



*Lenten Devotional  
2018*

*Week 3  
March 4-10*

*What's Your Story?  
Plot Twists*



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## LENTEN DEVOTIONAL WRITERS

2018

We may try to forget the darker areas of our lives, the hidden secrets, the places no one should know about us. However, when we ask the Lord, as David did, to forgive our hidden faults and willful sins, He does. Our prayers can be simple. They do not need to be flowery, sung like David's or full of many words. All God wants from us is our sincere, simple request asking for forgiveness. When we have the knowledge that He has heard the words of our heart, we feel the burden(s) lifted. Our whole being is lightened. And, isn't that a much better way to go through our day?

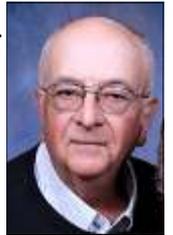
**PRAYER:** Oh, God, hear our requests, simple and heartfelt for the forgiveness of our sins, whether they are the deep ones we try to keep hidden or the daily sins we commit, sometimes unknowingly. No matter how hard we try to live sin free, as David cried to you, forgive us our hidden faults. Help us to remember that you are only a prayer away. **Amen.**

**Wanda Williams**



**Sunday—Rev. Jeanne Williams** became our Senior Pastor in July of 2017. She comes to us directly from Walnut Ridge First UMC in Walnut Ridge, AR. She has been in ministry ever since her call in the 7th grade as a preacher's kid. She loves being the mother of a kindergartner, the mountains of Northwest Arkansas, Arkansas football (even in disappointing seasons), chocolate and diet Dr. Pepper. She is excited to be able to share her Lenten inspirations with us in these devotional writings.

**Monday—Alan Packard** and his wife Judie moved to Bella Vista in 2007 from Wisconsin. They joined the church in September of that year. Alan has been a life-long Methodist having lived in many Midwest states from the time he was a young child. Most of the congregation knows him from his teaching the Disciple Bible Study classes and the Golden Links Sunday school class. He is past president of the United Methodist Men and currently serves as its secretary. He recently took on responsibility as Charter Organization Representative of the Boy Scouts, now that our church is a sponsor.



**Tuesday—Amy Fulton** (and Carole Boyd) moved to Bella Vista in December of 2002 and Amy currently works for Arvest Bank at Town Center. She's the church photographer and is rarely seen without her camera in hand. She truly enjoys capturing the life and service of FUMCBV...a place she has called home since joining Easter of 2012. She sings on the Praise Team and enjoys cooking, reading, traveling, fishing, singing and playing musical instruments (saxophone and guitar) when she's not busy taking pictures or involved with something having to do with photos. She has plenty of energy and has enjoyed writing since her early teens.



**Wednesday—Lynn Prueitt** moved to Bella Vista with husband Keith in October of 1995 from Des Moines, Iowa. They joined our church in January of 1996. In Des Moines she was a legal secretary for 29 years. After moving to Bella Vista she worked part-time for 9 years at the POA in the Membership Services Department. She sings in the choir, plays hand bells and is in the Bella Vista Women's Chorus. She likes to walk on the Bella Vista Lake trail and she does water aerobics at the Kingsdale pool in the summer.



Lynn loves to read, cook, play Candy Crush, crochet, and visit their four children and grandchildren in Iowa, Oregon and Pittsburgh, PA.



**Thursday—Alec Gilmore** is currently a freshman at Bentonville High School. He and his family—consisting of his younger sister, Jenna, his parents, Amy and James, and his grandmother, Wanda Williams—have lived in northwest Arkansas on two separate occasions. They joined FUMCBV in 2009, left for South Carolina in 2012, and returned in 2015. Wanting to serve the church as much as he can, Alec is active with the Youth ministry of our church and even has a role in the media ministry. He's combining his ever-growing passion for writing with his strengthening connection with God to write devotionals for this season of Lent.

**Friday—Sonnie Andersen** I was born on an Iowa farm where my roots seem to have been established in nature, justifying my being outside...even if it is "work". When less than five, our family moved to Muscatine, Iowa; and it was there I realized my love of singing...thus my involvement yet today. In spite of my BME degree at the U of Iowa, my position in the public schools was short-lived; while Dick was establishing his engineering career, my primary role was "keeping our home" and both of us raising our children. Directing church children's choirs became important; but I realized, I was happiest when I was a part in vocal singing, whatever form that took. Sometime later, I served in a number of positions in (what was then) Christian Women's Club, leading to a surge in my walk of faith. Realizing I wasn't really honoring Dick (scripture in mind), I took the risk of asking if we might go to a marriage enrichment program. Due to its lessons on Holy Matrimony and a gentle invitation to accept Christ not only into one's life but into our marriage, God worked in a mighty way by allowing us (through United Marriage Encounter) to share our lives with many...in the USA, England and many parts of Asia...something we never dreamed we would be doing for 26 years, until we permanently moved to Bella Vista ten years ago and FUMC became our home church.



