



*Lenten Devotional  
2018*

*Week 5  
March 18-24*

*What's Your Story?  
Desires, Roles, and Identity*



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## LENTEN DEVOTIONAL WRITERS

2018

Dreams can be fun, refreshing, exciting, scary or sometimes a warning. What happens in our brains when we dream? I've heard that when we sleep, the brain restores, refreshes and cleans debris out that we've accumulated throughout the day. If it does that, how can we dream? Talk about multi-tasking!

I wish Joseph would interpret my dreams. There seems to be a common thread but I never can quite put my finger on what it is. Perhaps it is not Joseph I should be counting on, but God who gives me these scenarios. Since most of my dreams are pleasant, I think God is letting me enjoy myself in my fantasy realm and keeping my mind off the day to day issues I struggle with. I am not going to complain!

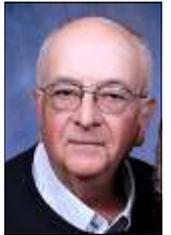
**PRAYER:** Our Heavenly Father, as I lay my head down at night, grant me peace and give me dreams that you choose for me. Let me keep the lessons you want me to have during this time and wake up refreshed and renewed again. In your holy and merciful name, **Amen.**

**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.

*and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good were growing on a single stock. After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted – thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up, it had been a dream.*

*In the morning, his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us. I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged.” So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.” “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”*

Dreams are stories. Sometimes they have a beginning, plot, plot twists and an ending. But they can also be backwards, no plots, no beginnings or endings. They may include desires, roles and identities – but often they don’t make sense. Dreams are strange things.

For a while after my son died, if I had a dream with him in it, I’d wake up and cry because I realized it was just a dream. One night, I dreamed that he said, “Mom, if you keep crying when you wake from these dreams, I won’t come visit you anymore.” That was so Craig that I quit crying so I could keep him in my dreams. Was he really “visiting”? This one remark made me think he was.

I dream every night and for the most part, they are good dreams. Sometimes, the “cast” would include people I had not thought about in years, or it would include someone I saw on TV or in the papers. When I wake up, I remember the dream and wonder why in the world I dreamt what I did. Then, I usually forget about it within the next few minutes.

## What's Your Story? Desires, Roles, and Identity

5th Sunday in Lent  
Sunday, March 18, 2018

**SCRIPTURE: John 12:20-26 (CEB)**

*Some Greeks were among those who had come up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request: "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip told Jesus.*

*Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me.*

As I read this passage this week, I am struck by the image of a single grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying. And then because it dies, it bears much fruit. Because one seed gave its life to the earth, many more grains are harvested.

How true is this of us? If we plant just one seed in someone else, how many more seeds might that person plant in others? It is a ripple effect, an exponential effect, really. If I simply smile at someone today, perhaps that will make them smile at others, and then those people smile at more people; therefore, spreading just a little more cheer in the world around us.

I am also reminded of last week's sermon, that other people's choices will affect our storylines, and how we choose to view these intersections of our stories determines our attitude about life. "...Those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever." I understand that there are times when you're down or depressed. You are absolutely entitled to those negative plot twists in life. It's how you view them once you're on the other side of them that determines your attitude about life. We can choose to seek God's blessing or choose to be defined by the negative plot twists.

I think I would rather "love my life" and spread some grain than "hate my life" and die withering away trying to hold onto my grain seeds. How about you? What grain will you sow today?

**PRAYER:** Let us pray: God of the Universe, we are each but small grains of wheat in need of your tending and care. Allow us to grow into mighty stalks where we can share your seeds of love even more. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**

**Rev. Jeanne Williams**

God's saving grace first became apparent to me during my teen years. While many in our church congregation refused to attend when an evangelist was invited to speak at our church, I chose to be there when specifically encouraged to accompany a friend. The speaker happened to be a very committed Christian (Jewish) man...so compelling that in spite of my fear of him, I also felt compelled to open my being to a warmth God had placed in my heart...allowing that veneer to soften and become pliable. I chose to become a child of God during that service.

Perhaps having gone to Sunday School and Bible School in the summers, created an "atmosphere" where I was drawn to Jesus, especially tuning up to child-engaging songs like "Jesus Loves Me", "Jesus Wants Me For A Sunbeam" and "Tell Me the Stories of Jesus"

Still, a baby Christian longer that I would like to admit; never-the-less, if you read my words in last week's devotions, hymns and anthems had already "taught" me scripture so I could begin my journey with Christ...and run the race!

