

marriage in christ

Easter 2020

PRAY

Daily Scripture readings and meditations to help you keep Christ at the center of your marriage.

TALK

Conversation starters to help recall memories and look to the future. Get to know your spouse in a deeper way!

ACT

Suggestions of activities designed to help you express your love, practice friendship, and deepen your affection for each other.





All scripture quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.

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Meditations by William C. Wacker, unless otherwise noted.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the most unusual Easter in our lifetime. A dear friend reminded me that we are an Easter people living in a Good Friday world. After six weeks of Lenten sacrifice, much of it isolated in our homes, we should celebrate Easter for six weeks! Why? Because nothing that is more important to our faith as Christians than the resurrection of Jesus.

We offer these meditations and activities to help you to celebrate Easter as a couple. And in this difficult time, allow your hearts and your marriages to be filled with hope!

HOW TO USE THIS SERIES

Set yourself up for success! Pick a time of day you can be consistent with. Turn off your phones and other distractions. Light a candle. Sit close together and take turns reading the parts out loud.

FORMAT

We've set up each day into three parts:

PRAY We have selected one scripture passage with a resurrection theme for you to read. It is followed by a meditation, a time for quiet reflection, discussion, a blessing, and a prayer for unity.

TALK We provide one conversation starter each day. These are not necessarily related to the Scripture reading or the meditation. They are meant to help you get to know each other better. Getting to know each other is a lifelong process of revealing ourselves and listening to each other. And, the more we know about each other, the more we love. The more we love, the more we want to know!

ACT We offer three suggestions each day for ways you can choose to love each other better. Pick the one you like best and try it! These actions are designed to build friendship, deepen affection, and help you remain connected to each other.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF THIS EASTER SERIES

FIRST, what the Scriptures mean by “resurrection” is that our dead physical bodies will no longer be dead. We will come out of our tombs; our bodies will be transformed, and we will never die again. The Jews at the time of Jesus believed that the general resurrection for all the righteous would happen at the end of the present evil age. God would act in a definitive way to set the world to rights. He would defeat his enemies, establish his kingdom and transform all of creation.

There is a period of time between the death of a righteous person and the resurrection of the body. The most we can say about that time is that the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God or that they are alive in a state of peaceful rest with God waiting for the general resurrection at the end of the present evil age. They are part of the great communion of saints and their intercession for us is powerful. Resurrection is “life after” life after death!

From a Jewish standpoint, one of the more unusual elements of the Easter story is not resurrection of the body, but the resurrection of only one person. This new way of thinking about resurrection is at the heart of our claim that Jesus is Lord and Christ.

SECOND, we offer a short reflection about **why resurrection is important for our marriages** at the end of this series.

THIRD, the Scripture passages and meditations don't follow the liturgical readings. Rather, since the Ascension happened on the fortieth day after Easter, we offer 40 scripture passages and meditations to reflect the number of days that the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples.

During this Easter season, you will develop greater unity, an increased appreciation for learning more about each other, and a gratitude for the small ways you've chosen to show your love and affection.

He is risen, trust in the Lord and begin!

HAPPY EASTER!

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND AND EXPECTATIONS

The doctrine of the resurrection developed late on the history of Israel. We know that the belief in resurrection was not universal at Jesus' time. For example, the Sadducees did not accept it. The first unambiguous expressions of a belief in resurrection don't show up until sometime around the Maccabean revolt (167-165 BC). However, that does not mean there weren't hints and beliefs that prepared the way. The prophets proclaimed that the Creator God who had made a covenant with Abraham, Moses and David would be faithful to that covenant even when his people weren't. They believed he would act in dramatic and unmistakable ways to set things to right. The prophets used startling metaphors and images to describe what that great day would be like: God's people coming out of tombs, dry bones coming back to life, curing the incurable wound, establishing an unbreakable covenant, etc. Gradually what began as a metaphor for something spectacular became an expression of what would really happen. Then one day, right in the middle of history, it actually happened. One man was resurrected and that changed the course of human history.

Here are the Old Testament passages we have chosen for this series.

Hosea 6:1-4

Isaiah 5:1-2; Amos 9:13-15

Isaiah 25:6-9

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Isaiah 65:17-25

Daniel 12:1-3

2 Maccabees 7:13-14, 20-23

Wisdom 3:1-8



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 6:1-6

"Come, let us return to the LORD; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. ³ Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth." ⁴ What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. ⁵ Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. ⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Meditation

Israel had missed the point of their relationship with the Lord. They were doing religious things like going to the shrines of Yahweh and offering sacrifices. But their hearts were far from the Lord. As soon as Sabbath was over, they went back to cheating the poor. They sacrificed to other gods and frequented the sacred prostitutes that worked at those shrines. They presumed on God's mercy and mocked him with their response. In essence they said, "it's no big deal. God will be angry for a little while, then he will welcome us back as he always does." Israel would indeed suffer and be torn down. The kingdom that Hosea was addressing would be destroyed. They would not be "raised" ever again. Until, as St. Paul said, Israel, in the person of her king, the Christ, would suffer the same punishment and die for our sins. He also saw that in accordance with this passage, Christ Jesus would be raised from the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:4).

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How do we want to celebrate the Easter season as a couple?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Have a champagne brunch to celebrate Easter!
- Make sure your kisses last at least six seconds. Every now and then go for a full minute.
- Feed each other grapes.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Reading: Isaiah 5:1-2; Amos 9:13-15

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

Amos 9:13 The time is surely coming, says the LORD, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.

Meditation

My brother sent five, two-year-old grape vines to our father for his 65th birthday. My Dad was retired and living at his lake home. Dad had begun to fancy himself as a gardener and was very excited to receive such a delightful gift. He took great pains to plant the vines and care for them. He bought books on how to mulch, fertilize, and build the arbor to promote their growth. He tended them with great care and in the second summer, when we would visit him, he would point out the little grapes that were beginning to grow. We watched the delight of our dad as he catalogued the progress of his grapes. He spoke often of how much he looked forward to tasting them. Then disaster struck. Sometime during the night before the big harvest, one or more deer ate every single ripe grape on his carefully tended vines. My dad was heartbroken.

