

**RUTH HALEY BARTON,
SHEILA WISE ROWE,
TISH HARRISON WARREN,
TERRY M. WILDMAN, AND OTHERS**

**A JUST
PASSION**



**A SIX-WEEK
LENTEN
JOURNEY**



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Tish Harrison Warren, Terry M. Wildman, and others.

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ASH WEDNESDAY

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HOLD ON TO WHAT'S REAL

TISH HARRISON WARREN, *PRAYER IN THE NIGHT*

*All go to one place; all are from the dust,
and all turn to dust again.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:20

Each year, I need the reality of death proclaimed over me and over my children. I need my church community to remind me of my mortality. I can be tempted to skip too quickly to the resurrection, to skim over the sad stuff, but the liturgical calendar requires me to pause and notice the unresolved chord of our present reality.

At my very first Ash Wednesday service, over a decade ago, I knelt in a quiet sanctuary and was surprised by a feeling of almost irrepressible rage. As the priest marked each forehead with a cross of ashes, I felt like he was marking us for death. I was angry at death. I was angry at the priest as if it was somehow his doing.

I don't want to face the reality of vulnerability—especially the vulnerability of those I love. I'm privileged and healthy enough to maintain the illusion of control. I distract myself from the howling fury of suffering and mortality. I check

Facebook. I tweet. I immerse myself in the current political controversy. I get busy. I fill up my life with a thousand other things to avoid noticing the shadow of death.

But I can't shake it. I bump up against it in big and small ways each day. Sleep, sickness, weariness, and nighttime itself are ordinary and unbidden ashes on our foreheads. They say to us: remember that you are going to die. And these daily tokens of mortality are then transformed, by God's mercy, into tools for good works.

When I became a priest, I was suddenly the one marking others with a memento of their death each Lent. In some ways, I love serving as a priest on Ash Wednesday. It is utterly counter-cultural. Into our shiny, privileged American optimism the ancient church speaks. She forces us to face hard facts. Amid the temptation to a trite denial of mortality, I stand before the church with an unavoidable truth: "Don't forget," I say, "we are dust. You and I and everyone we know will die. The stuff we live for is fleeting. Hold on to what's real."



Tish Harrison Warren is a weekly contributing newsletter writer for the *New York Times* and writes a monthly column for *Christianity Today*. She is a writer-in-residence at Resurrection South Austin, a priest in the Anglican Church in North America, and a senior fellow with The Trinity Forum.

THURSDAY

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AGENCY FOR CHANGE

ESAU McCAULLEY, READING WHILE BLACK

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

LUKE 4:18-19

This theme of God's value of the undervalued, highlighted by Jesus, runs right through the New Testament. Paul speaks about it when he says, "God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:28). (It is important to note that these people are not actually lowly or despised by God, but rather society doesn't value them.) James argues much the same in his letter when he says, "Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?" (James 2:5).

It is important to point out that the "gospel" preached here and elsewhere does more than affirm the value of the poor.

Jesus seems them as moral agents capable of repentance. Stated differently, it is often stated that “good news” for the poor is bread or a job or political freedom. That is true insofar as it goes. But Jesus also cared about the *spiritual lives* of the poor. He saw them as bodies and souls. His call to repent acknowledges the fact that their poverty doesn’t remove their agency. The poor are capable of sin and repentance. Repentance means that even if they remain poor, they can do so as different people. The enslaved recognized this. We see this on page after page of their testimony. Yes, they longed for actual freedom (no excessive spiritualization here) but they also rejoiced in the change wrought in their lives by the advent of God.

Jesus’ ministry and the kingdom that he embodies involves nothing less than the creation of a new world in which the marginalized are healed spiritually, economically, and psychologically. The wealthy, inasmuch as they participate in and adopt the values of a society that dehumanizes people, find themselves opposing the reign of God. This dehumanization can take two forms. First, it can treat the poor as mere bodies that need food and not the transforming love of God. Second, it can view them as souls whose experience of the here and now should not trouble us. This is false religion that has little to do with Jesus.