**PRAYER:** Holy Spirit, thank You again for entering into my life...my being. Lord, forgive me when I have not loved You wholeheartedly and when I have not reached out in love to others. As we enter Holy Week, help us to be so immersed in the love of Christ that others will read in us that which is what they neglect or refuse to read in God's Word...and it's all about Jesus and His coming. And we pray for all little ones, that they may learn of Your glory. May we sing praises to You, Lord of Life. **Amen.**

**Sonnie Andersen**

**Saturday, March 24, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: Genesis 41:1-16 (NIV)**

*When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up. He fell asleep again*

**Monday, March 19, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: Scripture: John 12: 26-31 (KJV)**

*If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spoke to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*

***“Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.’”***

I hope that you have already read Rev. Jeanne’s message because it precedes the passage that I am dealing with today. If you have a “Red Letter” bible, most of this passage is in red. Jesus is speaking in the Temple to his Disciples and any others who wished to hear Him teach, including some Greeks (the message is not just for the Jews).

In verse 26, Jesus says if anyone serves Him, His Father will honor them. He goes on to say that He is troubled and asks if he can be “saved from this hour?” But also states that He came to us solely for “this hour”. Then a voice came from Heaven (see above).

The reaction from the crowd is very familiar – some say it was thunder, others say “an angel spoke to Him”. Recall the scene from His baptism at the Jordan. Here though, Jesus responds to the people “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.”

The passage closes with a typical Johannian statement – “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out”. Who is “the ruler of this world? What could Jesus have possibly meant by this pronouncement? The “ruler of this world” is someone Jesus met very early in His ministry during His forty days in the wilderness. He defeated him then and will defeat him again – it is the Devil, Satan, the evil one, whatever you wish to call him, and believe it or not, he does rule the world unless we serve Jesus and are Honored by God!

**Prayer:** Grant O Lord that we may choose to follow Jesus and are Honored by God. **Amen.**

**Alan Packard**

*You, LORD, are to be blessed! Teach me your statutes.  
I will declare out loud all the rules you have spoken.  
I rejoice in the content of your laws as if I were rejoicing over great wealth.  
I will think about your precepts and examine all your paths.  
I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget what you have said.*

**Psalm 119 Synopsis:**

This wonderful, but lengthy psalm, reveals the great key to living life of victory as a Christian. No other portion of scripture examines in such detail the benefits of heeding God's word, but the key is to seek and serve Him with a whole heart.

**Focus on our Scripture:**

Sounding much like the wisdom in Proverbs Chapter 4, these scriptures 9-16 (from Psalm 119) contain God's instructions, actually a "prayer" for help in observing the law. If you recall, Jesus said He had come to "fulfill" the law...not to destroy it. In accepting Jesus' words, we realize: Christians are bound by the standard of righteousness. There is no neutral ground. "We are either slaves of sin or of God." Your assignment is to turn the negative "10 Don'ts" to "the 10 Do's"; and by condensing them, you will arrive to the meaning of Jesus' words, "Fully love God and love your neighbor (as yourself)."

I don't recall when or how I developed a sense of right and wrong...it seemed as if I already knew the difference by the time I reached second grade. At that point, I knew what would displease my parents (though my concept of "displeasing my heavenly Father," was, as yet, undeveloped). Being so young, I didn't know how easy it is to succumb to peer pressure...when my best friend steered me to what, in my heart, I did not want to do. Somehow "going along" with this playmate seemed more important than going to my parents with the "problem". Afterwards, I just couldn't bear to admit my wrong doing and wanted to bury the whole sickening mess. Actually, I did not place blame on my friend...but on me. But what bothered me most was...it involved other children from school and I didn't want to face any of them. The result was...I rejected my friend and avoided certain schoolmates. I saw myself as stupid and felt deeply ashamed, enough to color my life for a long time, I withdrew into my protective "shell" with a veneer, hard to penetrate, not even by my parents at that time. I could not love myself...so how could I come to love someone else? How could I come to realize God loved me...no matter what?

**Tuesday, March 20, 2018**

I think it's safe to say every single one of you did something to upset your parents back when you were a child. You might have annoyed a sibling in some way, you might have gotten in trouble at school, or maybe you broke something...the list goes on and on. As an older brother, I constantly tried to find ways to irritate my sister, which would result in my parents scolding me (at least) 99% of the time. As I got older, I still did it, but started to recognize why it made my parents so upset. I would feel guilty, then realize why what I did was wrong—conviction. From there I would ask for my parents to forgive me, and insist that I would be better in the future. And while I wasn't always faithful to whatever I said, I slowly began to better myself. As more time passed it went from beyond asking my parents and even my sister to forgive me...I started turning to God, as well.

What I'm trying to say with this immensely-simplified anecdote is that sin is inevitable. While David's example we read of in Psalm 51 is certainly not encouraged, we know we're bound to succumb to sin at some point, in one way or another. But the amazing thing (among many others, of course) about God is that he always forgives us...all we have to do is ask for it. If we sincerely ask for a cleansed heart, He will pull through for us, even when we don't deserve it. He will forgive, He will have mercy on us. We just have to be convicted to it within ourselves, and prepare to confess to God.