Now imagine three things: first God's disappointment when he discovered that his vineyard had suffered an even worse disaster – carefully chosen, well-tended vines were producing very sour wild grapes. Second, imagine that after the inevitable punishment for such a transgression, creation itself has been healed. The grapes would do what they are supposed to do and more. Wild animals don't eat the fruit, and the 2 – 4 year process of growing grapes from seed has been shortened to the point where the treader of the grapes is following the planter of the seeds – not even two-year-old vines! Imagine too that there is such an abundance of fruit that the mountains are dripping sweet wine and the hills are flowing with it! Finally, imagine the resurrection, which is nothing short of the transformation of creation, the transformation of our bodies and the defeat of all of our enemies including death. That is our hope!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What were your favorite Easter traditions as a child?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Have a champagne brunch to celebrate Easter!
- Make sure your kisses last at least six seconds. Every now and then go for a full minute.
- Feed each other grapes.



Pray

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Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. ⁹ It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Meditation

On “that day” the LORD of hosts will throw a big party. All the best food and best wines (notice he repeated that in case you missed it!). Think of the big banquet in Isaiah 55 and all the meals that Jesus ate with sinners, tax collectors. Think of his last supper and the meal he ate with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Think of the wonderful wine that Jesus supplied for that young couple in Cana – at their wedding feast. Think of the great wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelations 19). There will be a big party to mark the end of the present evil age and the beginning of the age to come. What will we be celebrating? We will be celebrating the great act of salvation, the marriage of God and his people, Christ and his bride the Church and the defeat of death. Death will be swallowed up forever – our enemy will be defeated, and we will have a great big party.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord’s Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What values have changed for us during this pandemic?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Leave a love note on a pillow, in a purse or pocket.
- Send funny and/or romantic cards by snail mail or e-mail.
- At night, step outside together for five minutes and look at the stars.



Pray

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Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-, 7-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones. . . ⁷ So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹ Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

Meditation

This is one of those magnificent passages where the Lord spoke through a prophet and had a double meaning. The prophet is trying to describe what it will be like when God acts to bring Judah back from her long exile in Babylon. It will be such an incredible event that the only thing you could compare it to would be watching a valley full of dead dry bones coming back to life. It will be like God opening their graves and calling them back to life – unheard of, unimaginable!!! Yet this passage and others gave future generations of faithful people the language and imagery to begin to believe that the creator of the universe could one day act in such a definitive way. Creation would be renewed and our great enemy, death, would finally and definitively be defeated. God will act!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How can we help (fill in a name) today?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Leave a love note on a pillow, in a purse or pocket.
- Send funny and/or romantic cards by snail mail or e-mail.
- At night, step outside together for five minutes and look at the stars.



Pray

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Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. ²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³ They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-- and their descendants as well. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent-- its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Meditation

How does one try to imagine what will happen at the end of the present evil age? Ancient Israel and the authors of Scripture did not believe that the world would end. God loves his good creation, but something went terribly wrong. Chaos entered the good creation with the rebellion of Adam and Eve, and quite frankly it continues to enter the world through our rebellion. But chaos and sin will not win the day. God will transform his creation. He will make it new. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. What will that look like? The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; lion and ox will eat straw together. The rabbits that eat my garden and the coyotes who eat the rabbits will probably both eat my garden, but I won't care because the thorns and thistles which represent chaos will be gone! There will be enough for all of us! It will be a great and glorious day!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What are three ways you'd like to see us grow together as a couple in the coming months?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Sing to each other.
- Make a care package with his/her favorite snacks and leave it in the car.
- Celebrate Easter for six weeks.



Pray

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Reading: Daniel 12:1-3

"At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. ² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Meditation

One of the biggest surprises in the Easter stories is the fact that the risen Jesus did not look anything like what you might expect from reading the story of Daniel or even from the story of the Transfiguration. The risen Jesus did not shine like a star. He was not glowing white as in the transfiguration. He was recognizable and not recognizable at the same time. He was physical and able to appear and disappear at the same time. He was able to easily move between two dimensions – the heavenly and the earthly. Daniel began the process of trying to express in words and metaphors what is nearly unimaginable. What would a formerly dead body look like? What kind of transformation would it take? The dead will awaken from their sleep and come back to life. They will be radically transformed and live forever and shine like stars? The biggest surprise, though, was that one person would awaken from sleep in the dust of the earth well ahead of all the others. No one saw that coming!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is one piece of good news you heard this week?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Sing to each other.
- Make a care package with his/her favorite snacks and leave it in the car.
- Celebrate Easter for six weeks.



Pray

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Reading: 2 Maccabees 7:13-14, 20-23

After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. ¹⁴ When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!" ²⁰ The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. ²¹ She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, ²² "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. ²³ Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws."

Meditation:

The persecution began in April of 167 B.C. In December of that year, the Syrian king, desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. He placed an altar to pagan gods in the temple and required everyone to worship those gods. That worship included monthly sacrifices, sacred prostitution, and violations of the purity laws. He also forbade practicing circumcision and keeping Torah. The response of some faithful Jews was violent revolution. The revolutionaries under the leader of Mattathias and his five sons succeeded in winning a guerrilla war against vastly superior forces and in March of 164 they received a letter from the king that the persecution would end. The imposed cult ceased, and they were permitted to observe Torah. In the summer of 164 they begin the process of purifying the temple and on the 25th of Kislev (November-December) they dedicated the Temple and began the feast of Hanukkah – the feast of dedication. During the three years of persecution and terror, many faithful Jews were martyred. They were willing to give their lives because they believed in the resurrection from the dead.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How do you understand the phrase, "trust God in all things?"

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Do something unexpected for your spouse.
- Snuggle on the couch.
- Touch each other with affection.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Reading Wisdom 3:1-8

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. ² In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, ³ and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. ⁴ For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. ⁵ Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; ⁶ like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. ⁷ In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. ⁸ They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever.

Meditation

This wonderful passage gives us a consoling hint about the fate of our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ before the general resurrection. They are at peace and with God. But more than that, this passage reminds us that our hope is full of immortality. Death looks like a great defeat and indeed it is a great enemy of humanity – even Jesus wept and expressed great anger at the death of his dear friend Lazarus. Death, however, is not the last word. The righteous will return in the resurrection and be seated at the hand of God. They will participate in the judgement of the wicked. They will, as the author says, “shine forth and run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples and the Lord will reign over them forever.”

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What are you thankful for right at this moment?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Do something unexpected for your spouse.
- Snuggle on the couch.
- Touch each other with affection.

THE EASTER STORIES

The stories about Jesus' resurrection vary in their details but have several things in common. First, the tomb was empty on Easter morning. Second, the risen Jesus appeared to many people. He was both recognizable (wounds in his hands, feet and side) and not recognizable because he was transformed. They could touch him because he was solid and yet he could appear and disappear in a most wonderful fashion. It was like he belonged to two dimensions of reality at one time – heavenly and earthly. He ate fish and broke bread with them. He spent 40 days with them before he ascended to be with his Father. He was alive!

