

**GOD'S GRACE IS ALWAYS
GOING**

A LENTEN STUDY GUIDE

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**A LENTEN STUDY GUIDE WRITTEN BY
JAMES MADSEN, EMILY HAMILTON,
AND SERGE STAFF**

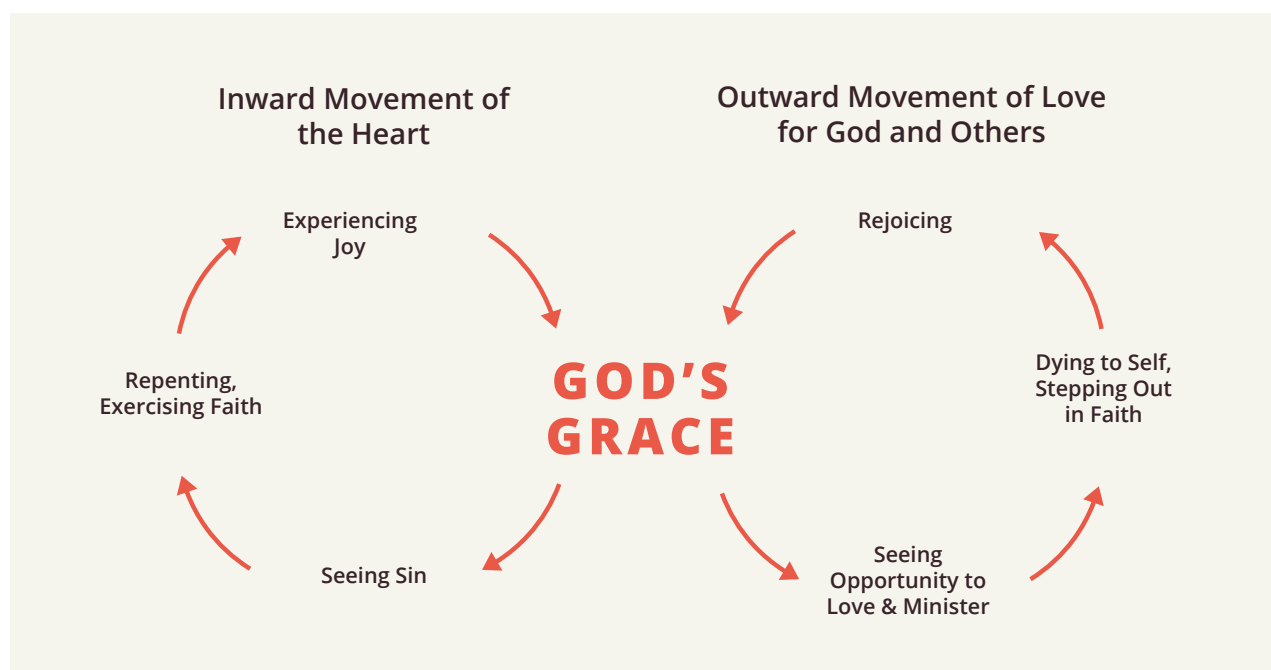
Serge Grace at the Fray

In many Christian traditions, Lent is a time of solemnity, of preparation for journeying with Jesus toward the cross. Many Christians think of Lent as a time of fasting—of “giving up” something like chocolate, alcohol, social media, or deeper habits like complaint or gossip. We have all kinds of mixed motives for this—health, weight loss, becoming nicer people.

But for the early church, Lenten fasting was an opportunity—an opportunity to make space in one’s own life to both receive God’s self-giving love given to us through Jesus’s death and to connect one’s time, heart, and resources with the needs of the world. St. Augustine, the great 4th-century church father, encouraged his congregation to not only fast during Lent but to take the money that would have normally been spent on food and set it aside for the poor and hungry out of love and recognition for the generosity with which God has loved us in Jesus. He writes: “Fasting without mercy is worthless to him who fasts.” We must understand ourselves as those on the receiving end of God’s mercy, and from there we are able to extend it to others.

That means that Lenten habits are about so much more than self-improvement; they are about **connecting the horizontal and vertical in your life.**

As you go deeper in your relationship with God, you’ll find yourself stirred, equipped, and sent out to engage with the needs of the world He loves. It looks something like this chart:



Here, we see how “the grace of God is always going somewhere” (*The Gospel-Centered Life*). In one direction, God’s grace goes deep within us to help us see our sin, repent, and exercise faith, which leads us to joy. Then, as we experience God’s grace for ourselves, His grace also goes in another direction, leading us outward to see opportunities to love and serve beyond ourselves.

This Lent, we invite you to reconnect with how God’s grace is always going somewhere—both toward you to draw you into a relationship with Him and out through you to show others His love.

“As we experience God’s grace in our lives, it frees us to move out into the world. But that movement into a needy world, brings struggles. It causes us to grow still closer to God and receive more of His love in fresh ways. This in turn moves us out still farther into places that are desperate to know the grace we’ve received, and the pattern repeats.” – Bethany Ferguson, *The Mission-Centered Life*

As you spend time with the Lord in this study, may you also make space in your life to engage in missions opportunities offered here at Serge.