**Saturday—Wanda Williams** was born and raised in Colorado but has lived in Montana, South Carolina and for the fourth time in Arkansas. She has been in Human Resources over twenty years and continues to work with the hopes of retiring before too long. She loves to read, do X-stitch, and has embroidered tea towels for the UMW bazaar every year she has been here. She also loves doing creative crafts, and her granddaughter Jenna can be found in her craft room joining her in alcohol ink and melted crayola projects. She is also the proud Grammy to Alec, and Craig who lives in New Jersey. Wanda attends the Well service with her daughter, Amy, and son-in-law, James, and Alec & Jenna.

Our church choir recently sang:

"Come follow me," said the Lord.  
 "Be at peace within my care.  
 Be as a child. Show me your need.  
 Take my hand, and I Will lead".

**PRAYER:** Abba, I address you as a little child. May I take Your hand and follow along with You. Forgive me when I miss the beauty of Your love...and when I don't thank You for the bounty of this world. Help us to be good stewards of all you provide, to serve others as You would do, all the while keeping our eyes on YOU. **Amen.**

**Sonnie Andersen**

**Saturday, March 10, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: Psalm 19:10-14 (NIV)**

*They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

We are all familiar with the book of Psalms. To me, some of the most beautiful verses in the Bible are in this book. David is praising God and, in this scripture, starts by saying the decrees of the Lord are more precious than gold. He continues his adoration until verse 12 where he changes to self-deprecation. David, the King, tells his Lord that he is God's servant and asks for forgiveness.

We all have our stories as we are learning this Lenten season. Many of us have the plot twists and transgressions David speaks (or sings) of. Some people don't mind telling of their trials while others hope no one ever hears their stories. Be we all know, deep down, that those hidden parts are known to God, our great and glorious and all-knowing Lord.

**What's Your Story?  
Plot Twists  
3rd Sunday in Lent  
Sunday, March 4, 2018**

God to find the Christ child, by way of a star. Today, NASA can accurately point out events in the skies, which show living proof of God's order. Because of this, recently thousands were rewarded after traveling many miles to see the solar eclipse. (On the other hand, a remark overheard, "I think I'll become a weatherman. Where else can I keep from being fired from my job, whether my predictions are right or wrong!" Again, proof that our Lord is still in charge, this by means of the weather).

There are, however, warnings: Man is not to worship the heavenly lights; they do not control man's destiny. Rather, their glory testifies to the righteousness and faithfulness of the Lord, their Creator. Focusing on last phrase of Psalm 19:6 "And there is nothing hidden from its heat," one commentator expressed: "God's Law is like the sun. On judgment day, it will arise with its burning heat and shine the brilliant light of eternal justice on the dark corners of the human heart. Nothing will be hidden from its consuming heat." The following scripture (Psalm 19:7-9) speaks of the moral nature of God's holiness (God's law which shows us where we sin), but we can rejoice. Christ, the only righteous one, has taken on all sin and nailed it to the cross.

Speaking of "focusing", this cute "illustration" happened just last week:

Advancing quickly, like a beeline, was a paper tube, intently aimed at my spouse...behind it, was a "bitty", fearless child who stood far below, peering upwards. Upon our laughter...came a winsome but demanding voice nearby, "What are you doing Abbey....spying on somebody again?"

What are we seeing as we peer upwards to God? Is it His glory? For that matter, what is God observing in us (His children)? I'd like to think I have the innocence of a little child...completely confident and trusting in what God wants...not what I think I want. Too often, we (adults) are too occupied to observe the wonders God offers. Our idols are many; where we spend the majority of "time" (our Father has given us) likely reveals...our focus is not on Him. But one important way to "rightly" focus is by attending worship on Sunday listening to "messages" from the pastor and through music.

**SCRIPTURE:** John 2:13-22 (CEB)

*It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple those who were selling cattle, sheep, and doves, as well as those involved in exchanging currency sitting there. He made a whip from ropes and chased them all out of the temple, including the cattle and the sheep. He scattered the coins and overturned the tables of those who exchanged currency. He said to the dove sellers, "Get these things out of here! Don't make my Father's house a place of business." His disciples remembered that it is written, Passion for your house consumes me.*

*Then the Jewish leaders asked him, "By what authority are you doing these things? What miraculous sign will you show us?" Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up." The Jewish leaders replied, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?" But the temple Jesus was talking about was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered what he had said, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*

How many times do we totally misinterpret what someone has said or is saying to us? I look at the end of this scripture text and can understand the Jewish Leaders' misinterpretation. How can any one person rebuild a stone temple in three days' time? That's ridiculous! But we know the end of the story where Jesus is raised in three days' time – he indeed rebuilds the temple of himself.

