



EASTERTIDE

**A SEASON OF JOY
AND PROMISE**

Madison First United Methodist Church
Rev. Grady Mosley, Senior Pastor



EASTERTIDE 2022

Madison First United Methodist Church

©2022

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Madison, GA

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EASTERTIDE

A Season of Joy and Promise

Eastertide is the season beginning on Easter Sunday and continuing for fifty days until the Day of Pentecost. During this time, followers of Christ celebrate His resurrection from the dead and new believers affirm the foundations of their faith as they begin their new life in Christ.

Trevin Wax, former missionary to Romania, urges all Christians to a greater celebration of Eastertide: *“Easter morning is the turning point of world history and the defining moment for Christianity. This is the day when God’s new world began. It’s the day when our own resurrection from the dead was secured. It’s the first time in history when someone went through death and came out the other side – victorious, in glory, mysteriously new and yet the same.”*

Though death claimed Jesus’ life, the power of God resurrected Him from the dead. Though Satan believed he had won, he was fully defeated. Though the first disciples scattered in fear when Jesus was arrested, He gathered them in peace after His resurrection. Though Peter had—three times—denied even knowing Him, Jesus restored his soul and called him to feed His sheep. So, even though the wages of our sin is death, new life is given to us when we trust in Jesus.

Along with the first disciples, and all believers throughout the ages, we rejoice that our Savior lives. We praise Him for our salvation and walk with Him in the new life He has given us. We seek Him daily in His word for the wisdom and guidance we need to live as His ambassadors in this world. While we fulfill the purpose to which He has called us, we can rest in the assurance that He will always be with us and the promise that we will live forever with Him in heaven.

Our celebration of Easter is also a celebration of the renewal of our faith and commitment to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. May we be people of great faith who live in a manner worthy of our calling. May we always be ready to share the reason for our hope. May we willingly set aside our desires and selfish ambitions so we might put the needs of others before our own. May we act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

CHRIST IS RISEN. HE IS RISEN INDEED!

REJOICE IN A RISEN SAVIOR

April 17 – April 23



“He is Risen!” Christ’s resurrection is the most significant event in human history. On Easter, we join believers throughout the world celebrating Christ’s victory over death and, thereby, ours as well. Every disciple except John was martyred because they would not recant the truth of resurrection; it is this truth that makes us distinctly the people of God. No other religion can claim that which Jesus proved when He rose from the dead: He is alive; He is the only True God; and His Word is true. He is the fulfillment of the prophecies—the Messiah and Savior of the world. Paul said, if Christ did not rise then all preaching and faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). Easter is a glorious day, and we celebrate it with joy and confidence in Christ’s lordship.

Why do those feelings fade as the days after Easter pass, and we return to our everyday lives? How do we hold on to the victory we proclaimed at Easter? How do we allow our faith in the power and work of the resurrection to transform our living and our thinking? During Lent, most of us prioritized time intentionally to practice the spiritual disciplines of the faith: studying the Word, spending time in prayer and meditation (which included reflection and listening to God), fasting, and cultivating the mind of Christ by allowing the Holy Spirit to work within us. We focused on our relationship with Him, how we could improve it, and where we might have missed the mark. If you

are like me, after the euphoria of Easter fades, I find myself falling back into my old routines wherein God is not my priority. We can't stop now! Our relationship with God is one we must cultivate and nurture; if we don't, the voice of this world will quickly drown out His. In my own life, I have found that the more I fill myself with the Lord and His Word, the less I will be controlled by this world—this is the power of Easter! We find joy despite our outward circumstances; we find power for living the resurrected life regardless of the trials we face; we find more time for Him despite our busy schedules. When we keep our eyes on Him, we joyously join the refrain: “He is Risen, indeed!”

A prayer for this week: *Holy Father, in the coming days, give us a hunger and thirst that can be satisfied only by Your Word and Your presence. Your resurrection is the best news ever. Equip us with the knowledge and boldness to shout that good news through our words and actions at every opportunity.*

Deborah Mosley is a wife, mother, grandmother, and educator. She and her husband, Grady, have been members of Madison First UMC for twelve years where she is a Sunday School teacher and small group leader.

SUNDAY, APRIL 17
Matthew 28:5–7

⁵ *The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where he lay.⁷ Then go quickly and tell His disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.’ Now I have told you.”*

When you feel hopeless, where will you find the joy to continue?

MONDAY, APRIL 18

Luke 24:13–14, 25–27

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus . . . talking with each other about everything that had happened. . . . ²⁵ [Jesus] said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.