Because God’s grace is always going...

WEEK ONE

BELIEVING

Do you believe in Jesus? What does that even mean? We tend to have a very surface belief in Jesus, while our true trust is placed in ourselves or our bank account. In John 6, we see Jesus in a very gentle way exposing something that is true about all of us: when we do seek Him, it is often more because we want something from Him, not because we want Him. Our true hope is placed in better circumstances, not in Jesus. We just want Jesus to fix our problems and make our life easier. But Jesus wants more for us. He wants us to find abundant life in Him.

At the beginning of chapter 6, Jesus feeds the five thousand. Afterward, He goes away from the crowd to pray. He tells His disciples to go on ahead of Him. Later, He meets them in the middle of the Sea of Galilee by walking on the water. Here we see the crowd has walked around the Sea trying desperately to find Jesus.

Read John 6:25-36

1. Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." What does Jesus want us to see about ourselves . . . about our desires and motives? What does Jesus want us to see about Him . . . His desires and motives?
2. The group asks Jesus, "What must we do to do the work God requires?" How were they expecting Jesus to answer? What do we intuitively think is the right answer?

3. Notice that there is only one work (v. 29). What does it look like to believe in Jesus in each moment of each day? The synonyms for believe or faith are helpful in picturing this. List as many as you can.

4. The hard work of the believer is to believe. Why is it so hard to believe in Jesus moment by moment? What are the obstacles that stand in the way of trusting in Jesus?

5. In the Gospel of John, John uses the word “believe” 84 times. Believing in Jesus is the foundation of each moment of each day. Read these verses on believing and reflect on the fruit of believing in Jesus. How would doing this impact your daily motives, decisions, and values?

- John 20:30-31
- John 1:12
- John 3:15-19
- John 5:44, 11:40
- John 7:37-39

6. Our deepest need is rarely what we think it is—our deepest need is Jesus. It is hard for us to believe that because we often have to come to the end of ourselves to believe that Jesus is what we really need. Why is that?

7. The life of the believer is counter-intuitive. While the world celebrates growing more self-reliant as we mature, for the believer, maturity is seen as a greater dependence on Jesus. Jesus, Himself, was the most dependent person who ever lived. He said apart from the Father He does nothing. How does believing more lead us to greater dependence and experiencing the Bread of Life?

 8. Jesus wants us to change our motivations and desires. As long as our view is that Jesus' job is to make our life easier, we will continue to make life about ourselves and our kingdom. We will never move out into the world to show the love of Jesus to others. How should believing in Jesus propel us out into the world to love others?
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Go Deeper

Start with inviting God, through prayer, to be your mentor and leader. You might also consider inviting a prayer or study partner to do these devotions with you. Your local church may have resources or you can [check out Serge's resource library](#) - which includes free gospel-centered webinars, books, and articles to help you go deeper.



**Explore Serge
Resources**

Write it Down

Grab a journal or notebook to use from now until Easter.

Meditate on This

"Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!'" - Mark 9:24

The Transforming Power of the Gospel

— An adapted excerpt from Serge's Sonship Curriculum

I too often substitute a knowledge about God and godliness for truly knowing God. I can defend the truths of the gospel, but I often fail to experience its transforming power in my life.

In my earlier years, I had assumed that the gospel was for non-Christians alone and had little or no relevance to the Christian life once someone was converted. But I began to learn that the gospel is not just a gate I pass through one time, but a path I should walk each day of my life.

It's a painfully common story. We begin the Christian life well, but gradually find ourselves increasingly experiencing little or no true spiritual transformation. How, then, does the power of the gospel transform our idolatrous hearts?

Jesus' message was simple but life-changing: "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Believing the gospel requires a continual rehearsing of and delighting in the many privileges that are now ours in Christ:

You are forgiven! Instead of continually punishing yourself for your sins, trying to earn forgiveness, or attempting to measure up to perfectionistic standards, you must learn to believe that The Good News is that you can do absolutely nothing to make God love you any more or less!

You are accepted! (2 Corinthians 5:21). You no longer need to fear rejection. You no longer must win the approval of others or hide your weaknesses. You don't always have to defend or build your reputation. You can stop trying to be who you are not and admit to God and others that you are a sinner. Now you can move toward others with a bold, Christ-like love.

You are adopted! (1 John 3:1-2). You don't need to live or feel like a spiritual orphan anymore. You now have immediate access to the Father's presence, the promise of His provision for your every need, and the privilege of His discipline for your good.

You are free! No matter how defeated you may now feel in your battle with sin, you are no longer in bondage to it (Romans 6:5-18). No matter what your current struggle, true hope exists for lasting change.

You are not alone! Through faith in Christ, you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to come alongside you, to comfort you, to encourage you, and to empower you to live the life God has called you to live (John 16:5-15).