When I misinterpret someone, I always feel embarrassed. And I really hate to admit to my mistake and my embarrassment. Perhaps you feel the same way. But, we are called to own up to our mistakes and to clear the air if needed. It's hard to admit to yourself that you are wrong, let alone to someone else.

As we continue our Lenten journey, I encourage all of us to take a moment to reflect on the places where we might be in the wrong and seek forgiveness – from ourselves and others. Sometimes the one person I have the most trouble forgiving is myself. I get angry that I misinterpreted a situation or a person and all the emotions just spiral down from there. But isn't it wonderful that we serve a God who understands the depth and breadth of our emotions and forgives us when we seek God's forgiveness?

**PRAYER:** God of all Creation, thank you for your righteous anger. Thank you for the ability to forgive myself and others, and for forgiving me. Help me to own up to my own shortcomings and help me to set them right. I pray this in your Son's name, Jesus. Amen.

**Rev. Jeanne Williams**

**Monday, March 5, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25 (NKJV)**

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

*For it is written: Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*

*For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

“For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent” Isaiah 29:14.

In this passage from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Paul is describing how different groups of people in his day understood Christ’s death on the Cross.

Crucifixion was the lowest form of capital punishment used by the Romans. To say that the death of a Jew on a cross is God’s way of saving the world would seem to be complete foolishness to the Greeks.

On the other hand, for “those being saved” it is powerful because it is able to change people’s lives and bring about their salvation.

Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 as proof of God’s judgment against the wise and learned, the elite who don’t understand God and His Wisdom.

Where are the wise, the legal experts, the debaters? The wisdom of the world that stands in contrast to God’s wisdom? Jews look for signs, Greeks seek wisdom from a human perspective.

The cross is a scandal to the Jews – the Messiah wasn’t supposed to die; and the Gentiles couldn’t understand how one could die the death of a slave and be a savior figure.

As Paul closes this passage, his reference to “those who are called” – those who have responded positively to the invitation of the Gospel and see Christ as he truly is – God’s power and God’s wisdom – will recognize “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength”. Thanks be to God!

**Friday, March 9, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: Psalm 19:1-9 (NKJV)**

*The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.*

*Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge.*

*There is no speech nor language  
Where their voice is not heard.*

*Their line has gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world*

*In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,  
Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,  
And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.  
Its rising is from one end of heaven,  
And its circuit to the other end;  
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether*

### **Focusing on God**

Synopsis: A hymn extolling the "glory of God" as revealed by the starry heavens; and then, calling attention to "the law of the Lord" as given to Moses.

Roman 10:18 advises: "All of creation reveals the genius of God's hand. Men are without excuse when it comes to believing in God's existence."

From ancient days...mankind has been awed by God's creation. Navigators depended on the signs in the heavens to sail the seas...even the wise men were directed by wisdom and predictions by

*covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor. When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the ram's horn, and when they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear. And they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen. But don't let God speak directly to us, or we will die!" "Don't be afraid," Moses answered them, "for God has come in this way to test you, and so that your fear of him will keep you from sinning!"*

The stage is set...the Israelites, in need of guidance, face the great and holy Mount Sinai to hear from God Himself. God, meanwhile, is there, atop the mountain, in the form of a massive storm cloud, which conveys a quite fearsome appearance. The terrified Israelites refuse to interact directly with God, fearing certain death if they were to talk to or move toward Him. And this is precisely what God wants.

I guarantee that every single one of you has known someone who tries to establish themselves as someone to be taken seriously. Whether it be a teacher or professor, a coach, a boss, even a parent...there has to have been someone in your life that seemed strict or intimidating. I had a teacher like this when I was in junior high school. He was my career development teacher that just so happened to also be one of the football coaches at the school. And you could tell the toughness that factored into his coaching would factor into how he taught; from the moment he stepped into the room, his booming voice and daunting presence set every student straight. We'd be afraid to look at him the wrong way, let alone break any real rules in the class. This ensured he had complete control over all of his students...it goes without saying that very little trouble was caused in that class.

My career development teacher was following what God is doing here in front of the Israelites. He wants everyone to know He has all control over everyone. And God, of course, means well in doing this. As Moses exclaims in verse twenty, God is doing this so that everyone will fear His power, which, in turn, scares them out of committing sin. We know God takes it a step further in Exodus when He brings the Ten Plagues upon Egypt, to further show what He is capable of. In summation, God wants his people to stay as far away from sin as possible. In order to do this, He wants to make sure people fear Him and his holy, unmatched power.