Matthew 28:8-15

Luke 23:39-43

Luke 24:13-22,27-32

Luke 24:33-49

John 20:1-7

John 20:11-18

John 20:19-31

John 21:1-13

John 21:15-19



Pray

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Reading: Matthew 28:8-15

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." ¹¹ While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ telling them, "You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" ¹⁴ If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.

Meditation

The Scriptures are very precise. Resurrection means that our dead physical bodies will no longer be dead. We will come out of our tombs; our bodies will be transformed, and we will never die again. The tomb must be empty or it's not a resurrection. That was why this unlikely alliance of the Chief Priests and Pharisees, risked violating Sabbath to ask Pilate to put a guard on the tomb. They knew it wasn't about ghosts and disembodied spirits, it was about the body. Resurrection was such a dangerous idea that they went so far as to bribe the guards to lie, to say that the body had been stolen by his disciples. But it was too late for the lie to change the course of history. The women and many after them saw the risen Jesus. The resurrection changed the course of human history. What are the implications for our marriages?

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- In five years, I imagine we will...

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Call or video chat with other couples.
- Play your favorite card or board game together.
- Listen to an audio book together.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 23:39-43

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Meditation

When my Father died, the big question in my mind was where is he now? The Scriptures offered me a way to think about the time between death and resurrection. On the day of his own death and before his resurrection Jesus invited the repentant criminal who was hanging on a cross next to him to join him that day in Paradise. "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Being with Jesus in Paradise or heaven is a way to talk about where those who have fallen asleep in Christ are now. Our final destiny is the resurrection of our bodies and the restoration of all creation. But between death and that glorious day is rest in Paradise or heaven, with Christ. Those loved ones who have gone before us are resting in the hands of God. They are with Christ. They are with Peter, John, Paul, Mary, Mary Magdalene and all those who have gone before us in faith.

Resurrection is "life after" life after death. Resurrection of the body is the ultimate end of humanity. It is the great promise of the creator God.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Where did you see the Holy Spirit at work this week?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Call or video chat with other couples.
- Play your favorite card or board game together.
- Listen to an audio book together.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 24:13-22, 27-32

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive... ²⁷ Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

Meditation

Later that same day, two disciples were walking slowly from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus about seven miles away. It has been suggested that the two disciples were a husband and wife, Cleopas and Mary. A stranger joined them along the way and asked them why they were so sad. They explained what had happened. The stranger explained the Scriptures to them, and their hearts burned. As they approached the village, the stranger made as if to go on. But the couple urged him to stay because it was getting late in the day. He consented. They sat down at a table to eat the evening meal. The stranger picked up a piece of bread, blessed it, broke it and gave them each a piece. At that moment their eyes were opened. The phrase in Luke's Gospel reminds one of Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:7). Their eyes were opened, and they saw their nakedness and shame. This time their eyes were opened, and they saw the Lord, the giver of life. This time, the story did not end ultimately with death but with the promise of life.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How have we grown in unity in the last year?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Give each other backrubs to relieve tension and stress.
- Work very hard at saying "I'm sorry, please forgive me."



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 24:33-49

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. ³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence. ⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Meditation

Ghosts don't eat fish! Ghosts don't have flesh and bones! But can you blame the disciples for thinking he was a ghost? Even if they believed that the dead would be raised in the general resurrection, there is nothing that would have prepared them for the resurrection of one person prior to that. Jesus was recognizable, they saw and touched the wounds. He even ate the fish. But it wasn't until he opened their minds to the scriptures that they really understood. He commissioned them to go out and tell the whole world – but wait until they had been filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the same Spirit and the same power we invited to fill us in the Marriage in Christ Seminar. Ours is the same commission. We are to be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is the first thing you want to do when the pandemic is over?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Give each other backrubs to relieve tension and stress.
- Work very hard at saying "I'm sorry, please forgive me."



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 20:1-7

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Meditation

Mary came from the town of Magdala on the Sea of Galilee. The gospel stories don't say much about her life before she met Jesus, but it must have been terrible, because she was possessed by demons. After she was freed from the clutches of the Devil, Mary became one of the most faithful of Jesus' disciples. She was one of the women who traveled with Jesus in and around Galilee. She followed him all the way to Jerusalem and was with Mary the mother of Jesus and her sister at the foot of the cross. Mary Magdalene had been with Jesus nearly from the beginning of his public ministry. She had heard Jesus claim that, at long last, Israel's great exile was coming to an end. Jesus forgave sins, freed people from the grip of Satan, from sickness and even death. Jesus had freed her from sin and demonic possession. She had given her loyalty to him. She had trusted him. She had loved him, and now he was dead. Her loss was profound. Her grief must have been nearly unbearable. As she was approaching the tomb in the morning twilight, more things were not right. The hastily prepared tomb had been disturbed. The giant stone at its opening had been rolled away. She ran to get Peter and John. When they arrived back at the place where the body had been buried, the tomb was empty!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What signs of new life have you observed lately?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Notice and comment about something your spouse does that you like.
- Be polite, say "thank you," and "you're welcome."
- Be interested in what your spouse is doing.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 20:11-18

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Meditation

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. Her friend was gone. Mary was a woman broken with grief and sorrow. Her only desire was to care for the one she loved so dearly. She could not understand what had happened. She turned to the gardener and said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Then Jesus called her name, "Mary," and she knew him. Jesus' love for her was personal. He called her by name. He healed her broken heart and restored her hope. The mysterious truth that could hardly have been guessed is that death cannot defeat love, because love never ends. Jesus' death was real, and Mary's tears were genuine. However, beyond the grave there is life. Love conquers death, and love calls each of us by name to change us and bring us to be with him. It is love that conquers sin and brings new life and unity to us.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- If each day magically had 20 extra minutes added to it, how would you use that time?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Notice and comment about something your spouse does that you like.
- Be polite, say "thank you," and "you're welcome."
- Be interested in what your spouse is doing.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin¹), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Meditation

John opened his Gospel by echoing the beginning of Genesis, "in the beginning." The Spirit of God hovered over the watery chaos and God the creator began his marvelous work of creation. We know that things went terribly wrong. Sin and death entered the world. On the cross Jesus took sin and death onto himself and in a great act of love defeated them and forgave us for our hideous transgression. More than that, on the day he rose from the dead, he met the disciples cowering in the locked room, he greeted them with "Peace be with you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Jesus, the word of God, present at creation, now breathes the breath of God on the disciples and on all of us. New creation has broken into this present evil age. The old age is still with us, but the new one has begun. It is real. It is tangible and one day we will experience the fullness of that new creation. Sin and death will be gone. Peace will reign forever. Let our hearts rejoice with gratitude as we say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Describe your favorite outfit when you were growing up.