It has been said that a stone lying in the sun can't help but grow warm. In the same way, as we learn to expose our stony hearts to the warmth and light of the gospel, we can't help but be transformed. **We should preach this Good News to ourselves and others constantly** so that no matter what our struggles and fears may be, we can be encouraged, strengthened, and changed by hearing God's voice repeating these eternal truths to our hearts again and again.

REPENTING

Believing and repenting go hand-in-hand. They are inseparable qualities. As we learned last week, believing is putting our trust in Jesus and growing in dependence on Him. Repentance is becoming aware that we are not depending on Jesus but instead trying to find life apart from Christ, and then turning back toward Jesus. Repentance is much more about our relationship with Jesus than a transactional event. In the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, we see all these parts of repentance at play.

The son has gone off to a far country to try to find a better life apart from the father. In the pigsty, the son comes to his senses and realizes the gravity of his mistakes. He heads back home to the father. As is the nature of grace, the father runs out to meet him with a loving hug. The father reminds him of his true identity as his son with a signet ring and a robe. The banquet celebration reminds us that the fruit of repentance is joy.

“The purpose of repentance is to repeatedly tap into the joy of our union with Christ in order to weaken our need to do anything contrary to God’s heart.” - *Timothy Keller*

Martin Luther reminds us that the life of the believer is one of daily repentance. Daily, we see where we are trying to find life apart from Jesus and turn back to Him, believing He is our Bread of Life. Repenting is putting Jesus back at the center of our life. Tim Keller says, “The purpose of repentance is to repeatedly tap into the joy of our union with Christ in order to weaken our need to do anything contrary to God’s heart.”

The more we repent, the more room we have in our heart to receive the grace of God and let that grace flow to others in love. In our passage this week, we see a contrast of two people. One thinks he is righteous apart from Christ and feels no need to repent. The other, a woman who sees her great need for Jesus, pours out all she has for Him, and receives grace by faith.

Read Luke 7:36-50

- 1.** Compare and contrast Simon and the woman.
- 2.** What are the obstacles that keep Simon from seeing his need for repentance? Where is Simon placing his faith?
- 3.** What tend to be the obstacles in your life that keep you from seeing your need for Jesus?
- 4.** What do we learn about the object of our faith, the fruit of our faith, and what we bring to Jesus in order to come to faith?
- 5.** How do you see faith and repentance working together in this story?
- 6.** Sometimes the things we need to repent are not the obvious sins but the more ingrained sins of our heart that flow from our selfishness. List some "self" words like self-reliance that hinder your dependence on Jesus. Then reflect how they keep us from giving and receiving grace.

7. Paul says that the fruit of our faith in Jesus is love (Galatians 5:6). Look at the chart from page one. Consider how Jesus' words, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little" fit into the flow of the chart. How have you seen in your own life how repenting and receiving grace leads you to greater love?
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Go Deeper

Slow down. We often rush to get to the "good part" of the resurrection but we are secure in the Father's love. This lets us take honest stock in our hearts. Take the time to take inventory of your beliefs and need to repent. This may be the slowest step of Lent. The more we repent, the more room we have in our heart to receive the grace of God, and let that grace flow to others in love.

Write it Down

In light of God's love, how is your heart during this season of Lent? Write down what you need to take to the feet of Jesus? Write down what you need to leave behind?

Meditate on This

"For the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn His face from you if you return to Him" - 2 Chronicles 30:9

Learning Not to Rush to Easter

BY OLI SMITH, A SERGE MISSIONARY SERVING IN THE U.K.

As we move into the second week of Lent, I have been contemplating the ways in which I continue to live as if I were still enslaved to sin.

We tend to rush to Easter Sunday, wanting it to all be over, wanting to get to the “really good bit”. We tend to not want to reflect on our betrayals of Jesus, our abandonment of His way in exchange for the shiny bauble of our own imagined “better” futures.

I can often feel that, because I can't see the completed work manifested in front of me today, I am somehow a failure, inadequate, less than I should be. Combined with a surrounding culture that demands that we never be satisfied or at rest, this can lead me to despair.

So, this Lent season, I am taking the opportunity to repent.

Repenting of wanting to rush the story that God is telling. Repenting of wanting to be somewhere else in the story than where Christ has put me.

Repenting of not seeing God in the present, thinking that He is not close but rather somewhere far off in the future.

Repenting of a triumphalist Christianity that does not know how to stick it out, cope with adversity, or have anything real to say to the person (disciple or not) who is genuinely suffering.

We are told in the Gospels that Jesus knew what was going to happen to Him when He entered Jerusalem. How hard it must have been to ride that colt into the city. Even with the crowds chanting “Hosanna” and singing psalms there must have been a heaviness in Jesus' heart, knowing, and waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Was Jesus tempted to turn around? Was He tempted to just make a scene then and there to get it all over with? Perhaps. Yet Jesus chooses none of these temptations.