**PRAYER:** Lord, we thank You for your unconditional love for us. We ask that you help us understand that the times You may seem fearsome are to guide us away from the world of sin. We are often terrified of the great things You can do, so help us remember that you mean to direct us toward a more healthy, fruitful life. In Your name we pray, **Amen.**

**Alec Gilmore**

**PRAYER:** Grant O Lord, that we may truly recognize that God's thoughts and human thoughts are entirely different and that we may each try to understand God's thought above any human thoughts as we try to truly follow the example of Jesus Christ in our daily lives. **Amen.**

**Alan Packard**

**Tuesday, March 6, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:26-31 (LB)**

*Notice among yourselves, dear brothers, that few of you follow Christ have big name or power or wealth. Instead, God has deliberately chosen to use ideas the world considers foolish and of little worth in order to shame those people considered by the world as wise and great. He has chosen a plan despised by the world, counted as nothing at all, and used it to bring down nothing those the world considers great, so that no one anywhere can ever brag in the presence of God. For it is from God alone that you have your life through Christ Jesus. He showed us God's plan of salvation; he was the one who made us acceptable to God; he made us pure and holy and gave himself to purchase our salvation. As it says in the scriptures, "If anyone is going to boast, let him boast only of what the Lord has done."*

This scripture reminds us that Your (God's) ways are so different from the ways and standards of the world. With our limited understanding and perspective, we can't begin to know Your ways or understand why things happen as they do. There are times You turn everything upside down from how we think things should be and the twists and turns that our lives seem to take don't make sense, but we know You are in control.

Who knew You would choose to use a peasant girl to be the mother of Jesus? Who knew we would get to see glimpses of You working in the lives of others who have gone before us? Who knew you would give Joseph a beautiful gift of prophetic dreams to help secure the lineage of Your Son? (You did of course!) We're continuing to see the way that You weave all the things that seem to be happening in Joseph's life and how we're seeing the words in Roman's 8:28 played out: And we know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Nothing is impossible with You, God. You continually call us to do Your work. You long to have us seek to know You better and to follow the path and life You are calling us to lead, regardless of the unexpected turns, bumps and ditches we experience.

**PRAYER:** Oh God, help us to trust You more in the little things in life so that when the bigger things come along, we are faithful to turn to You and allow Your will to play out in our lives. Help us to surrender our desire to take back any control as the plot in our lives continues to thicken. Help us to remember that You are already around the next bend and leading us on as the adventures of our lives continue. Thank You for sending Your one and only Son for our salvation. And, help us always to give You the glory, the honor and praise for Your faithfulness and steadfast love. **Amen!!!**

**Amy O. Fulton**

**Wednesday, March 7, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: Exodus 20:1-11 (Contemporary English Version)**

*God said to the people of Israel: I am the Lord your God, the one who brought you out of Egypt where you were slaves.*

*Do not worship any god except me.*

*Do not make idols that look like anything in the sky or on earth or in the ocean under the earth. Don't bow down and worship idols. I am the Lord your God, and I demand all your love. If you reject me, I will punish your families for three or four generations. But if you love me and obey my laws, I will be kind to your families for thousands of generations.*

*Do not misuse my name. I am the Lord your God, and I will punish anyone who misuses my name.*

*Remember that the Sabbath Day belongs to me. You have six days when you can do your work, but the seventh day of each week belongs to me, your God. No one is to work on that day--not you, your children, your slaves, your animals, or the foreigners who live in your towns. In six days I made the sky, the earth, the oceans, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That's why I made the Sabbath a special day that belongs to me.*

God is telling the people of Israel how he expects them to behave. God has delivered the Israelites from slavery and gives them The Law as a standard of conduct. We called them The Ten Commandments. God said, "I am the Lord your God, do not worship any god except me." God said, "I am the Lord your God--I demand all your love. If you reject me I will punish your families for three or four generations." God said, "I am the Lord your God and I will punish anyone who misuses my name." And God said, "Remember the Sabbath Day belongs to me."

The first three commandments are easy for me to follow. But remembering to rest on the seventh day was not always easy when I was working an outside job and raising a family. Since I have been retired I use this commandment to be pretty lazy on the Sabbath. Does it mean I don't have to do any laundry or fix any meals? I think God has to be more understanding in today's world where women work outside the home. Most of us remember when everything was closed on Sunday.

The King James Version of the Bible says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Keeping the Sabbath holy could mean many different things to many different people. But for me the Sabbath means the most important day of the week; the day to attend church services and be uplifted by God's word; a day to give God the praise and glory as he requires of us.

**PRAYER:** Lord God of all creation, you gave us The Law so that we would live our lives to honor you. Fill us with your Holy Spirit each and every days so that we can be constantly reminded that you are the Lord, our God, our deliverer and redeemer. **Amen.**

**Lynn Prueitt**

**Thursday, March 8, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: : Exodus 20:12-20 (NLT)**

*Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you. You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely against your neighbor. You must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not*