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Notice and comment about something your spouse does that you like.
- Be polite, say "thank you," and "you're welcome."
- Be interested in what your spouse is doing.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 21:1-13

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. ⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish.

Meditation:

I was standing next to a spring as it flowed into the Sea of Galilee. It was a beautiful day in December. The temperature was in the high 60s, but the lake itself was cold – as my son who had gone swimming the day before attested. The water would not warm up until well into the spring. However, the water near where the spring entered the lake was warmer. That warm water attracts fish. Sometimes you can see great numbers of the fish swirl near the surface. As I stood on the shore, near where tradition says that Jesus prepared the meal described in today's reading, I saw such a swirl of fish about 100 yards offshore. I could imagine Jesus seeing what his tired friends could not see and calling out to them – "throw your net on the right side of the boat." Even if it was more "miraculous" than that, the tenderness of the Risen Jesus and his great love for even the most practical aspects of his friends' lives is evident. Even catching fish matters!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Describe the worst experience you have had with the weather.

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Tell a joke or share a funny story.
- Offer to help with his or her least favorite task.
- Read a poem to your spouse.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 21:15-19

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Meditation

Peter betrayed his best friend. He denied that he knew Jesus three times. In his great mercy, Jesus gave Peter three opportunities to reaffirm his love and friendship for him. In the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, John weaves together two Greek words for love, *agape* and *philia*. *Agape* describes God's total self-giving love. *Agape* is his faithfulness to the promises he made in the covenant; it is the love that was most clearly revealed by Jesus on the cross. *Philia* is the love of friends for each other. When *agape* and *philia* are woven together, they make love more visible in the world. As Jesus' friend, Peter will do what Jesus wants him to do. He will feed his sheep and care for his people. Love is visible, practical and oriented to service. We too have a mission to make love visible and to serve each other and the Lord with our whole being.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- If you had to pick music to play every time you entered a room, what would it be?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Tell a joke or share a funny story.
- Offer to help with his or her least favorite task.
- Read a poem to your spouse.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Belief in the resurrection of the body was a dangerous idea with real life political ramifications. It put the fire in the belly of the revolutionaries who resisted Antiochus Epiphanies in the Maccabean Revolt and the Jewish revolutionaries who resisted Rome. It was the hope and belief that the creator God would act. They believed that the creator God would restore their bodies and their lives someday. That hope drove them to do remarkable and great things for the Lord. It freed them to sacrifice their lives. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit drove the earliest Christians to great and heroic sacrifices and allowed them to preach the good news boldly. It also brought them into serious conflict with the authorities: Jewish, Greek and Roman. What follows is a brief tour through Acts of the Apostles as the Gospel goes out from Jerusalem to Samaria to the ends of the earth (Rome).

Acts 2:36-41

Acts 3:1-10

Acts 3:11-16

Acts 4:1-12

Acts 4:13-21

Acts 17:16-21

Acts 17:12-34

Acts 23:1-13



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Acts 2:36-41

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." ³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Meditation

We live in uncertain times. All of the ways in which we used to live have been disrupted. It is unclear what normal life will look like on the other side of this pandemic. But listen to Peter's words with fresh ears. Let his message cut us to the heart. Let us call on the Lord. He offers forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we forget how radical the gospel is. We can forget that sin, sickness and death will not have the last word. The good news of Jesus' resurrection changes everything. It is the certain thing in an uncertain time.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- If you could open a restaurant, what kind of food would you serve? What would you name your restaurant?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Offer to cook dinner, if you aren't the one who usually cooks.
- Go for a long walk together with appropriate social distance!
- Be sure to say "Goodbye, I love you," when you leave for work each day -even if you are both working from home.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Acts 3:1-10

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. ⁴ Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ All the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Meditation

Many of the first Christians were ordinary uneducated folks. Many of them were poor. However, they did something remarkable. They pooled their resources and made sure that everyone had enough food, money, clothing and shelter. Money had stopped being important to them. So, it is not surprising that Peter and John wouldn't have gold or silver to share with the lame beggar. But they had something even more valuable. They gave him a new life. But the power wasn't Peter's. It was the offer of new life and healing in the name of Jesus. There is a remarkable, life changing power in the name of Jesus. Mention his name and things change. Pray his name and our marriages will be strengthened. Pray his name and find new life and healing.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How would you spend the day if all the power went out?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Offer to cook dinner, if you aren't the one who usually cooks.
- Go for a long walk together with appropriate social distance!
- Be sure to say "Goodbye, I love you," when you leave for work each day -even if you are both working from home.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Acts 3:11-16

While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished. ¹² When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

Meditation

We were on a weekend retreat and it was now late Saturday night. The young woman had not told anyone that she was allergic to most of the food that had been served that weekend. By now she was in a great deal of discomfort. Several of us gathered around her to pray. After a few minutes of prayer one of the leaders of the retreat said, "in the name of Jesus be healed." To our amazement the young woman's pain and discomfort left immediately. Like the lame man that Peter had healed we began rejoicing and worshipping the Lord. It was a wonderful moment. Also, like Peter, we knew that she was not healed because those of us who were praying were anything special. It was in and through faith in Jesus and in the power of his holy name. That power, that name, that new life are available to us as well.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is usually the first thing you think about when you wake up in the morning?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Create a play list with favorite songs, or love songs.
- Post photos on the refrigerator or bathroom mirror that remind you of wonderful times you've shared.
- Order great take out from your favorite restaurant for just the two of you.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Acts 4:1-12

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, ² much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. ³ So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand. ⁵ The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹ This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone. ¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Meditation

Everywhere the resurrection of Jesus was preached there was a riot. The authorities, both Roman and Jewish, were threatened by it. They were threatened by the claim that Jesus' resurrection proved he was the Christ, the king, the Lord. That meant the Jewish leaders were wrong about him and that Caesar's claims to divinity and lordship were going to be challenged as well. Whole economic structures would soon come under scrutiny and that would cause even more tension. Eventually, this new way of life built around the proclamation that Jesus of Nazareth was alive and that he was the world's true Lord and savior would turn the world upside down (see Acts 17:6). This new way of life was breaking out right there. People were being healed and freed from sin in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. It was a message of great hope! "There is salvation in no one else, for **there is no other name** under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." It was also not welcome by the power structures of the world.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is the last thing you think about when you go to sleep at night?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Create a play list with favorite songs, or love songs.
- Post photos on the refrigerator or bathroom mirror that remind you of wonderful times you've shared.
- Order great take out from your favorite restaurant for just the two of you.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Acts 4:13-21

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. ¹⁴ When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to leave the council while they discussed the matter with one another. ¹⁶ They said, "What will we do with them? For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to keep it from spreading further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." ¹⁸ So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; ²⁰ for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard." ²¹ After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened.