Esau McCaulley is associate professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and a contributing opinion writer for the *New York Times*. He is also the author of *Sharing in the Son’s Inheritance* and the children’s book *Josey Johnson’s Hair and the Holy Spirit*.

FRIDAY

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PRAYER AND HEALING

SHEILA WISE ROWE, YOUNG, GIFTED, AND BLACK

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 NIV

The journey of healing from experiences of injustice is an intensely emotional process that cannot be rushed or ignored. It doesn't occur in an orderly way with fixed steps. No two people will heal precisely the same. Increasingly, we become aware of the emotional baggage from the past, and we seek to offload it so we can freely move forward. Famed Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe wrote in "The Art of Fiction No. 139" for *The Paris Review*, "If you don't like someone's story, write your own." I believe this is a call to uncover and recover from the words and wounds written on our hearts, minds, and bodies by someone else.

Prayer is a two-way communication where we have the assurance that God hears us and wants to answer the most resounding cries of our hearts. As we learn to listen for God's voice and distinguish it from other voices, know that God

PRAYER AND HEALING

always speaks to us from a place of love and with compassion and mercy. Even when asking us to face difficult truths about ourselves or a situation, God's messages always lead to clarity, release, and relief. If you hear a message that is mean-spirited or demoralizing, it isn't God speaking.

Although Jesus states, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. . . . They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. . . . My sheep listen to my voice" (John 10:14-16, 27 NIV), some of us question if we can hear from God. The Lord is constantly speaking to us, and he is willing and able to communicate in many ways. The Holy Spirit will bring us into all truth, whether it's through the Word, a still small voice, prayer, a situation, a person, pictures, or a gut-level hunch. Our part is to make the time and place to get quiet enough to pray and listen and remain open to his voice as we go about our day.

Jesus always welcomes us. He is the firm foundation where we can stand secure.



Sheila Wise Rowe holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and has ministered to abuse and trauma survivors in the United States and Johannesburg, South Africa. She is the cofounder of The Cyrene Movement and a writer, counselor, speaker, and spiritual director in the Boston area.

SATURDAY

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SABBATH ECONOMY

**RUTH HALEY BARTON, EMBRACING RHYTHMS
OF WORK AND REST**

Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock.

DEUTERONOMY 5:13-14

One day a week we practice trusting in God as our ultimate strength and provider rather than putting all our faith in what we can secure for ourselves through our 24-7 striving. We practice humility and dependence on God as we settle into the limits of our humanity and rest one day a week. Remembering how we used to live and how God has freed us from our bondage leads quite naturally to delight and devotion as we determine once again that we will not get sucked back into a life of non-freedom. Sabbath is first and foremost about the freedom to live our lives on God's terms for us rather than living in bondage to anyone, anything, or any culture. It is about the God who is free to cease laboring and to rest, marking out a path for us to live in freedom as well.

And sabbath is not just for the privileged few. The passage from Deuteronomy reflects the fact that in its original context,

sabbath was intended to be the great equalizer, ensuring that all God's creatures—including the animals!—would receive the benefits of this life-enhancing pattern.

One concern we might have about sabbath-keeping is that it smacks of privilege, an impossibility for those living in poverty, working multiple jobs, or perhaps “hustling” low-paying jobs to make ends meet. It is important to realize that this is an issue created by our current culture, not one created by the practice itself as God gave it.

Norman Wirzba, a professor at Duke Divinity school who pursues research and teaching at the intersections of theology, philosophy, ecology, agrarian, and environmental studies, goes even farther. In *Living the Sabbath* he articulates the idea of a *sabbath economy* in the spirit of our God who executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets prisoners free, and lifts up the bowed down (Psalm 146:7-9). Wirzba defines a sabbath economy as one that will have “the *equitable distribution of resources* as a foremost goal.”

We might not know exactly how to bring about this kind of equality in our current culture, but that does not change the fact that in God's economy sabbath is the great equalizer—the great leveler—and it is our job to figure out how to make it so today. A faithful sabbath practice actually calls us to it.



