

WEEK 1

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18 - SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18TH

Lent: Called to Obedience by Grace

MAISA OLIVEIRA

"And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" (Luke 9:23)

Lent is a meaningful season for reflection and preparation for Easter. It is not a requirement or a way to gain God's favor. Instead, it is an intentional period to recall Christ's call and to renew our commitment to Him. We are called only by God's grace. This calling naturally leads us to obedience, not as a condition for salvation, but as a consequence of it. Just as Jesus taught, denying ourselves and taking up the cross is not just an action for forty days, but a daily attitude that influences our entire life.

This Lenten season also offers an excellent opportunity for reflection as a break amid our busy lives. Our culture tends to be emotionally driven, encouraging us to pursue quick pleasures, which can lead to a more superficial faith. In such an environment, practicing obedience involves gently resisting the temptation of the "shortcut," personal rewards, and shallow religiosity. This gentle resistance helps us cultivate a deeper and more genuine spiritual journey.

"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22)

Lent is choosing to live before God with honesty, even when it goes against what everyone else does. During Lent, practices like fasting, prayer, and Bible reading can be rediscovered in the light of grace. They are not sacrifices to compensate for sins but disciplines that help us remember who we are in Christ. By surrendering sinful desires, we are prompted to examine our hearts and recognize everything related to the central role of Christ in our lives. Thus, Lent is a constant invitation to repentance, to renewal of the calling, and to joyful obedience. We do not walk toward Easter trusting in our practices, but in Christ's completed work, which calls us to follow Him with faith, gratitude, and fidelity each day.

Prayer: Lord, we are grateful because Your love has reached us and called us through Your grace. During this Lenten season, help us learn to live in obedience and sincerely surrender to Your sovereign will. May our lives reflect the essence of Christ in our homes and in our community. In the gracious and precious name of Jesus, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - MAISA OLIVEIRA



Lay Pastor and Worship Leader of New Life Brazilian Church, Plano TX. Married with Toninho Oliveira. I am a someone who really loves music, good food, and to always be around people.

A Posture of Surrender

J O S H A V I L A

“Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38, NRSV).

This memorable interaction between Mary and the angel (Luke 1:26–38) is usually associated with the Advent season rather than Lent, yet in that moment Mary embodied the very essence of Lent in her response to God’s call—faithful surrender. The call of God, like many biblical themes, carries layers of meaning that range from conversion to consecration to commission; sometimes, as in the case of Paul, it holds all three at once. God’s call also comes in many forms. For some, it is impressed upon them through providential circumstances that leave little room for preference, as with Jonah. Others experience something more like Mary’s encounter—a vision, a dream, or an unexpected spiritual event that overwhelms them, as with Isaiah. For still others, it is a quiet yet persistent longing for Jesus and his kingdom, as with Nicodemus.

Whatever form it takes, our response is meant to assume the same posture: one of humble embrace. God-glorifying reflection, repentance, and renewal are not possible without vulnerable receptivity to God’s revelation; obedience requires openness. Where do you sense the Lord’s call today? Is it to fan the flame of faith, to deepen dependence, or to surrender sacrificially? As we ponder Jesus’ road to the cross, let us take a moment to quietly receive—or release—whatever God asks, emulating Mary’s posture of surrender to the gospel’s many calls: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38, NRSV).

A Prayer of Surrender

Lord, today I come with unresolved emotions—anxiety, pain, loss, shame, whatever feelings accompany my obvious unworthiness. Still, “my soul clings to you, because your right hand upholds me” (Psalm 63:8). Through the tenderness of your Son, I hear you calling to me, and by your comforting Spirit I am drawn toward practicing humble embrace. Here am I, Lord. Let it be with me according to your word. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - JOSH AVILA



Hello! My name is Josh Avila and I am a rowdy Cuban-American that met the radical love of God in the gospel of grace. My journey of faith has included marrying my beautiful and delightful best friend, Daniela, and having two rambunctious daughters, whose silliness reminds me that Jesus is fun. I’ve also had the privilege of attending, and graduating, the Flourish Institute of Theology along with receiving my first call as an ECO pastor. For better or worse, I currently enjoy serving as the Assistant Pastor at Indian River Presbyterian Church. Pray for them!

Knowing When We Are Called

C H R I S D I V I E T R O

Pray: Liturgy for the Ritual of Morning Coffee, by Doug McKelvey

Read: Psalm 126

Israel was a people who—at times—knew when they were. As Psalm 126 opens, Israel is in a present season of hardship but looks backward on an occasion of God's deliverance. In so doing, Israel is buoyed as they anticipate God's future and forthcoming deliverance. This is a familiar rhythm in the Psalms: Israel looks back on God's past deliverance for present confidence in God's future provision.