Jesus lives in the present, not withdrawing from the situation before Him and not trying to speed up or control events.

As we remember our King coming into Jerusalem all those centuries ago, may we remember to invite Him afresh into our lives and hearts today.

May we be people who refuse to rush the story or live too much in the future.

May we be people who remember to look and turn to Christ in the present. And people who can trust the story and trust our place in it because we know the Author intimately.

Blessings to you all in this season of Lent.

WEEK THREE

IDENTIFYING

Most of our issues stem from trying to find our identity outside of Christ. In Christ, we are offered an identity that is secure and beautiful because it is based on what Christ has done, not on our performance.

In Christ, we are beloved, accepted, secure, complete, and have purpose. But in our sinful nature, we grasp to find these things apart from Jesus. We become slaves to the acceptance of others. Instead of believing who Jesus says we are, we are shackled to a life of continual striving for identity through our successes and failures.

Read Philippians 3:4-12

- 1.** According to the passage, what was Paul's identity in before he met Jesus?
- 2.** What kind of things do you put your identity in besides Jesus? What are the pros and cons of having your identity in those things?
- 3.** Paul says that all those worldly achievements are garbage (he literally says manure) compared to knowing Jesus. Why is knowing Jesus better than those things?

Paul calls us not to strive for a righteousness of our own but to receive the free gift of Christ's righteousness by faith. The Heidelberg Catechism does a good job of helping us grasp this truth:

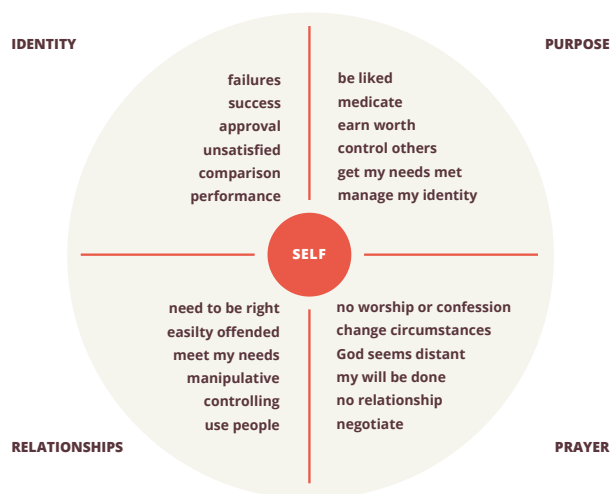
Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.

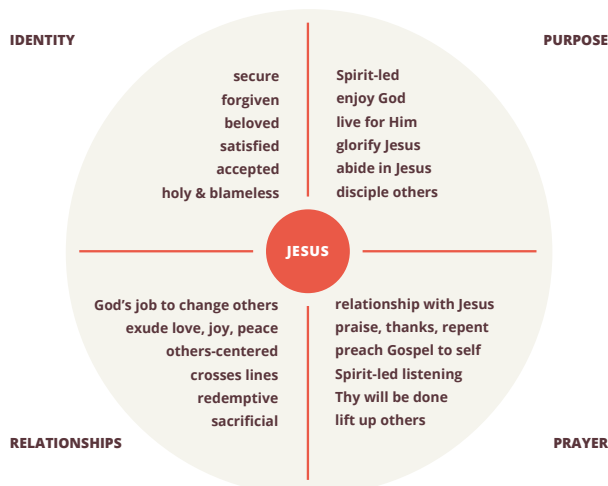
Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments, of never having kept any of them, and of still being inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift with a believing heart.

4. Let that sink in for a minute. What are some of the implications of this reality for how you see yourself? How does this fit into the diagram on page one? How does it impact the relationship of believing, repenting, and identifying?

5. Look at the **Self Circle**. Consider what your life is like when you put yourself at the center of your world. What is the fruit of your life when you are at the center? What do you spend most of your energy doing?



6. Look at the **Jesus Circle**. In those moments when Jesus is at the center of your life, what is the fruit? How do relationships feel? How does it help you thrive?



“The gospel, if it is really believed, removes neediness—the need to be constantly respected, appreciated, and well-regarded; the need to have everything in your life go well; the need to have power over others. . . Paul is saying that if you want to really change, you must let the gospel teach you—that is to train, discipline, coach you—over a period of time. You must let the gospel argue with you. You must let the gospel sink down deeply into your heart, until it changes your motivation and views and attitudes.” - Timothy Keller

- 7.** How do you let the gospel train, discipline, and coach you? How is believing, repenting, and identifying involved in that process?

- 8.** How does having your identity in Jesus free you to love and serve others?

Go Deeper

[Watch Serge’s webinar “Is God Disappointed with Me”](#) with Pastor Marc Davis where he explores how the gospel speaks to our insecurities and how our identity in Jesus frees us up to strive to please Him without fear of failure.



View Webinar

Write it Down

How do you introduce yourself to people you have just met? What are the titles or descriptions you give yourself, either out loud or in your own thoughts?