Ruth Haley Barton is founder of the Transforming Center, a ministry dedicated to strengthening the souls of pastors and Christian leaders, and the congregations and organizations they serve. Her books include *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, *Pursuing God's Will Together*, and *Invitation to Retreat*.

WEEK ONE, MONDAY

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FAILURE AND FORGIVENESS

DOMINIQUE DuBOIS GILLIARD,
RETHINKING INCARCERATION

*Help us, O God of our salvation,
for the glory of your name;
deliver us, and forgive our sins,
for your name's sake.*

PSALM 79:9

Biblically, justice is a divine act of reparation where breached relationships are renewed and victims, offenders, and communities are restored. Justice, therefore, is about relationships and our conduct within them. Justice asks, How is righteousness embodied and exuded in how I live in relation to God, neighbor, and creation? In fact, Scripture could be read as the narrative of God's restorative justice unfolding in the world.

Biblical justice is established and worked out within the confines of relationship. The relational working out of justice is righteousness. This is why Scripture calls us to pursue right(eous) relationships with God, neighbor, and creation, and through our realigned relationship with God, in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we "become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV).

While most people think about God’s holiness, private morality, or spiritual prudence when they see the word *righteousness*, scripturally *righteousness* is most commonly used to define those who conduct themselves uprightly in all of their relationships. A righteous person treats all people—whether rich, poor, or condemned—with justice, generosity, and equity (Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice*). The two ancient words translated as “righteousness” in Scripture, *tsedeq* (Hebrew) and *dikaosynē* (Greek), are used to define someone who has “lived uprightly and behaved justly before God and their neighbor” (Theopedia).

The liturgical prayer for God’s forgiveness that we pray before Communion includes both the things we have done and the things we have left undone. Inaction, silence, and indifference are also relational failures. They breed injustice, oppression, and death.



Dominique DuBois Gilliard is the director of racial righteousness and reconciliation for the Love Mercy Do Justice initiative of the Evangelical Covenant Church. An ordained minister, he previously served in pastoral ministry in Oakland, Chicago, and Atlanta. He serves on the board of directors for the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) and Evangelicals for Justice.

WEEK ONE, TUESDAY

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TESTED BY THE EVIL TRICKSTER

²For forty days and nights Creator Sets Free (Jesus) ate nothing. *His body became weak, and his hunger grew strong.*

³*When the evil snake saw that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) was weak and hungry, he came to him and whispered in his ear.*

“Are you the Son of the Great Spirit?” he hissed. “Prove it by turning these stones into frybread.”

⁴“The Sacred Teachings are clear,” Creator Sets Free (Jesus) said. “Human beings cannot live only on frybread, but on all the words that come from the mouth of the Great Spirit.”^a

⁵The evil trickster then took him to the Great Spirit’s sacred lodge in Village of Peace (Jerusalem). He set him at the very top, *high above the village.*

⁶“Prove you are the Son of the Great Spirit and jump down from here!” the evil snake taunted him. “Do not the Sacred Teachings also say, ‘His spirit-messengers will watch over you to keep you from harm. They will even keep your foot from hitting a stone’^b?”

⁷“Yes,” Creator Sets Free (Jesus) said back to him, “but they also say, ‘Do not test the Great Spirit.’^c”

⁸Once more the evil trickster took him to a high mountain and showed him all the great nations of the world with their power and beauty.

TESTED BY THE EVIL TRICKSTER

⁹“All of these I will give you,” the snake said *smoothly*, “if you will highly honor me and walk in my ways!”

¹⁰“Get away from me, Accuser (Satan)!” he responded. “For it is written in the Sacred Teachings, ‘The Great Spirit is the only one to honor and serve.’^d”

MATTHEW 4:2-10 FNV



Terry M. Wildman is the lead translator, general editor, and project manager of the *First Nations Version*. He is the founder of Rain Ministries and serves as the director of spiritual growth and leadership development for Native InterVarsity. He and his wife, Darlene, live in Arizona.

WEEK ONE, WEDNESDAY

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BREATH PRAYER

BREATHE IN

*Blessed are those
who hunger.*



BREATHE OUT

They will be filled.