

Lenten Challenge

What am I being challenged to *give up or stop doing* in order to grow in my relationship with God?

What am I being challenged to *start doing or practicing* in order to grow in my relationship with God?

Who will I ask to hold me accountable for these 40 days?

Prayer Concerns

THURSDAY 04.04.19 [Luke 15](#) (focused on 15:4-10)

This is one of the stories in Jesus' set of this-is-why-we're-having-a-party stories. But, like most of Jesus' stories, this one connects with what goes on in people's heads when they respond to him. So many of us secretly assume that there must be something special about his person, or that one, that makes Jesus go looking for them. Others, with low self-esteem, always assume that it's the other people who are the special ones, and that they're somewhere in the back of the flock, unnoticed and unimportant. But the point is that every single sheep is important to the shepherd, and when any one of them gets into difficulties he is especially concerned for them. That is the truth that's so hard to learn, both for those with self-confidence and for those without it. By welcoming Jesus, we are inviting him to do in our moral and spiritual lives what he did for so many people physically.

• *Lord, help us to celebrate your welcoming love, and to be transformed by it.*

FRIDAY 04.05.19 [Luke 16](#) (focused on 16:1-12)

Jesus' first hearers of this story would have understood that a story about a landowner and his steward, or manager, was almost certainly a story about God and Israel. And, granted what Jesus had been saying about needing to sit loose to the traditional Jewish attachments to family and land, this would make a whole lot of sense. The nation of Israel, *as a nation*, is going to find that God's purpose is moving ahead in a new direction, as always intended; but if they have been faithless to that overall intention, as Jesus is constantly warning that they have been, then they cannot presume that they will be God's 'steward' for ever and ever. This story also illustrates the murky world you get into when you start playing around with money and property. Do one shady deal and others will follow as a way of hushing things up, and before you know what's happened, you're in over your head and can't get out. That's the point at which, after the parable, Jesus turns to serious warnings. These are things we need to take very, very seriously. But how? Jesus has some questions for every generation, for each of his followers; questions about priorities, about people poorer than you. How are you going to listen to those questions, and answer them truthfully?

• Take a walk (in your imagination) to your bank. Take Jesus with you. Chat to him, on the way, about how much money comes in, how big your overdraft is, which loans you hope to pay off, and all that. Then, when you get to the bank, sit down in a private room with your manager, with Jesus beside you. Get the full bank statements from last year. Talk through them with Jesus. Are there points you're tempted to gloss over, or bits you wish had been deleted in advance?

• *Lord Jesus, make me faithful in little things and great things, so that I may be faithful to your gift to me also.*

SATURDAY 04.06.19 [John 12:1-8](#)

As we approach Passion Sunday, we switch to John's gospel to help us get your hearts and minds ready for the tumultuous, awe-inspiring events that are about to unfold. John describes the intimate scene when Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet with a very expensive perfume, and wipes them with her hair. Judas, watching this scene, is more than a little annoyed. His impatience grows the closer they get to Jerusalem because if God is ever going to act to free his people then Passover would be the obvious time to do it... so why is Jesus allowing this woman to waste perfume so good that it must have cost a year's wages? Doesn't she know there are poor people around here who could live on that money? Doesn't she realize we're all poor anyway and some of us could use a bit of a bonus after all we've been through? And you suddenly realize, as you watch this scene from Judas' point of view, that Mary has seen something that Judas hasn't. And learning to see *that* is what living with Jesus and his story is all about.

• *Lord, help me to be humble enough to see what you are seeing, even when all my instincts are telling me the opposite. Help me, particularly, to understand what your death was all about.*