Meditate on This

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.” - 1 Peter 2:9

When Life Feels Out of Control

BY SCOTT BRAND, SERGE MISSIONARY SERVING IN IRELAND

It's been cold lately. Most of the winter we've spent time indoors. The only problem is that we have been competing for space in the warmth with other residents.

We have mice. I won't tell you how many mice, let's just say there have been a lot. We have set traps, cleaned out closets, put out mouse deterrent sound emitters, and called our landlord. And yet every time we clear an area, we find tiny mouse droppings somewhere else. Under the sink. In an old Ikea bag in the pantry. In one of my wife's boots – no joke.

Needless to say, it has been a frustrating winter. No amount of searching for solutions on the internet or asking experts has helped. Then, a few weeks ago, we were talking in the kitchen, and a mouse ran out in the open, in a final defiant act of just not caring that we were there.

My wife was at the end of her rope. Later, as she was expressing her frustrations to a friend, the friend told her "It's not about the mice."

Clients. Finances. Wanting to start a family. All of these things can be strategized. You can try different techniques. Different blogs will give you various solutions. Over the past year, we have found ourselves scrambling in all of these areas to find a technique that would enable us to wrestle back some sort of semblance of control.

None of these things are inherently bad. Some are even slightly helpful. **But the truth is, we can do everything "right" and still have mice.**

As soon as I put my faith in my techniques (or my wife puts her faith in mine), I am pretending I am lord of the situation and my own life. Whether it be the right kind of bait for mouse traps or a certain way of doing life or ministry, if my hope is in my own ability to control my life through strategy, I will only ever fail, even if I "succeed" on the surface.

We have been learning, slowly, that the Lord is more interested in growing us into the kind of people who trust and rest in Him rather than in alleviating our frustrations and situations. Even when those frustrations keep us up at night by scurrying through the walls.

It seems the only way that I learn that is by coming to the end of all my efforts and collapsing into the arms of my Father—who has been waiting patiently for me to come to the end of myself.

It doesn't get rid of the mice, but it does something far greater: it chips away a little bit more at the kingdom I have built for myself.

It's not about the mice.

WEEK FOUR

GOING

In some ways, Abram is the Bible's first cross-cultural missionary. The prior chapters of Genesis show God filled with remorse and sadness—almost ready to give up on humanity because of their violence and turning away from Him. But now God develops another plan—a missional plan—that hinges on the lineage of Abram. Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis writes, “From now on, Abraham and his seed will be the one channel for the dissemination of God’s blessing. Abraham is like a prism; he focuses God’s blessing and then spreads it through the world like a rainbow stream of light.”

God comes to Abram with a command: Go. This command is hard—it requires him to leave behind land and social connections, the things that equated to wealth and prosperity in the ancient world. God sends Abram away from all the alternative things he might be tempted to rely on other than God. The next dozen chapters of Genesis are all about how Abram (who becomes Abraham) will walk through a whole range of crises related to whether or not he truly trusts this God who has called him.

“From now on, Abraham and his seed will be the one channel for the dissemination of God’s blessing. Abraham is like a prism; he focuses God’s blessing and then spreads it through the world like a rainbow stream of light.” – Ellen Davis

But the command also comes with a promise—a promise that Abram will be blessed and will become a blessing to the entire world. For Abram and his wife, Sarai, a childless and by all signs infertile couple, this is a promise so big that only God can fulfill it. It is a promise that no amount of self-reliance can accomplish. In being sent by God, Abram and Sarai must learn to rely on God even more. This is the way that God chooses to bring blessing to all the families of the earth: with a command and a promise that invite deep reliance upon Him.

Jesus will follow this same pattern in Matthew 28 when He sends out His disciples with the command to go and make disciples of all nations and the promise that He will be with them always. God's grace compels us to go—with His command and His promise.

Read Genesis 12:1-4a

1. How do you imagine it might have felt to be Abram? What might have been scary, exciting, difficult, or joyful about this call from God?
2. Missiologist Ed Stetzer says, "Put your yes on the table, and let God put it on the map." As you've reflected on the internal rhythms of God's grace (believing, repenting, and identifying), where do you discern that God's grace is leading you to go? Across the street? Across the world? In love to whom and for what?
3. What holds you back from saying yes to God's command? What sacrifice, risk, or discomfort is involved in obeying Him?

4. Read Isaiah 43:1-2 and Romans 8:38-39 (or all of Romans 8 if you have time!). What promises of God do you find in these passages? How do these promises give you courage to rely on God even more as you go where He leads you?

Go Deeper

Is there a region in the world that interests you and you'd want to learn more about? Research that part of the world. Start praying for the national church in that region and missionaries who serve there. Or [explore short-term trip opportunities](#) – either through Serge or your local church.



**Explore Serge's
upcoming short-
term mission trips**

Write it Down

What are the reasons that stop you from serving God in another location, even cross-culturally? And what are the reasons you stay where you are? Write them down and offer those lists to the Lord, in order to consider going or staying where you are with a greater sense of purpose.