When you feel confused, where will you search for answers?

TUESDAY, APRIL 19

Acts 7:55–56

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

When you face persecution or death, where will you find peace?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20

1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 20–21

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. . . .

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

When you have doubts, which truths will restore your confidence?

THURSDAY, APRIL 21

Ephesians 1:19b–23

^{19b} That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

When you feel powerless, where will you look for strength?

FRIDAY, APRIL 22

Hebrews 1:3

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

When you feel unworthy, where do you find hope for redemption?

SATURDAY, APRIL 23

Revelation 1:12-16

¹² I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest. ¹⁴ The hair on His head was white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In His right hand He held seven stars, and coming out of His mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When you feel insignificant, how does this vision give you assurance?

REJOICE IN YOUR SALVATION

April 24 – April 30



Wow! Here we are a week after Easter. The holiday has come and gone. The missing plastic eggs have been found, the baskets and the green plastic grass are packed away until next year. Now what?

Easter, the happening, the miracle, is still here for us. Last week we rejoiced in our Risen Savior. This week, we are rejoicing in our wonderful salvation brought to us by that Risen Savior. Salvation is a guarantee to us from God—the promise that whoever believes has eternal life. This is real life, something we can hold onto, accept, and then celebrate—salvation.

As you read the Scripture each day, first thank God for His Word, then think about what the words say: “Delight in the Lord; Sing for joy.” These are celebration words that call us to be ecstatic that God loves us and wants us always in His Kingdom. It is a wonderful thing to just be around people who seem to bask in the knowledge that they have God’s salvation. I’m sure you know someone who almost glows when they talk about how God has changed their world since they found their new salvation. You can’t do that with a frown on your face. You think to yourself, “I want what he or she has.” In the verses this week, see the words “declare” and “believe.” These are the keys to finding the salvation that only Jesus can give. There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved. Joy and rejoicing are right there waiting for us.

When I think about rejoicing, I picture smiling, laughing, maybe shouting. I love Southern gospel music. These are not slow sad songs about cancer and misery—they are happy celebration songs. “Insiders” call it convention music, usually because a large crowd of people get together to listen and sing. One of our happiest times is Memorial Day weekend when we go to Gatlinburg and join 3,000 other believers in applauding God for the promise of salvation. Songs like “Blessed Assurance,” “How Great Thou Art,” and “Because He Lives” fill the Convention Center. We smile, we cry, we praise. This is rejoicing in our salvation with other people. We can also rejoice when we are here at church. When the Praise Team leads an upbeat song, or Pastor Grady’s message speaks to you, REJOICE! Celebrate the fact that Jesus died and arose to give us salvation. He is just waiting for us to receive it.

A prayer for this week: Father God, thank You for Your promise of salvation and eternal life if we only believe. Help us to smile and celebrate the fact that You love us more than we can imagine. Amen.

Ray Spence is married to Cindy. His family includes Steve and Shannon Collier, Karen Spence, four grandkids and two great-grandkids. He raises blackberries and blueberries.

SUNDAY, APRIL 24

Psal m 95:1–3

¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

² Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song.

³ For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

How and where do you find joy and promise in today's verses?

MONDAY, APRIL 25

Isaiah 61:10

I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

How and where do you find joy and promise in today's verses?

TUESDAY, APRIL 26

John 3:16–17

¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.* ¹⁷ *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.*

How and where do you find joy and promise in today's verses?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27

Acts 4:11–12

¹¹ *Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”*

¹² *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*

How and where do you find joy and promise in today's verses?

THURSDAY, APRIL 28

Romans 5:6–8

⁶ *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

How and where do you find joy and promise in today's verses?

FRIDAY, APRIL 29

Romans 10:9–10

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

How and where do you find joy and promise in today's verses?

SATURDAY, APRIL 30

2 Corinthians 5:14–15

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.

How and where do you find joy and promise in today's verses?

REJOICE IN YOUR NEW LIFE

May 1 – May 7



In the weeks since Easter, we have focused on the Risen Savior and the Gift of Salvation. This week, we contemplate what it means to rejoice in the **new life** that we now have in Christ Jesus. In John 3, we read one of the most beautiful exchanges in all of Scripture between Jesus and Nicodemus, who came under cover of darkness, searching for answers. He came to Jesus with a seeker's heart and a longing in his soul. Jesus did not disappoint. He explained to Nicodemus that in order to see the Kingdom of God, we must be born of the Spirit—born again to a brand new life. As believers, we know what Jesus did FOR us—He died, was buried and raised from the dead, which wiped away our sins and gave us with the gift of salvation. But do we realize that we also participate in that process WITH Jesus? Just as the seed must die to bear fruit, so must we be willing to die to ourselves, so we might experience the new life that Christ has prepared for us.