Meditation

Uneducated and ordinary men indeed. While they may have been untrained in the usual ways, they had spent three years with Jesus. They watched how he acted. They listened to him pray. They knew how he read and understood the Scriptures. They had been trained by the Son of God himself. We too can learn from Jesus. We can watch how he acted; we can listen to him explain the Scriptures for us. We can, in the Holy Spirit, have the same courage, wisdom and power that the uneducated and ordinary Peter and John had. Then we too will be unable to keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- If you could ask for a miracle, what would it be?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Research a new recipe to make together.
- Schedule a virtual "happy hour" and video chat with another married couple.
- Pray the "Marriage in Christ Night Prayer" together. Download at www.marriageinchrist.com/resources.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Acts 17:16-21

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities." (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) ¹⁹ So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means." ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

Meditation

There is no small irony that the Athenians who spent their time looking for novelty, when presented with the most wonderful new thing ever to happen in human history, would mock and reject it. This novel idea gets Paul into serious trouble. He is being accused of introducing new and strange gods. In a city full of all kinds of gods, this one was not sanctioned by the state, a crime for which Socrates had been put to death. Who are these strange new gods? Jesus and Resurrection! In Greek, "resurrection" is a feminine word *Anastasis*. They mistook Paul to say Jesus had a consort. Things take an ugly turn. He was not invited to a pleasant exchange of philosophical ideas. He was summoned to the Areopagus to defend himself. If it doesn't go well, he might be killed. What happens next?

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is the biggest risk you have ever taken?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Research a new recipe to make together.
- Schedule a virtual "happy hour" and video chat with another married couple.
- Pray the "Marriage in Christ Night Prayer" together. Download at www.marriageinchrist.com/resources.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Acts 17:22-34

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³ For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷ so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him -- though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' ²⁹ Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." ³² When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ At that point Paul left them. ³⁴ But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Meditation

Paul, with tongue in cheek, flatters them for being such a religious people. After all the city is crowded with shrines to various gods. Never mind that Paul means they are all idols and false gods. Then he says that they have a shrine to an Unknown God and he, Paul, knows who it is. It is the creator of the whole universe, the Lord of heaven and earth. In him "we live and move and have our being." Then in a brilliant move, he says even your poets say we are his offspring. So, if we are God's offspring, then the deity can't be made of silver and gold. This God has judged the world and it is time to repent. How do we know? He has raised Jesus from the dead. But they scoffed and did not believe in the resurrection. Paul escaped with his life and resurrection remained a dangerous belief to proclaim.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What three things do you want to be remembered for?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Write a love note on the bathroom mirror.
- Offer to take the kids for an hour and give your spouse a break.
- Order her favorite flowers and have them delivered.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Acts 23:1-13

While Paul was looking intently at the council he said, "Brothers, up to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God." ² Then the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near him to strike him on the mouth. ³ At this Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting there to judge me according to the law, and yet in violation of the law you order me to be struck?" ⁴ Those standing nearby said, "Do you dare to insult God's high priest?" ⁵ And Paul said, "I did not realize, brothers, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a leader of your people.'" ⁶ When Paul noticed that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he called out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead." ⁷ When he said this, a dissension began between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three.) ⁹ Then a great clamor arose, and certain scribes of the Pharisees' group stood up and contended, "We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" ¹⁰ When the dissension became violent, the tribune, fearing that they would tear Paul to pieces, ordered the soldiers to go down, take him by force, and bring him into the barracks. ¹¹ That night the Lord stood near him and said, "Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome." ¹² In the morning the Jews joined in a conspiracy and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³ There were more than forty who joined in this conspiracy.

Meditation

Preaching the resurrection was very dangerous. Paul made it clear, "I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead." The turmoil that resulted was one of the things the Roman authorities feared and hated the most. This was not the first time Paul was in trouble with the authorities. He had been accused of treason and sedition but was found innocent by the Roman authorities on several occasions. In that, he was like Jesus who had been accused and found innocent by the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate. Like Jesus, Paul although innocent, will be put to death by the Romans. This scene is at the beginning of Paul's final journey to Rome. He will appeal to Caesar as was his right as a Roman citizen. That will get him to Rome where he can bear witness. Jesus' command to preach the good news in Jerusalem, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth (symbolized by Rome) would be fulfilled.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- With whom would you swap lives with for a day?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Write a love note on the bathroom mirror.
- Offer to take the kids for an hour and give your spouse a break.
- Order her favorite flowers and have them delivered.

HOW WE LIVE BECAUSE OF THE RESURRECTION

Jesus' resurrection transformed the way his followers lived. Death was not the last word. More than that, the resurrection gave them a taste of what was to come. Hope for the future also changed their present reality – as it had done for the martyrs and revolutionaries. Jesus' followers lived a different way because they too were filled with hope and purpose. Resurrection generated hope and purpose, not escape and evasion.

The early Christians invested in this world, in this life because they were convinced that the Creator God loved this world he created and intended to rescue it as well as rescue us.

They believed that what they did mattered. The resurrection meant that the small Christian communities that made up the early Church were colonies of heaven. They were, and we are called to live as if there is a new creation already breaking out. We are called to live as if death will not win in the end; to live as if what we do matters because of the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Matthew 25:31-40

Philippians 3:20-21

1 Timothy 2:15

2 Timothy 1:9-10

Romans 8:18-25



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ-- whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Meditation

The Romans had killed many people who had claimed to be the Messiah. On the surface it looked like Jesus was just another “failed messiah.” Yet all of the hopes that Christians have are founded on the belief that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the one who would rescue his people and save all of humanity. What made it possible to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the true king was the fact that he had been raised from the dead. Without the bodily resurrection on Easter morning it is not rational to believe that Jesus is the Christ – the true Lord of the world. If the tomb were not empty and if so many had not seen the risen Jesus, we would be the most foolish people around to put our faith in a dead man. But he is risen!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord’s Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What's the best compliment you have ever received?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Tell someone about the changes that have occurred in your marriage since you participated in the Marriage in Christ Seminar.
- Make Spring-themed gift bags to leave at your neighbors' homes. Include treats, words of encouragement, flowers, etc.
- Watch a church service together online.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection," it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

Meditation

When death has been destroyed everything will be subject to Christ's authority. He will then take all things and, along with himself, subject all creation to the Father. When that happens, God will be "all in all." We will not lose our personal identity, but somehow, we will be taken up into God in such a way that he will be "all in all"—a phrase that is difficult to translate from Greek into English. It is God's intention to be one with us. While this kind of unity is profoundly mysterious, our unity as married couples is a tangible signpost pointing toward that reality. When that day comes it will be a great glorious day. Creation itself is longing for it. On "that day" the trials and tribulations of this life will not in any way compare to the glory that awaits us (see Romans 8:21-24).