Meditate on This

"Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise His name; proclaim His salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples." - Psalm 96:1-3

Partner Reflection

God is a Missionary

BY A SERGE MISSIONARY IN THE U.K.

I live in a place where people from all over the world come to live, and they bring their culture and religion with them. We pray that God will work in their hearts, and in this diverse community, we often pray for their dreams.

One woman, named Fariah, was brought up in a strict home where she was faithful in attending religious services. Four years ago she was invited by a friend to attend a Christian church for the first time. She was so moved by the worship and felt so loved that she couldn't stop crying. Even though she had been praying five times a day, she had never felt this way.

Someone nearby saw her crying and when the invitation came to step forward, the lady said, "Come, I will go with you." She went, but when they handed her a leaflet, she became angry and said, "You are trying to convert me."

For two years, she attended the Christian church, but only for the worship. During this time, she had a frightening dream. In the dream, she called out, but no one came to her aid. This made her seek out help from Tarot cards and she eventually felt an evil presence enter her.

Soon after, she went to the pastor of the church and told him her story. He prayed and her peace returned. After that, she started going to the church but was now really searching for the truth. She picked up a leaflet about a meeting of believers and went to it. This is where she met a Serge missionary.

Later, the two of us met her for coffee and she shared another dream: she was in a room with a lot of people, and the room was rapidly filling with mud. She felt someone lift her out of the mud and she knew it was Jesus. We shared the gospel with her and stood amazed at how many people had helped her along this journey.

She continued to slip in and out of contact, but finally, about two months ago she asked if she could begin meeting with me to study the Bible. We get together every Thursday morning, and she often teaches me through her humility and repentance.

Through many providential circumstances – simple gestures such as praying, going out for tea, talking on the phone, having dinner, serious discussions, and answering honest questions – and even her own dreams – the Holy Spirit was drawing her to God.

God's plan is to rescue a run-away planet by bringing the lost out of darkness into His marvelous light. His plan includes our cooperation, a community of believers being present, and our prayers. He works through our weakness and the Spirit supporting, longing for and sustaining... all of us.

WEEK FIVE

SERVING

The gospel of Mark is unrelenting in its portrayal of how easy it is for disciples of Jesus to get confused about the servant-heart of their Lord. At this point in the story, the disciples have heard Jesus tell them, no less than three times (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), that He will suffer at the hands of Jerusalem's leaders, die, and rise again on the third day. And each time Jesus shares this news, the disciples make it clear that they just do not get it. First, Peter rebukes Jesus for saying such things. The second time, the disciples have an argument about who will be the greatest. And the third time, brothers James and John feel bold enough to come to Jesus and ask Him for recognition (seats of glory and power).

Like the Zebedee brothers, we all at some point wrestle with our own desires for greatness in ways that are at odds with the character of our King. When we have decided to actually step out and touch the needs of the world with God's grace, there will come a point when we must again repent of the desire for glory rather than service. Even well-meaning Christian "ministry" can be done with an attitude of underlying pride rather than humility, success rather than faithfulness, or the desire to get something from Jesus rather than love Him.

"One of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation of power—political power, military power, economic power, or moral and spiritual power—even though they continue to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to His divine power but emptied Himself and became as we are." –Henri Nouwen

In reality, seeking to serve our neighbors often feels like the tedious and humiliating work of washing feet that we know will just get dirty and dusty again.

We desire greatness; Jesus invites us into service. What will help us persevere in the heart of service when everything in our culture (including, often, our own hearts) tells us to pursue our own glory?

To start, we must remember that before and apart from any good deed of service we could ever do in the name of Jesus, we have been the recipients of His self-giving servant love. Jesus gently reminds James and John that they are called to serve because that is what He is doing for them.

Jesus serves us and will go all the way to the lowest point of humiliation of being nailed to a Roman torture device to do so—to serve us in our weakness in order to save us.

Read Mark 10:35-45

1. One of the greatest stories of Jesus serving is John 13:1-17. In this passage, Jesus is giving His disciples a tangible way to understand the significance of His death for them. Read this passage and then consider what stands out to you about seeing Jesus in this way. How does it help you to imagine Jesus not just as someone who asks obedience of you but as someone who serves you?

2. Jesus says, “Those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.” If you were to put it into modern-day language, how would you describe what it looks like when someone “lords over” another?

3. A lot of us have beliefs about ourselves that run through our minds like:
 - “I’m willing to serve, **but** I want to be noticed.”
 - “I’m willing to serve, **but** I deserve thanks.”
 - “I’m willing to serve, **but** only when I can see the impact.”
 - “I’m willing to serve, **but** I don’t have time.”
 - “I’m willing to serve, **but** I don’t have anything to offer.”

Which do you most identify with? How do you imagine Jesus might desire to respond to you or reframe your thinking?