We can get pretty caught up in the dying part, can't we? All the things that we have to let go of? Some of those things can be hard to release, because they are what we know and what we are comfortable with. A brand new life is a little scary. But God, in all of His love and goodness, asks to us to have the faith to look up, to look forward and to set our minds on the things that are eternal.

Even when we are ready to accept that new life, we often think of it as a new life yet to come. It is in fact a new life that is available to us right now. As we pray "Thy kingdom come..." we have the

assurance that we can experience God’s kingdom on this side of heaven. That doesn’t mean our circumstances will be suddenly easy or perfect. It means that we are invited deeper into the heart of God and His abundance. We can have unbroken fellowship with Him and we can experience the fullness of joy, right now, with the God-given strength and eternal perspective to live beyond our circumstances.

This week, let’s aspire to live as what we are—brand new people in Christ—and to see the brand new people of Christ in those we encounter. Jesus will not disappoint.

A prayer for this week: *Father, thank you for loving us and sending your only Son to sacrifice His life for our sins so that we might have a brand new life with You, both eternally AND right now on this side of Heaven. Help us live in a way that shows the world Your kingdom is here and now, and that all are welcome. Help us let go of what keeps us from being who you want us to be and embrace the thoughts and actions that will reflect You to the world. Amen.*

Ruth Bearden and her husband Rob have lived in Madison for 21 years and raised their four adult children, James, Emily, Clayton, and John David, here at First UMC.

SUNDAY, MAY 1

Ezekiel 36:26–27

²⁶ *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.* ²⁷ *And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

How does the promise of a new heart and spirit encourage you today?

MONDAY, MAY 2

Romans 6:3–4, 13

³ *Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* ⁴ *We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. . . .* ¹³ *Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness.*

How does Christ enable you to be an instrument of righteousness?

TUESDAY, MAY 3

Romans 12:1–2

¹ *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* ² *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.*

How can you allow God to transform and renew your mind?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4

2 Corinthians 5:17

*¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:
The old has gone, the new is here!*

How does being a new creation change the way you live your daily life?

THURSDAY, MAY 5

Colossians 3:1–2

*¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above,
not on earthly things.*

What does it mean to set your mind on things above?

FRIDAY, MAY 6

1 Peter 1:3–4

³ *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.*

How can you share this living hope with someone else today?

SATURDAY, MAY 7

1 Peter 3:15–16

¹⁵ *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

What is the reason for your hope?

REJOICE IN GOD'S WORD

May 8 – May 14



Rejoice in God's Word. I say again, rejoice. We have in our hands the inspired Word of God, a preservation of God's actions with mankind and for mankind and the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ.

As an atheist, Oxford professor C. S. Lewis, came to know God by reading the Bible. His intent was to disprove it. But he encountered God's Word recorded there. "In the beginning, was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

Jesus—the "Word" in John's gospel—is God's ultimate self-revelation. His life, death, and resurrection are revealed to anyone who opens and reads the Bible, God's holy Word.

Think of the joy and comfort of having the holy Scriptures to guide our lives. Not a textbook that gives us a list to be mastered, like learning our numbers and letters. It's bigger than that. It is the very Word of God, what God *wants* us to know. It inspires and instructs us.

Did you ever read a passage of Scripture—maybe in Sunday School or at home in devotion—and think: *Wow! I've read or heard that a hundred times, but I never understood it like that before.* It happens often because the Word of God is both straight forward and profound.

It's deep.

Think of it: for two thousand years, the one thing that the church could always count on was the Word of God—holy Scripture.

Fads and fashions and ideas and trends come and go. Teachers—and false prophets—come on the scene and pass away. Things change.

But the Word of God doesn't change; it "endures forever" (Isaiah 40:8). For much of this week we read from the same Scriptures that Jesus read: the Old Testament. Ponder the Shema of Deuteronomy; hear the psalmist praise the Word; then listen as Paul assures Timothy of how central is the Scripture to a life in God.

As the Body of Christ, we are people of the Word. The Word that was with God in the beginning, and the Word that comes to us as holy Scripture, for Scripture speaks to us through the ages.