**PRAYER:** Lord, we thank You for Your boundless love for us, constantly forgiving our sin and cleansing our hearts. We ask that You help us in confessing our wrongdoings to You, as we often do not appreciate how committed You are to leading to prosper upon our Christian walk. In Your name we pray, **Amen.**

**Alec Gilmore**

**Friday, March 23, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:9-16**

*By guarding them according to what you've said.  
I have sought you with all my heart.  
Don't let me stray from any of your commandments!  
I keep your word close, in my heart, so that I won't sin against you.*

**SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 5:1-10 (NRSV)**

*Every High priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So, also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."*

*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.*

We are in our 5<sup>th</sup> week of our Lenten journey and are one week away from all the events which comprise Holy week. As we continue to reflect upon the goodness of Christ and the sacrifices He made on our behalf, it is overwhelming. It is overwhelming to think of His love and compassion for us. It is overwhelming to think that He took ALL the sins of the world upon himself...oh the enormous weight not only on His body, but His heart, soul and Spirit as well. For us, it is unimaginable...what He endured at our expense...the torment, the torture, the loneliness, the betrayal, being misunderstood and so much more. Good Friday will soon be here. But until then, we have many things to ponder as our journey continues. We are soon to find ourselves in all the ups and downs of Holy week, but we must remember that we are "Resurrection People".

How many of you have ever heard a song by Carman called "Sunday's on the Way"? If you have never heard it, I would encourage you to go to YouTube and/or Google this song. Whether you listen to the 1<sup>st</sup> rendition that pops up or whether you go to Carman's album by that same title ("Sunday's on the Way"), please go check it out. I really like to listen to it near Easter because of the message of Christ's resurrection. It is by this same power of His resurrection that we receive our promise for eternal life. Why and what does this mean? Jesus took our rightful place on the cross and endured and came out the victor over sin, death and Satan.

**PRAYER:** Dear Jesus, continue to enlighten us and reveal to us the power of Your resurrection and remind us that even though we may get caught up in our own circumstances and feel as though Friday will never end, please help us remember that Sunday's on the way. You are the one who makes it possible for us to live as "Resurrection People". Thank you for this gift and responsibilities that go with it. **Amen!**

**Amy O. Fulton**

**Wednesday, March 21, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

*The Lord said: The time will surely come when I will make a new agreement with the people of Israel and Judah. It will be different from the agreement I made with their ancestors when I led them out of Egypt. Although I was their God, they broke that agreement.*

*Here is the new agreement that I, the Lord, will make with the people of Israel: "I will write my laws on their hearts and minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they have to teach one another to obey me. I, the Lord, promise that all of them will obey me, ordinary people and rulers alike. I will forgive their sins and forget the evil things they have done."*

Jeremiah was a prophet and a priest. He preached of God's judgment but he also taught that God would make a new covenant with the people of Israel. The Lord said that all would obey him and he would forgive their sins and forget the evil that they had done. Sound familiar? This passage from Jeremiah is the longest sequence of Old Testament verses to be quoted in its entirety in the New Testament. Look at Hebrews 8:8-12. They are word for word the same.

God once gave his laws **to** the people of Israel but those laws were broken. This time he would write his laws **in** them so they would understand what he was asking of them. God asks much of us. He wants our love and obedience. He wants his people to mirror him, to be like him.

I think maturity has its advantages. We have left behind the wild and crazy days of our youth and have settled into a routine that allows more of God into our lives. However, we must not become complacent. We still need to remember daily the covenant that God made with his people many years ago. *"No longer will they have to teach one another to obey me. I, the Lord, promise that all of them will obey me, ordinary people and rulers alike. I will forgive their sins and forget the evil things they have done."*

When my daughter was young she used to sing a song called "Kids Under Construction." One of the phrases in the song went "God's not finished with me yet." I say that phrase frequently when I mess up and forget the covenant God made with his people and with me.

**PRAYER:** God, how do you not lose patience with us humans? How can you love us so deeply when we continue to go against your covenants? Father, thank you for reminding us daily of your presence. I pray that I can be reminded daily of my commitment to you to be your voice, your hands and your feet. I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the son you so lovingly gave to us, the son who taught us to mirror his image, and the son who died for our sins. **Amen.**

**Lynn Prueitt**

**Thursday, March 22, 2018**

**SCRIPTURE: Psalm 51:1-12 (NLT)**

*Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.*

*For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there. Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.*

*Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.*

The purpose of the book of Psalms in the Bible is to convey how faithful worshippers talk to God. Psalm 51 is an example of a confession to the Lord.

In this chapter, David—author of roughly half of the 150 Psalms in the Bible—is confessing the adultery he has committed. Of course, God already knows what has happened, but David feels convicted of his sin and is now asking—well, more like begging—the Lord for mercy.