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- If you could have picked your own name, what would it be?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Tell someone about the changes that have occurred in your marriage since you participated in the Marriage in Christ Seminar.
- Make Spring-themed gift bags to leave at your neighbors' homes. Include treats, words of encouragement, flowers, etc.
- Watch a church service together online.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, **because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**

Meditation

What we do matters. Imagine a bold new social program that would dramatically lower the divorce rate, solve the perplexing problem of single parent poverty that enslaves single mothers in a disproportionate ratio, provide women with equal dignity and rights within the context of the most important and fundamental societal unit – the family. This program would further ensure that women, and less frequently men, do not become objects of sexual pleasure, but rather they would retain their full dignity and freedom as human persons. Men, too, would find their place in the world. They would live with and care for their children. They would live with and care for the mother of their children.

This bold new program would also have the long-range effect of slowing down the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and in particular AIDS. The troubling drop of birth rates in Europe and America would cease. Abortion and the wholesale slaughter of innocent life would slow or even stop. On top of all these outstanding benefits, this program would not cost taxpayers a single cent. Rather, it would be a partial solution to our perplexing national debt and would, if implemented worldwide, contribute to the good of all humanity. Finally, this new program would not require another new government agency to oversee it. Ordinary people, men and women just like you and me can do it. As a matter of fact, ordinary life is the only way to implement this bold new social initiative. We can start small and become bright lights that hold out the promise of an exhilarating new freedom for all people. Our families, our homes, our neighborhoods would become cells in a revolution whose goal would be nothing less than the transformation of the whole world! Families would become places of freedom, healing, love and power. Marriage and family would become a challenge and an invitation to the world we live in. What we do matters in this world and the next!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Which of the saints would you most like to have over to dinner?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Greet each other with a hug and a kiss when you return from home after work – even if it was from your home office.
- Listen carefully to your spouse when he or she tells you about his/her day.



Day Twenty-Nine

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 25:31-40

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?' ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?' ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Meditation

Two devastating epidemics hit the Roman Empire. One lasted from A.D. 165 – A.D.180 and another occurred in A.D. 251. The first plague, which lasted for 15 years and killed between a quarter and a third of the population, was possibly smallpox and the second, equally as devastating, may have been measles. Imagine being in a city stinking of death, piles of dead bodies all around, homes abandoned, the sick left to fend for themselves. All around you, your family and friends are dropping. You can never be sure if or when you will fall sick too. Your priests confess ignorance about what the gods are doing, your philosophers are of no help either. The most famous physician of the time is coping with the epidemic by leaving Rome and hiding out at his country estate.

But Christians have hope. And, they have love. They do not appear to fear death. Rather, they act as if giving their life for the sake of caring for their sick brethren, is the equivalent of martyrdom. They often died as they lived out Matt 25:34-40. But because they give basic nursing care to the sick, both to their own and to their pagan neighbors, they didn't die as often. Many even recovered! Conscientious nursing care, as simple as providing food and water, even without any medications cuts the mortality rate by 2/3 or even more. Although many Christians died, the believers survived at a much higher rate than their pagan neighbors. And their pagan neighbors survived at a much higher rate than those who did not have Christian neighbors or relatives. The Christians did not fear death and put into practice our Lord's command to love one another.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Greet each other with a hug and a kiss when you return from home after work – even if it was from your home office.
- Listen carefully to your spouse when he or she tells you about his/her day.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Meditation

Imagine that you live in Philippi and the emperor is coming to visit your colony. His arrival, the Greek word is *parousia*, will be a wonderful festive occasion. The leaders of the city will go out to meet him to escort him back to the city. The Emperor, “lord and savior,” did not come to rescue you from Philippi by bringing you back to Rome, (he does not want you to come back to the overcrowded city of Rome) but he has come to be with you here in Philippi. So, when Paul said, “we are citizens of heaven and are expecting a Savior the Lord Jesus Christ” he was probably not expecting to be transported back to the mother city (heaven). Rather, the king was coming to meet them there. He would come from heaven to earth and on “that day” he would transform their bodies and all of creation in the resurrection. While they were waiting for that great and glorious moment, the Christian community in Philippi was to live as if they were “heaven citizens” or better “kingdom of God citizens.” They were to be a colony of heaven, a concrete expression of and a foretaste of the transformed life to come, a real expression of the kingdom of God. The rest of the good news is that they don’t have to wait for the king to arrive. He is already present in the person of his Holy Spirit and in his body the Church. Marriage in Christ is one of the bright signs that points to the present reality of that union and the future promise as well.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord’s Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Say “I love you” in a different way every day.
- Slow dance to a love song.
- Look at your wedding pictures together.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

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Reading: 1 Timothy 2:15

A person will be saved through rearing children, provided they persevere in faithfulness and charity and a sensible holiness. (trans. WCW).

Meditation

This short verse was probably taken from an early Christian marriage ceremony. What would the young couple have heard when those instructions were given to them? They would have heard two things. First, Christian belief in the resurrection had very practical consequences that led them to value all human life. They were to live out their marriage in a way that was radically at odds with the prevailing practices in the Roman world. Listen to this excerpt from a letter written about 1 B.C. It is from a loving and concerned husband to his wife who was pregnant and at home. She was worried about his return from an out of town business trip. "If happily you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be. If it is a girl, throw it out." Are you shocked? Well, that was the ancient world. Baby girls were not valued and were often left to die in the city dumps or sewers.

You will notice that the subject of the sentence is not expressed. Most modern translations say that a woman will be saved through childbirth. The word "woman" is not in the Greek text and the word for "childbirth" can also be translated "childrearing." It may be better to think of this instruction being directed to the groom first and then to the wife. The husband in the Roman world decided whether to expose infant baby girls in the city dump. If it is to the woman and about childbirth, this instruction prohibits abortion. In both cases, a person, husband or wife, will be saved, by God, in and through the act of raising their children.