If we would know God, look at Jesus. If we would know Jesus, look to the Scriptures. And pray for God's Holy Spirit to guide us as we read and learn from them. We rejoice in God's Word.

A prayer for this week: *Eternal God, empower us with your Holy Spirit to find in your Word what we need to know of your love, truth, and redemption in Jesus Christ as we celebrate Easter during these fifty days. Amen.*

Jim Killman is retired and lives on Lake Oconee. He and his wife, Lynn, have eight grandchildren and Waylon, the French bulldog.

SUNDAY, MAY 8

Deuteronomy 6:4–9

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Why is it important to impress the Word of God on your children?

MONDAY, MAY 9

Joshua 1:7–8

⁷ *“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

What do you think of as “obeying” God’s law?

TUESDAY, MAY 10

Psal m 19:7–9

⁷ *The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.*

How does the psalmist view God’s Word? How do you view it?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 11

Psal m 119:9–12, 105

⁹ *How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.* ¹⁰ *I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.*

¹¹ *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

¹² *Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees. . . .*

¹⁰⁵ *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*

How is the Word of God a lamp and a light to your daily path?

THURSDAY, MAY 12

Isaiah 55:10–11

¹⁰ *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,*

¹¹ *so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

What is God's Word accomplishing in your life?

FRIDAY, MAY 13

2 Timothy 3:16–17

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Are there parts of the Scripture that you struggle with?

SATURDAY, MAY 14

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

How is the Word of God alive and active in your life?

PROMISE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

May 15 – May 21



Have you ever felt utterly alone? Not just physically alone, but devastatingly and overwhelmingly spiritually alone? Have you ever felt so confused and frightened by your circumstances that all you could do was stand frozen in panic—unable to make the next move? Have you ever felt the parched darkness of grief or shame so painful that you felt you would never smile again? In those moments, God can feel very distant. You may find yourself questioning His promises—and even His existence. Life can buffet and toss your mind and spirit until they are so tattered and worn that even God's promises seem as fleeting and useless as dust. None of us are exempt from suffering—and sometimes we can feel as though God has deserted us and left us to die alone in the vast wasteland of our grief.

Dark? Heavy? You better believe it. But God never allows us to sink into the abyss of grief and hopelessness alone. The quiet strength of Jesus sits with us through the longest nights and hovers over us through the darkest days when the sun hides behind the black clouds of shame, regret, and anguish. In these moments, Jesus understands our flagging faith. God knows our doubts and insecurities. Heap your anger, questions, and cries upon our Heavenly Father. He implores us to cast every care onto Him. When we weep and throw ourselves upon the Solid Rock, Jesus counts it as JOY. God does not enjoy our suffering, but He knows when we surrender all of our struggles to Him, we drop the weight of trying to carry everything alone. He knows when we

admit helplessness against our grief, we receive His perfect love and reassurance. He knows when we beg Him for the strength to take one more breath or walk one more step, we draw near to Him and receive His peace and comfort. These are His faithful promises to us.

Sweet Child of God, rest assured that your Heavenly Father will never, ever leave you. His presence transcends every sadness, loss, and heartache you will ever experience. He is in the silence that comes when tears are spent. He is heavy in the air when you struggle to find the will to breathe. He is life eternal in the face of death. He is love in the face of darkness. He is our Solid Rock. He is our faithful, enduring, and eternal comfort. Emmanuel. God is with us.

A prayer for this week: *Dear Heavenly Father, lead me to seek you in all of life’s circumstances—the big and small, the profound and mundane, the joyous and wretched. Allow me to bask in your presence as it envelops me in holy peace. Grant me rest when I am soul weary and grief stricken. Help me remember that earthly trials fade to dust in the light of your glorious promises and eternal blessings. Amen.*

Courtney Thomas is New Member Connection Leader and serves on the Intercessory Prayer Team. She and her husband, Travis, have three daughters.

SUNDAY, MAY 15
Deuteronomy 31:8 & Joshua 1:9

Deuteronomy 31:8: The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Joshua 1:9: Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

When and how has God enabled you to “be strong and courageous”?

MONDAY, MAY 16

Psal m 46:1–3

¹ *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.* ² *Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,*
³ *though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

How do these verses remind you to surrender all of your cares to Him?

TUESDAY, MAY 17

Psal m 63:1–5

¹ *You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.* ² *I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.* ³ *Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.* ⁴ *I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.* ⁵ *I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

How does God's holy and perfect love nourish and satisfy your soul?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18

Isaiah 41:10–13

¹⁰ *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

¹¹ *“All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. ¹² Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all.*

¹³ *For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.*

How does God’s presence calm your fears? Give you strength?

