



CONNECTIONAL MINISTRIES

UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Week 1 Lent

Scripture: John 10:7-11

Description: Called to Abundant Life

No one is perfect. We all live in a broken world and, like sheep, we have gone astray. Thankfully, the story doesn't end there. We were made for something better - the abundant life made possible in Jesus, the good shepherd who shows us the path to the life we are called to live.

Opening Prayer

Amazing God, we come before you and long to know you better. Help us to see the ways you call us and live into being the person you have created us to be. Imprint your message of love on our hearts, so that all we do in your name is a witness to your grace. Amen.

Quote "The abundance of our lives is not determined by how long we live, but how well we live. Christ makes abundant life possible if we choose to live it now." Barbara Brown Taylor

Breaking the Ice:

- What kind of animal reflects your personality? Why?
- What do you know about sheep? Do you have any traits in common?

Wrestling with the Word

Read John 10:7-11

- What is the importance of the statement, "Very truly I tell you"?
- Why is it significant that Jesus is both the gate and the shepherd? What are the characteristics of each of these?
- What does Jesus teach about the life he gives?

Next Steps

- The shepherd goes before the sheep, how might that be significant for you?
- Why is it significant that he leads them and does not drive them?
- One of the things that Jesus emphasizes about the shepherd/sheep is their relationship. What are some ways that we can deepen our relationship with Jesus? How might this lead to abundant life?

Prayer for the Week

Jesus, thank you for your loving care. Teach us to hear your voice and follow your lead, to lean on you and not our own understanding. Help us to care for others as you care for us. Amen.



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Week 2 Lent

Scripture: 1 John 1:3-10

Description: Facing the Dark to Reach the Light

To find true healing, we have to face the hard truths. Part of the healing process is realizing that something is broken. This brokenness is the darkness that overshadows our lives. The good news is, there's freedom in the light.

Opening Prayer

Amazing God, we come before you and long to know you better. Help us to see the ways you call us and live into being the person you have created us to be. Imprint your message of love on our hearts, so that all we do in your name is a witness to your grace. Amen.

Quote

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Martin Luther King Jr

Breaking the Ice:

- What was the biggest lie you ever told as a kid?
- If you had this week over again what one thing would you do differently?

Wrestling with the Word

Read: 1 John 1:3-10.

- Why does it matter that John heard and saw Jesus for himself?
- How is it possible for us to deceive ourselves?
- What is the purpose of light? What does a person's life look like when they are living in the light?

Next Steps:

- In what circumstances would we turn to this text for help?
- How do we have fellowship with Christ? How can we have better fellowship with Christ?
- Why is it difficult for us to face the hard truths?
- A first step to changing our lives is to admit our sin. With whom will you share and why?
- What grace is being offered in this passage?
- What support system or tool will help you to live differently?

Prayer for the Week

Lord, your great light shines brightly in the darkness of this world. Help us to go forth from this place not only following your light but being a reflection of your light in this world. Amen.



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Week 3 Lent

Scripture: John 8:1-11

Description: You Are Not Your Sin

Sometimes we feel like what we have done is who we are. When we mess up, fall short, do the wrong things, it is not who we are. We are not defined by what we've done. We are the children of a loving and forgiving God.

Opening Prayer

Amazing God, we come before you and long to know you better. Help us to see the ways you call us and live into being the person you have created us to be. Imprint your message of love on our hearts, so that all we do in your name is a witness to your grace. Amen.

Quote "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." C.S. Lewis

Breaking the Ice:

- What group did you hang out with in high school?
- Have you ever tried to change a bad habit through willpower alone? What happened?

Wrestling with the Word:

Read John 8:1-11.

- What jumps out at you in this passage?
- Why do you think it's so natural for people to assume that God is quick to judge and condemn them?
- How has religion affected this woman?
- If you imagine Jesus standing in front of you, what would he write in the dust for you?

Next Steps:

- What are all your role labels, such as parent, spouse, etc.?
- What other labels have you given yourself? Why?
- How should knowing Jesus change the way you see yourself?
- How should knowing Jesus change the way you see others?

Prayer for the Week:

Holy God, we confess that we do not spend as much time as we should in relationship with you. Forgive us for the places where we allow the busyness and the business of our lives overshadow our time with you. We thank you, Holy One, for loving us even when we do not know how to fully love you. In the name of Jesus the Christ, Amen.



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Week 4 Lent

Scripture: Philippians 3:12-16.

Description: There is More

When life gets challenging, we have a choice to either fall back into the sin that is so enticing and easy for us, or to persevere and trust that when we follow Christ, we will live into even more than we have ever imagined.

Opening Prayer

Amazing God, we come before you and long to know you better. Help us to see the ways you call us and live into being the person you have created us to be. Imprint your message of love on our hearts, so that all we do in your name is a witness to your grace. Amen.

Quote “In the absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia.” Author Unknown

Breaking the Ice:

What’s your guilty pleasure? What is your “bad habit” or the thing that you tend to revert to when things get overwhelming?