4. Have you ever experienced someone serve you in the way that Jesus describes above? What was that experience like? What did it show you about God’s love for you?

5. Review the grace chart on page 1. Have you ever experienced an opportunity to love or serve somebody that made you feel more dependent on God's grace toward you? What was that like? How did you come to delight in Jesus and His grace more as a result of this experience?
6. Go back and read Mark 10:39 and spend some time thinking about what Jesus means here. Andy Crouch writes, "Are they able to actually risk everything in the way [Jesus] will shortly risk everything, drinking the cup of wrath to its dregs? When this goes straight over the disciples' heads, Jesus makes an extraordinary prediction. They will in fact identify this deeply with their Lord. One day, James and John will taste the same cup as Jesus. They will be closer to Him in glory than they can ever imagine, after paying the highest possible cost" (Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power). **What do you imagine is the connection between serving with Jesus and suffering with Him?**
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Go Deeper

Watch the free webinar ["Rising and Dying with Jesus in Everyday Life"](#) with Paul Miller where he explores how dying and rising with Jesus helps us walk a path that is both liberating and joy-generating.



[View Webinar](#)

Write it Down

In week one, we noted that Lent is an opportunity to make space in one's own life to both receive God's self-giving love given to us through Jesus's death and to connect one's time, heart, and resources with the needs of the world. What gifts, abilities, or interests do you have that you could use to serve the needs of the world?

Meditate on This

"so (Jesus) got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him." - John 13:4-5

Taking One For the Team

BY HEIDI LUTJENS, A FORMER SERGE MISSIONARY IN SOUTH SUDAN

Cleaning out the team's kitchen sink drainage trap that smells rancid in 100+ degree heat.

Setting your alarm for the middle of the night to walk across the compound with your headlamp to check a teammate's temperature or clean out their barf bucket.

Sitting in offices in the capital with folders full of papers; hour after hour, office after office, never knowing who is going to require what from you, possibly rendering your 7-hour, one-way trip on some of the worst roads in the world, useless.

Standing on top of a black plastic water tank in the equatorial sun and trying to restore water flow for the team's compound, after doing the same for the community taps, and you're bone-tired.

This is what sacrificial love looks like in rural South Sudan.

Ask missionaries in urban Europe and they'll be able to give you a similar list...similarly sacrificial, similarly loving, similarly necessary for life on the mission field.

Our work in the community is vitally important to our roles as missionaries. But often I forget that perhaps equally important is our sacrificial love for our teammates.

Why sacrificial? Because Jesus said so. Because Jesus did so.

Scripture says "Jesus Christ laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." But to "lay down" one's life...what does that actually mean?

Jesus did so by becoming man and living among us. He "laid down" His life at the right hand of the Father - leaving heaven and coming to earth to live among us fallen people. Jesus did so in His death for us. He "laid down" His perfection and heavenly comfort to "pick up" our fallenness and sin.

Whether in South Sudan or Vienna - life, sanity, survival, on a team of a dozen sinners WILL REQUIRE compromise, sacrifice, and love. But I can tell you right now that the volume of that love waxes and wanes depending on the volume of the sacrifice required at any given time. **This love is often a battle, but it's this love that Jesus tells us will be our witness to who He is.**

It's my prayer that our friends and community in South Sudan will see our love for one another and for them, and that the Spirit would bear witness to God's love through the love we fight daily to have for one another - for by this, He will be known.

WEEK SIX

SUFFERING

When God's grace leads us into mission, it means two things: 1) we are sinners who celebrate how the suffering of Jesus on the cross works for our salvation and 2) we are saints who understand how our salvation frees us to daily die to ourselves and enter places of darkness with His light.

In Luke 9, Jesus is teaching His disciples both of these things. He is helping them understand that His mission as the Christ will be accomplished through suffering and costly identification with our sin and brokenness in the form of public execution on the cross. Jesus's death is the means of our salvation.

The means of our salvation is also our model for missional living: the self-giving love of Jesus.

Many of us know that the cross of Christ is the source of our salvation, but sometimes we forget that the cross is the shape that our lives take on as we follow Jesus, and especially as we seek to share His love with others through going and serving.

As we walk with Jesus, as we confess and proclaim and live like He is Lord, we find ourselves being led on a similar path to His. Quite often, Jesus will lead us to hard places that involve risk, dying to self and sin again and again, and embracing weakness.

The means of our salvation is also our model for missional living: the self-giving love of Jesus.

And so the power of the Church's mission is the power of this love, a love that is willing to enter and endure suffering rather than evade it. It's a willingness to have your hope so set on the mercy of God toward you that you are freed from your addiction to comfort and ease. And then you can move out into places where, yes, you will confront grief, fear, and doubt—but you will also see God bring new life. You will find true life.