THURSDAY, MAY 19

Isaiah 55:6–7

⁶ *Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on them, and to our God, for He will freely pardon.*

What urgency do you feel to “seek the Lord while He may be found”?

FRIDAY, MAY 20

Acts 17:24–25, 27–28

²⁴ *“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything. Rather, He Himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. . . . ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in Him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring.’*

How does it feel to know your very life and breath is in His hands?

SATURDAY, MAY 21

Romans 8:38–39

³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

What threatens to separate you from God? Trust Him to overcome it.

PROMISE OF PURPOSE

May 22 – May 28



John Coleman, author of "The HBR Guide to Crafting Your Purpose," says many employees "leave a job in haste only to find that they changed their external circumstances to solve an internal problem." Coleman contends people often leave their jobs without first doing the hard work to understand what would really give them greater meaning and happiness in their job. In other words, you must determine your purpose before you can find the right job.

Coleman's advice resonated with me. For many years I observed that other men had achieved greater financial success and better lifestyles. If I was to have what they had, I needed a new career. What followed was a futile and sometimes comical search for the ideal situation. (Ask Jamie about my vision for a furniture store.) It took many years before I did the hard work of determining what gave me greater meaning.

With the help of a good friend I began to seriously consider what it meant to be a Christian. That journey continues but I've come to a few conclusions. I've been purchased at a great and precious price. That means that I have great value. I don't need to base my self-esteem on the opinion of others—I'm a child of the King! The opinion of others is irrelevant. Additionally, my worth doesn't rest on what I think about myself. You've heard it said that it doesn't matter what others think about you, what counts is what you believe about yourself. Honestly, there are times that I don't think much of myself.

Indeed there are people who spend their entire lives putting themselves down. Your heart will lie to you every bit as much as your worst enemy. However, if I'm precious to God, then I'm precious. My value is based solely on what He says about me.

He knew me before the foundation of the world and He has a plan for my life. My choice is to live for Him or for myself. He promises that if I live for Him I will have an abundant life now and one day I will rule and reign with Him. That's a purpose filled life.

The only way to live a life of purpose is to obey Him. We can't obey if we don't know what He asks of us, and we can't know that unless we know His Word. Paul wrote that to know the Scripture is to know the mind of Christ. Living a life of purpose means living in the light of biblical truth. As stated above, the world and the heart will lie; therefore, there's nothing to gain by determining our purpose on our own. If we're to know joy and purpose, we must yield our will to His.

A prayer for this week: *Lord, continue to work in me and through me that I may become the person you would have me to be.*
John K. Miles, Jr. is a husband, father, Bible study teacher and businessman.

SUNDAY, MAY 22
Deuteronomy 10:12-13

¹² And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

If I applied this Scripture to my life, what would I have to change?

MONDAY, MAY 23

Jeremiah 29:11–13

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

If I applied this Scripture to my life, what would I have to change?

TUESDAY, MAY 24

Matthew 28:18–20

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

If I applied this Scripture to my life, what would I have to change?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25

Romans 8:28–29

²⁸ *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.* ²⁹ *For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

If I applied this Scripture to my life, what would I have to change?

THURSDAY, MAY 26

Ephesians 2:10 & Colossians 3:23–24

Ephesians 2:10: For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Colossians 3:23-24: Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

If I applied this Scripture to my life, what would I have to change?

FRIDAY, MAY 27

2 Timothy 1:6–9

⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. ⁸So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

If I applied this Scripture to my life, what would I have to change?

SATURDAY, MAY 28

1 Peter 4:8–10

⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

If I applied this Scripture to my life, what would I have to change?

PROMISE OF HEAVEN

May 29 – JUNE 4



I grew up in the country near a small Georgia town. My grandmother Kersey was one of eleven children, most of them settling within a small area near Jackson Lake. Our neighborhood was known affectionately as “Kersey-ville” because so many Kersey kinfolk lived there. My dad was raised by a widowed mother and her many siblings. His Aunts and Uncles all played an important role in his life, and a significant role in my early years, too. But as you can imagine, those elderly patriarchs and matriarchs of Kersey-ville began to pass away, including my beloved grandmother. I was very familiar with the local funeral home and visitation procedures from a very young age. The casket was always open. The pungent smell of funeral flowers was always heavy in the air. The same family members had gathered yet again to say goodbye to a loved one, telling stories and sharing memories of past times. The loss was always immense to the family. And it always broke my heart into tiny pieces. As a child I began to anticipate with excitement the funeral service at the church where I knew the pastor would tell about heaven and life everlasting. I wanted to hear the words about the promise of paradise and glory in heaven. About how death does not prevail, and that one day there would be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. I would imagine the scene when we would be all caught up together in the clouds on our way to our eternal Kersey-ville home in heaven. It was my comfort and my hope, as I was desperate to see these lost loved ones again.