Knowing when we are matters, because calling is often less about where (Where am I called from? Where am I called to?) or what (What am I called to do?) and more about when: When am I?

Parker Palmer invites us to listen to ourselves, to hear how God has already been at work. Calling, then, can be considered a synthesis—a culmination of all that God has done in past seasons to prepare us for future seasons. In this way, calling seems to flow from our relationship with our past, our present, and our future, and listening to ourselves means grappling with when we are.

What is your relationship with your past? How do you discern the movement of God in your past - in your hurts and wounds? How have you noticed, with Joseph, that what some meant for evil God actually meant for good? Søren Kierkegaard says that life is understood backward but can only be lived forward. When you look back, what do you notice? Where can you, with the gift of hindsight, see God moving?

What is your relationship with your present? How present are you to King Jesus, to yourself, to those around you? John Calvin says that knowledge of God and knowledge of self are inextricably intertwined. How much attention do you give to Jesus, who is always attentive to you? How purposefully and willingly are you with God, who is always already with you?

What is your relationship with your future? What, or who, inspires your confidence for the future? We read in 1 John 5:4–5 that our faith in Jesus is our means of victory; our future is guaranteed by another. When you think about your future, who or what fills you with hopefulness?

Psalm 126 closes with the honest and frustrating recognition that tomorrow's joy is often made possible by today's tears. Israel knows this because, at times, they knew when they were. How is God calling you? Well, when are you?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - CHRIS DIVIETRO



Chris was the Pastor/Head of Staff of Park Road Presbyterian Church between 2017 and 2025 and has a PhD in Organizational Leadership from Johnson University. Chris is married to his best friend Liz, enjoys indoctrinating his kids into Philadelphia sports fandom, and is motivated by adventure, curiosity, discovery, & novelty. He currently serves as the President of the Flourish Institute of Theology: School of Ministry.

From “Should” to “Want” to “Can”

R E V . P A U L Z A Z Z O

Ezekiel 36:26–27 “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you...and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

There is a world of difference between should, want, and can. “Should” is where many people get stuck. It’s the language of guilt, striving and even fear. When we experience the freedom of forgiveness by faith in Christ, gratitude becomes our new motivation for obedience, but the “should” can still linger. We say we should love, forgive, serve, and obey because we’ve been forgiven. But should alone is fragile and sooner or later it fails.

In Christ, however, our desires are made new because we have a new nature and a new heart that actually longs for holiness. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, God doesn’t just pardon our sins, He makes us new and plants new desires within us. Through the cross we have forgiveness (justification), but in the resurrection we have new life (regeneration) & a new inclination to “follow His decrees & keep His laws.”

It’s not just a transaction resulting in a new position, but a transformation resulting in a new condition. As Ezekiel prophesied, God replaces our heart of stone with a heart of flesh, soft and responsive to His Spirit. “Want” is the voice of that new heart - a longing that flows from our new condition. But there’s even more. Because God puts His own Spirit within us, we move from “should” and “want” to “can.” The Holy Spirit gives us power to do what we could never do on our own. We don’t just have a new inclination, we have a new ability.

I once met Jack Nicklaus, the greatest golfer of all time. He gave me a quick lesson, and I thought, “Now I’ll finally be good!” But when I got back to the range, nothing changed. I didn’t need coaching - I needed his swing. If Jack could somehow live inside me and actually swing the club for me, then I’d be able play like him. That’s regeneration: Christ in us, living His life through ours. When we yield and abide, His Spirit produces fruit that we could never grow alone.

The Atacama Desert in Chile, one of the driest places on earth, looks barren, just dust and rock. Yet beneath the surface lie dormant seeds. When the rare rain comes, the desert bursts into breathtaking color. That’s what happens when the Holy Spirit waters the seeds of our new heart. The “should” of duty becomes the “want” of desire and the “can” of empowered obedience. It is still hard and messy, but as we abide in Him and yield to His Spirit, we experience the truth that “He who calls you is faithful, and HE will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24)!”



Lent reminds us that while we are dust, God breathes life into that dust again and where His Spirit flows, the desert blooms.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for making me new. I long for holiness, but apart from you I can do nothing. Empower me by Your Holy Spirit to obey and follow you in all you call me to do this day. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - REV. PAUL ZAZZO



Rev. Paul Zazzo is the Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Mount Holly, NJ. He and his wife Samantha have two college age children, Alexandra who attends Taylor University in Indiana and Paul who attends Baylor University in Texas.