The second piece of advice was that marriage was for a lifetime. Note how the subject changes to the plural. The phrase that is translate, "they persevere in faithfulness and charity and a sensible holiness" means here, "Don't divorce, but care for each other in faithfulness, love and practical sensible holiness for your lifetime." It is Paul's version of a lifetime of loving activities. Marriage in Christ is a radical contrast to marriage in the ancient world, both Jewish and Roman. In Christ there is a new way to live human life! Our love is fruitful, faithful and forever!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What are your favorite memories from our wedding day?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Say "I love you" in a different way every day.
- Slow dance to a love song.
- Look at your wedding pictures together.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: 2 Timothy 1:9-10

Along with me take your share of suffering for the gospel, as God gives the strength, the same God who saved us and called us for a holy life. That saving call was not based on our deeds. It was based on his own purpose, his own grace, given us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. That gracious purpose, however, has now been made clear through the revelation of our savior, Christ Jesus. He broke the power of death. He made life and immortality shine forth through the gospel. (Translation, WCW).

Meditation

Jesus had said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Nearly thirty years after the resurrection, St. Paul was reminding Timothy that death has been defeated and eternal life has already begun. Even though those we love will die, and even though there will be suffering ahead, we need not fear. What then is the hope of Christians? It is almost too difficult to express in words, because it is too great! Our hope is to be one with God; to share his very nature and to live in a transformed heaven and earth in a resurrected body! Christ has broken the power of death. Alleluia!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- For what in your life do you feel most grateful?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Plan an in-home movie night with your favorite snack.
- Consider donating \$25 to a small business or charity.
- Order take out delivery from a local restaurant.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Romans 8:18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Meditation

“The sky is falling, the sky is falling!” Henny Penny aka Chicken Little

“The world will end on May 27, 2012” Ronald Weinland

“The world will end on December 21, 2012” The Mayan Calendar.

“Advances in science and technology could cause the end of the human race.” Stephan Hawking

“100,000 – 250,000 deaths in the US alone!” US government projections about the COVID 19 pandemic

From the *Late Great Planet Earth* to the *Left Behind* series that has sold over 63 million copies and the movies that have been made from most of the titles above everyone worries about the end of the world. Fear is really big business! But the scriptures do not say that the world will end. The world is waiting patiently for the general resurrection of the children of God. On that day the good creation, which was wounded by our sin, will be healed and transformed. It will be transformed in such a way that it will be a new heaven and a new earth. The world will not end, but the present evil age will one day end. On that day death will be defeated and our bodies will be raised from the dead. We will live in intimate communion and friendship with God. It is not a day to fear. The end of the evil age is a day to anticipate with great joy and hope.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Plan an in-home movie night with your favorite snack.
- Consider donating \$25 to a small business or charity.
- Order take out delivery from a local restaurant.

NEW CREATION AND OUR HOPE

Pandemics and economic recessions are not the last words. Death is not the last word. Our God is an extravagant God. He created a world teeming with life and one day that creation will be transformed. We will be transformed and live in that new creation with him for all eternity. Our marriages in Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit point to that great and glorious day.

“And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

We have hope!

Romans 5:1-5

Galatians 1:1-5

John 2:1-11

John 6:1-14

Song of Solomon 8:6-7

Revelation 21:1-5



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access¹ to this grace in which we stand; and we² boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we¹ also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Meditation

Hope transforms how we live every day of our lives. Hope guides every decision we make. Hope leads us to choose the good. Hope frees us to live a life that testifies to the fact that the kingdom of God is both to come in all of its glory and yet is present today! Hope allows us to glimpse into the unknowable future and know with great certainty that God will act. Hope allows us to see the end and so have confidence while we are in the sometimes confusing and difficult middle. Our hope as Christians is a little different than the hope of Israel, because the dark door of time has been opened wide for us. Our hope is to be one with God; to share his very nature and to live in a transformed heaven and earth with a resurrected body. Jesus announced and enacted that the hopes of Israel were being fulfilled in him and by him.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is your most treasured memory?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Listen to a podcast about marriage or a hobby together.
- Check out copies of your favorite childhood book and read them together.
- Do online karaoke.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Galatians 1:1-5

Paul an apostle -- sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead -- ² and all the members of God's family who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Meditation

In Jesus' life, death and resurrection the "age to come" burst into the "present evil age." Now we find ourselves in a sometimes-confusing overlap of ages. We believe in the resurrection, but our parents, children and friends still suffer and die. We are new creations in Christ, but we still get sick, we still sin, and we still die. We are called to live as if we have a new king and a new Lord. This was not simply nice theology or fodder for interesting intellectual or philosophical debates. It was about the revolutionary way in which the early church lived its ordinary life and the ways in which that transformed the Roman world. It is our invitation to transform the world in which we live. Hope opens the dark door of time and allows us to live in remarkable freedom.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How has your experience of the Holy Spirit changed the way you think about your responsibility to spread the gospel as a married couple?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Listen to a podcast about marriage or a hobby together.
- Check out copies of your favorite childhood book and read them together.
- Do online karaoke.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory.

Meditation

On the first day of creation God said, "Let there be light." In the beginning of his Gospel, John proclaims that God's word the "Light of the world," and that all of creation came to be through the Word. Then he said, that in Jesus we have beheld the glory of God. In the Gospel there are seven signs that reveal Jesus' glory: water to wine at Cana, healing the royal official's son, healing of the crippled man, feeding of the 5,000, healing of the blind man, raising Lazarus to life, and the crucifixion. These seven signs reveal Jesus' glory and point to the great act of new creation – the resurrection of the Son of God! God said, "Let there be light." Jesus, the light of the world said, "Fill the jars with water." It was as a prelude to changing the water into the best wine that they had ever had. God was extravagant in making a creation teeming with all kinds of life. Jesus was extravagant in his wedding gift to the young couple and their families. Creation makes the glory of God visible; this was the first of the signs that made Jesus' glory visible in the world.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What was your favorite job when you were growing up?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Have a pillow fight.
- Draw portraits of each other - or caricatures.
- Get your umbrellas and go for a walk in the rain.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 6:1-14

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

Meditation

God spoke and the sun, moon and stars were created. I remember looking at the Milky Way through a pair of binoculars on clear night while I was standing on the shore of Lake Michigan. I was far from the light pollution of the big cities and I was amazed and overwhelmed by the extravagance of God's creation – there were too many stars even to begin to count! Now imagine trying to feed about 5,000 people on the spur of the moment. Even if you had ½ year's wages for a common laborer, you would barely be able to buy two items off or the MacDonaldd's dollar menu for everyone. Not much food for a whole day. What did Jesus do? He demonstrated the extravagance of God. He provided a feast, and there were leftovers! How did he do that? He said a blessing and gave thanks for five barley loaves and two fish. Then he broke them and distributed them to the whole crowd. They ate as much as they wanted. Creation and the signs that Jesus is performing point to the fact that God is extravagant, and that Jesus is extravagant.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- If you could drop everything and be a missionary, where would you go?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Have a pillow fight.
- Draw portraits of each other - or caricatures.
- Get your umbrellas and go for a walk in the rain.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Song of Solomon 8:6-7

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. ⁷ Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.