Fortunately, I now know so much more about the Savior who made my childhood heavenly hope possible. I am now most excited about being able to see Jesus face to face and spend eternity with Him. I have read the Scriptures about the promise of paradise (Luke 23:43). I pause when I read in Scripture the words I heard a pastor speak so many years ago at my grandmother’s funeral. A promise that death does not prevail (1 Cor. 15:54). A promise that one day there will be no pain, no suffering, and no mourning (Rev. 21:4). The promise that a place has been prepared just for me by the One who knows me and loves me unconditionally (John 14:3). The Scriptures took this child’s desperate hope for a heavenly reunion to a blessed assurance of a Heavenly Promise.

A prayer for this week: Lord, I praise You for the promise of heaven. May the significance of Your sacrifice never be taken for granted. Help me to live each day as a witness to Your mercy and grace, and may I be worthy of Your eternal blessing.

Laree Zant has lived in Madison for 20 years with her husband, Dan, and their two children: Maclane (24) and Carolina (23).

SUNDAY, MAY 29

John 14:1–4

¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ²My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.”

How will this Scripture strengthen my relationship with Jesus?

MONDAY, MAY 30

1 Corinthians 15:50–54

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

How will this Scripture strengthen my relationship with Jesus?

TUESDAY, MAY 31

2 Corinthians 4:14–15

¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to Himself. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

How will this Scripture strengthen my relationship with Jesus?

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1

2 Corinthians 5:1, 8

¹ *For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*

⁸ *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

How will this Scripture strengthen my relationship with Jesus?

THURSDAY, JUNE 2

Philippians 3:20–21

²⁰ *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

How will this Scripture strengthen my relationship with Jesus?

FRIDAY, JUNE 3

1 Thessalonians 4:14–17

¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

How will this Scripture strengthen my relationship with Jesus?

SATURDAY, JUNE 4

Revelation 21:1–4

¹ Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"

How will this Scripture strengthen my relationship with Jesus?

PENTECOST SUNDAY, JUNE 5

Acts 2:1-4

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The Old Testament prophet Joel foretold a day when God would pour out His Spirit on men and women who would then speak and prophesy in His name (Joel 2:28-29). Jesus reiterated this promise when He told the disciples that He would ask God to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to teach them everything they would need to know to speak as His disciples (John 14:26). The Spirit of truth would guide them into all truth because He would only speak those truths which came straight from God (John 16:13). The Spirit would give them the words to say when they faced challenges and persecution (Matthew 10:19-20), and would even pray for them when they were too distraught to pray for themselves (Romans 8:26).

On the Day of Pentecost, these promises came true in an astounding and unmistakable way! God sent His Spirit to dwell within the hearts of all believers so they would have His constant presence and guidance in their lives. How blessed we are that God lives in us, never leaving us to face the challenges of this life without Him. Our challenge is training ourselves to listen intently for His still, small voice, and then responding with boldness to His leading. May we become like the child, Samuel, who learned to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10).

A prayer for today: Father, help us to recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives so we can walk more closely with You. Amen.

Roberta Watson serves as our Director of Education. She and her husband, Todd, joined Madison First eight years ago.

When have you felt the presence and encouragement of the Holy Spirit?

On Easter morning, as the sun breaks above the horizon casting brilliant light and warmth over the earth, Christians from every nation, tribe, and tongue gather in groups large and small around the world to celebrate Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead. Just as the sun gives life to the physical world, even more so, the Son of God gives abundant and everlasting life to those who trust in Him. Over the fifty days of the Eastertide season, these readings from the Old and New Testament Scriptures encourage us to rejoice in our risen Savior, in our salvation and new life in Christ, and in His Word. Through these verses, we learn to trust in the promise of God's presence in our lives while we live out His purpose for us, anxiously awaiting the day when we join Him in heaven. May we be drawn ever closer to the Savior who gave His life for us and the God who loves us more than we can ever imagine.