Wrestling With The Word

Read Philippians 3:12-16

- What was Paul’s goal, what was he pressing towards? What does it mean to have a goal? Do you have goals in your life that you’re reaching towards? What do the steps along the way of that goal look like? What’s the hardest thing about striving toward your goal?
- Our Philippians passage this week talks to us about holding fast to what we have already attained, what have you attained during this time that you are holding fast to as you press forward toward the heavenly call of God?

Next Steps:

- Lent is often a time of self-denial in order to grow closer with Jesus. We are just over the halfway point now- what have you learned? What have you seen? Have you indeed grown closer? Or has something new been revealed to you during this time?
- What are some things that you can do during this season of Lent to help strengthen yourself in the midst of the overwhelming parts of life? How can we do this journey together? Set intentions for the rest of the season, they may look something like this:
 - I intend to spend 15 minutes a day in quiet meditation with God.Then, once your intentions have been set- ask yourself why these are the things that you intend to do, it may look something like this:
 - I intend to spend 15 minutes a day in quiet meditation with God so that I learn to quiet myself and listen for God’s Revelation.

Prayer for the Week:

Gracious God, you extend yourself to us every day in countless ways. Help us to focus on you, and who you are, and who we are in you. In the moments when we are inclined to fall backwards on our path, send your Spirit to remind us to have faith, to trust in you. Help us to retreat into you, rooting ourselves in your grace and in your love. In the name of Jesus the Christ, Amen.



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Week 5 Lent

Scripture: Exodus 32:1-14

Description: The Gods We Make

Sometimes we allow things in our lives to become more important to us than God, distract us from God, and even come between us and God. These are the gods we make.

Opening Prayer

Amazing God, we come before you and long to know you better. Help us to see the ways you call us and live into being the person you have created us to be. Imprint your message of love on our hearts, so that all we do in your name is a witness to your grace. Amen.

Quote “You can always find a distraction if you’re looking for one.” Tom Kite

Breaking the Ice:

- What is your most valuable physical possession?
- Did you ever get caught up in a group activity that you would have never started on your own?

Wrestling with the Word

Read Exodus 32:1-14

- What belief drives the people of Israel to make an idol?
- What did the building of the golden calf show about the heart of the people?
- How can you contrast the leadership of Arron vs Moses?
- How does Moses appeal to the Lord on Israel’s behalf?

Next Steps

- How might the Israelite’s actions mirror our own interactions with God? In what ways might we have diminished God, put God in a box, or made God in our own image?
- In what ways have you blamed others for our wrongdoings?
- What does this show about their relationship to God? How about us? When will our true character come out?
- What can we learn from Moses prayer and attitude?
- How is God calling you to sacrifice for others?

Prayer for the Week

Amazing God, we come before you and long to know you better. Help us to see the ways you call us and live into being the person you have created us to be. Imprint your message of love on our hearts, so that all we do in your name is a witness to your grace. Amen.



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Week Six Lent

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11, 27:15-23

Description: Fix Our Eyes

Being part of a crowd can be a powerful experience. The crowds in Jerusalem moved from the joy of Palm Sunday's "Hosannas" to the jeers of Good Friday's "Crucify Him!" On this Palm and Passion Sunday, let's explore how we too can get caught up in the crowd, and ways that we can fix our eyes on Jesus.

Opening Prayer

Amazing God, we come before you and long to know you better. Help us to see the ways you call us and live into being the person you have created us to be. Imprint your message of love on our hearts, so that all we do in your name is a witness to your grace. Amen.

Quote "Remember finally, that the ashes that were on your forehead are created from the burnt palms of last Palm Sunday. New beginnings invariably come from old false things that are allowed to die."

Richard Rohr

Breaking the Ice:

- What's the last parade you saw? Do you like parades?

Wrestling with the Word

Read Matthew 21:1-11, 27:15-23

- Jesus's entry into Jerusalem is a celebration.
- When have you participated in a joyful crowd?
- How did you feel being swept up in that energy?
- This crowd chooses Barabbas, the person likely to practice and encourage violence against others. When have you chosen to follow the wrong person? Why?
- Have you ever felt pressured to say or do things you don't think you would otherwise say because you were part of a crowd?

Next Steps

- We choose other things over Jesus all the time. When has something else been more important to you, or more desirable than following Jesus?
- Pilate chose to release Barabbas because the crowd shouted for it. The power of crowds and groupthink influence us too. How can we resist following the crowd?
- How does following Jesus require us to focus on long-term outcomes rather than short-term consequences?

Prayer for the Week

Lord, we come to prepare for the holiest of weeks. We will journey to follow you, we will sing your praises "Hosanna, Hosanna". But all too soon we will join the crowds with shouts to crucify you. Forgive us for our weakness. Remind us of your mercy and love. Empower us to go into this world full of goodness and grace, so that all may know love. Amen.