Meditation

The Song of Songs was almost correct. Love is **stronger** than death! On the first day of the week, the first day of the new creation, love emerged from the tomb, never to die again. All of the signs have been pointing to this moment. God has been faithful to all of his promises, he has rescued his people and he has broken the power of our archenemy. Death will not have the last word. The new creation has burst into this present evil age, but the age continues. We live in a sometimes-confusing overlap of ages. The age to come, when no one dies, when lions and lambs lie down together, has not fully begun. The present age is still marked by the sickness and death of the ones we love. But we live now in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can live human life in a new way. We don't have to be subject any longer to sin and bad habits. We can live in the freedom and dignity of God's children while we wait for the moment when **WE** are the bride coming down to meet our groom. On that day we will take his breath away!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What was the best part of your day?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Do an at home workout video together.
- Look through old yearbooks or photo albums together.
- Have an indoor picnic on a rainy day.
- Play two player video games.
- Go rollerblading/roller-skating through a park.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Revelation 19:5-8

And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, and all who fear him, small and great." ⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; ⁸ to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" -- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Meditation

I have had several surgeries in the last three years. Fortunately, I am married to a nurse with a great heart. While I was recovering from my heart surgery, I marveled at all the little acts of love that Adella did for me. I was thinking about how she was filled with the Holy Spirit and she was being Christ's hands for me. I was and am filled with gratitude. With that in mind, I was praying one day. I had a vision of the most beautiful fabric I had ever seen. Strands of that fabric were made up of our actions and the Holy Spirit's actions. It was like Adella's actions and Christ's at the same time. Not separate strands of our actions and the Holy Spirit, but each strand was made up of the human and divine. The wedding garment of the bride of Christ is made up of the thousands of acts of kindness and love that we do for one another. Those actions are not simply our actions alone, but they are the acts of God who has already become one with us in Baptism. In the resurrection the true beauty and splendor of that garment will be made manifest to all.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What was the hardest thing you ever did for the sake of someone else?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Do an at home workout video together.
- Look through old yearbooks or photo albums together.
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Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

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Reading: Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Meditation

There was a time when I imagined that the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven would look something like the spaceship in the "War of the Worlds" only not evil or threatening. John offers another way to think about the appearing of the New Jerusalem – it will be like a bride adorned for her husband. That is one of my favorite images. I remember the first time I saw Adella coming down the stairs to the back of the church just before our wedding began. I had always thought of her as the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. But seeing her in her wedding gown – a gown she had made for her wedding and for me, was breath taking. I imagine that the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ is not so much like a fully formed city descending from a faraway place as it is a beautiful bride appearing at the back of the church, ready to begin a new life with her husband! She (we) would be the most beautiful person he had ever seen!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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ONE FINAL THOUGHT

WHY IS RESURRECTION IMPORTANT FOR OUR MARRIAGE?

In the sixth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul expressed concern about the behavior of certain Corinthian Christians. They were behaving badly at the elaborate dinners to which they had been invited, especially around the time of major religious and sporting events. These dinners would have involved copious amounts of food, wine and sexual favors provided by the host for his guests. There was also the ever-present danger of the pagan cults of Aphrodite, Dionysus/Bacchus, Apollo, Isis and Serapis. Idolatry and the sacred prostitution associated with these pagan cults was an integral part of civic life and culture. Even celebrating a relative's birthday, marriage or graduation could be an occasion for participating in idolatry and sexual immorality.

One can easily imagine some of the Christians wanting to fit in with their neighbors or relatives and being attracted to this kind of behavior. It is equally possible to imagine that they were not sure how to get out of difficult situations without offending a patron, friend or relative. Once trapped or lured into these situations, some of them appear to have adopted the slogans of the local philosophers as a way to justify their behavior. The excuse would be something like, "it does not matter what we do with our body because our real self is our soul and that remains untouched by whatever happens to the body." So, as they said, "Food for the belly and the belly for food and God will do away with both!" (1 Corinthians 6:13). The same line of reasoning would have justified visiting the prostitutes at the pagan shrines or partaking in the after-dinner entertainment at the fancy banquets. Again, the body is not really me. That phrase would have sounded like this, "casual sex was made for the body and the body for casual sex and since God will destroy both and I will live on, I can do what I want with my body."

That would allow them to do anything they wanted with their body because it really didn't matter – it was not really them. Paul said, "NO!" God will raise your body because without it you will not be human – even in the afterlife. What we do with our bodies matters because it is inseparable from YOU! What your body does, you do.

Paul goes on to quote Genesis 2:24. For him that is proof that what we do with our body matters. It matters because God intends the physical act of intercourse to create as well as express the unity of two persons. The two persons really do become one! Intercourse with a prostitute creates a unity where there ought not to be one. And because we are one with Christ in Baptism, we have now involved Christ himself in our sin because he is one with us. The resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of our bodies demonstrate that our physical bodies are indeed good and without them we are not fully human persons. Our marriages are concrete signs of the total and complete unity of persons that will one day be the unity of Christ and his bride the Church. Marriage in Christ involves the unity of two people body and soul.

What we do with our bodies matters. Our love as married men and women expresses, in a way no other human relationship can, the spousal love of God for his people. Our spousal love, because it involves our whole person, is fruitful, faithful and forever. God's love for us is the same. Alleluia!

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Wacker is the retired headmaster of Trinity School at River Ridge and currently the director of the Marriage in Christ outreach. He has taught Sacred Scripture for 35 years and is the coauthor with the late Msgr. Jerome D. Quinn of *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, published in the Eerdmans Critical Commentary Series. He and his wife Adella have been married since 1974. They have five children and three grandchildren. Adella is a retired RN and the former Director of Nursing at the Little Sisters of the Poor long-term care facility in St. Paul, MN. Together they have been part of the development of the Marriage in Christ seminars from the beginning.