Read Luke 9:18-24

- 1.** How do you think the disciples initially felt when they heard Jesus tell them about His death and then give the invitation to lose their lives? How do you think that these words of Jesus continued to impact their thinking and decisions throughout the days of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension?
- 2.** Think of examples in Scripture or in your own life of people who have both celebrated the cross as the source of their salvation and the shape of their life as they follow Jesus (read Acts 6:8-7:60 for one example). How do these examples encourage you?
- 3.** In Luke 9:23, Jesus says "take up his cross daily." What does it look like for you to take up your cross in the ordinary rhythms of your day (dying to sin, saying yes to new life in Christ, going into places of risk, fear, or suffering)?
- 4.** Fleming Rutledge, author of *The Crucifixion*, writes, "Crucifixion as a means of execution in the Roman Empire had as its express purpose the elimination of victims from consideration as members of the human race. It cannot be said too strongly: that was its function." Because of the unmatched humiliation of this form of death, Rutledge insists that what's seen in the cross is that "the uttermost depth of human misery has been plumbed by the incarnate Lord. In Christ crucified we see the depths to which our God is willing to go to rescue us." How do you respond to this statement? What emotions, thoughts, or desires arise in you?

- 5.** Go back and review the grace chart on page 1. Notice how the outward movement of grace requires a return toward the inward movement of belief, repentance, and identifying. If we have any hope of persevering on the road of carrying our cross, of entering into a life of holiness and service with Jesus, we must return again and again to the good news of what He has done for us. Bethany Ferguson writes, "When I find myself struggling with cynicism, I go back to Jesus and the cross. I confess ways I have relied too much on myself, and ways I have forgotten my need for Jesus. I remember the ways I have seen and experienced His faithfulness . . . I pour out to Him the questions and fears that confound me. In Him, I find the renewed hope I need." How do you imagine that going, serving, and suffering would lead you back to your own need to believe in Christ again?
- 6.** **As you journey through Holy Week, reflect on what this quote means to you:** "Christians do not simply look to the cross of Christ with prayerful reverence. We are set in motion by its power, energized by it, upheld by it, guaranteed by it, secured by it for the promised future because it is the power of the creating Word that 'gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist' (Romans 4:17)." - Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*
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Go Deeper

In week two, we asked you to slow down and not rush to Easter. In light of the time we have spent Believing, Repenting, and Identifying, consider the suffering of Christ. As we look at God's call for us in the world to go and serve in the world – how does Christ's suffering move us to see this as a path to redemption?

Write it Down

Write down your own words of lament. Can you bring these words to the cross? How have you suffered in the past six weeks or the past year?

Meditate on This

"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces He was despised, and we held Him in low esteem." - Isaiah 53:3

Partner Reflection

A Savior Who Suffers With Me

BY A SERGE MISSIONARY SERVING IN AFRICA

Loss, grief, suffering, emotions of all kinds are so incredibly human. Yet, those hard emotions, like grief, are ones we tend to try to escape. But grief, I have learned, is not a thing to be outrun.

This past weekend, we got a text from a young woman we have been walking alongside for two years. She has had a very difficult life with a lot of suffering in it and her text asked us why God allows her suffering to continue. Why doesn't He put a stop to it?

Suffering is all around us. On a recent drive into the refugee community where we work, we passed by a man who was being dragged along the ground by two other men. It was unclear if they were trying to help him or harm him. "This is a hard place," the driver said to me. Another day I passed by a line of five or six young men - boys really - only half-conscious, high on the glue they were inhaling from used Coke bottles.

I want to say that our ministry here is about providing high-quality healthcare. I wish I could say that it's about teaching English and life skills. That it's about empowering the poor. Because those are things that we do.

But we are learning that our ministry here is a ministry of continually entering into an area of the city, a group of people, marked by their suffering. Of sitting with people who have, are, and will continue to suffer in ways some of us can only imagine, but without being able to change it. Is it possible that that has value in and of itself?

Not unless Jesus is really who He says He is. Not unless there is hope of a resurrection, and not unless that hope can be backed up by a God who not only calls us to suffer but did it for us first.

I don't understand why God doesn't put an end to all our suffering. To the death, the sickness, the drought, starvation, war, and seeming ceaseless pain. But my one hope is for a resurrection that not only makes all of this right but makes it worth it.

Jesus led the way to resurrection by dying for us first. Jesus validated our suffering, our humanity, not by ending it, but by entering into it.

Yes, Jesus calls us to sit with the sick, but He sat there first. Yes, He calls us to walk alongside the poor, but He walked there first. Yes, He calls us to stand at the graveside and weep with the mourners, but He stood there and wept first and still does now. Yes, Jesus calls us to take up our cross, but only to follow Him, because He took it up first and led the way to resurrection on a road marked with suffering.

Sometimes, I get emotional because I am human. But Jesus was human too.

*"Well, I've got no answers / For heartbreaks or cancers / But a Savior who suffers them with me / Singing goodbye, Olympus / The heart of my Maker / Is spread out on the road, the rocks, and the weeds."
- The Road, The Rocks, and The Weeds, by John Mark McMillan*

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Grace at the Fray

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