



# **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF**

*From Reflection to Response*



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### INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us on this journey of lent. It's a privilege to sojourn with you. Sojourn, in the Biblical sense, is to interdependently rely on the goodwill of one another in a community for our continued existence. As we approach Lent, we look forward to walking with you on this 40-day journey in loving our neighbours better!

### WHAT IS LENT?

**Lent** (Latin: *Quadragesima*, or 'fortieth'), the season before Easter is a solemn religious observance in the Christian liturgical calendar remembering the 40 days that Jesus spent fasting in the desert. On Ash Wednesday, we begin a season of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter. In 2022, Lent begins on March 2nd - Ash Wednesday. On this day, tradition holds that Christians gather to receive a cross of ashes on their foreheads. This reminds us of our mortal nature - we are dust and to dust we will return. The ashes are also a symbol of sorrow for the sins we have committed, and an initiation to the coming time of *repentance and self-examination*.

We are mindful that the discipline of Lent isn't a substitute for the completed work of the Cross but rather a tool to help open the eyes of our hearts to the Light of Christ within a hurting world. The spiritual formation we undergo during the time of Lent can make us more alive to the truth of the Risen Christ as we journey toward Easter Sunday. It opens our eyes to the stark reality of our desperate need for God's grace and healing.

Many also adopt the tradition of abstaining from a food or activity that has a particular hold on them, and instead, direct that longing towards something that is ultimately fulfilling. The *Alcoholics Anonymous Set-Aside Prayer* (several versions circulate), helps us consider what we need to start with:

*God, today help me set aside everything I think I know about You, everything I think I know about myself, everything I think I know about others, and everything I think I know about my own healing/recovery so I may have an open mind and a new experience with all these things. Please help me see the truth.*

And so, we invite you to embark on this Lenten journey of reflections and prayers contributed from members of the community, church leaders, pastors, and Union Gospel Mission staff. May you be blessed, challenged, and refreshed in your relationship with God - and may you be drawn from *reflection to response* as we embrace this season together in community and intention with our neighbours.



## DAY 1 - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2<sup>ND</sup>

(Isaiah 30:15, NIV)

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says:

**“In repentance and rest is your salvation,  
in quietness and trust is your strength,  
but you would have none of it.”**

*Ash Wednesday...* a symbol of the pruning of the dead wood, giving way to abundant fruit. *Ash Wednesday...* a reminder of my own mortality and propensity towards the selfish choices I make. *Ash Wednesday...* an acknowledgment that the servant is not greater than the Master. *Ash Wednesday...* a gateway to hope that comes through walking the gauntlet of repentance and self-examination.

It all sounds so heavy! But do I really need to do this heavy lifting? Hasn't Jesus already done this for me? Too often, I find my *repentance and rest* replaced by *avoidance and distraction*. Too often, I find my *quietness and trust* replaced by a surface spirituality of noise and fear-management.

When my thoughts and actions manifest in these ways, I'm reminded of what Bonhoeffer (the German theologian) calls *cheap grace*. However, *costly grace*, through the overflowing, sacrificial love of the living Christ is *anything but cheap*. It's the personal, world-transforming gift of God, given to us - *made perfect in weakness*. Grace costs us nothing.

And yet... we have an irresistible response to its homeward call, that graciously demands our all. May my response be aligned with the heart of our Creator in *repentance, rest, quietness, and trust* as my eyes become ever opened to His grace embarking on this 40-day journey of Lent.

*Loving God, prune the dead wood from my life into fertile ashes. May your Grace call me to repentance and unfathomable rest. Help me lose my independence to discover and rediscover the supernatural strength through the quietness and trust that can only be found in You. Amen.*



Rob McKinley  
Manager, Church Relations at UGM

## DAY 2 - THURSDAY, MARCH 3<sup>RD</sup>

*(Mark 10:21-22, NIV)*

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

It happened again. I saw a new bright shiny thing and thought, "Oh, to be happy I need that." I feel, daily, hourly, the sting and the weight of all the things I lack.

But in Jesus' strange economy, to lack something is to have too much of it. "One thing you *lack*," Jesus says to this rich man: you have too much. Too many shoes, jackets, wristwatches, pillowcases, stainless steel pots. You are encumbered with wealth.

Do you not feel it, all these things depriving you, eating your insides? Each and all adding up, not to abundance, but to an enormous lack?

Jesus throws down the only offer that makes sense: lose it, lose it all. In one giant swoop, jettison the whole kit and kaboodle. Walk free. Live light. Make your life about something bigger than the next new bright shiny thing.

The man refuses. He walks away, deeply sad. He chooses to live with his enormous lack.

*But should I? What is the one thing I lack?*

I am starting with my clothes, the ones I still wear, still love. Piece by piece, I am giving them away, so that eventually I'll have little, but lack nothing.

*Lord, help me give freely so that I may, in your strange and beautiful economy, lack nothing.*



Mark Buchanan  
Associate Professor at Ambrose University and Author



## DAY 3 – FRIDAY, MARCH 4<sup>TH</sup>

*(John 15:4, CSB)*

**“Remain in Me as I remain in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me.”**

I love how Jesus uses so many word pictures to get His messages across! Just thinking about fruit conjures up many pictures in my mind. I think of fruit not quite ready, don't like the taste of it, fruit being perfectly ripe, delicious. I think about bad fruit, rotten and very undesirable. I reflect upon which kinds of fruit of the Spirit am I walking in and exhibiting? Detached from the Vine I am nothing but selfish, indifferent and apathetic, like the fruit that is off the Vine rotting and stinking on the ground.

This Lent I am contemplating on the types of seeds I am sowing in each daily interaction with family, friends, neighbours, and co-workers. I'm asking myself, *what kind of fruit will this thought, word, or behavior grow?*

My desire is to be like the tree in Psalm 1 that is planted by the riverbank bearing luscious fruit each season without fail.

*God, help us to abide in You as we serve You wherever we work, sharing Your love, sharing Your hope to each other and to those who don't yet know You.*



Karan Flanagan  
Manager Lydia Home/Mission Ministries at UGM



## DAY 4 - SATURDAY, MARCH 5<sup>TH</sup>

*(1 Peter 5:6-7, NIV)*

**Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**

Mental health challenges can be more disabling than physical ailments in the degree to which they impact thinking, emotions, behaviour, and ability to cope. One common challenge is anxiety, which can be experienced as mild unease to panic attacks, often triggered when there is no looming danger, although the threat feels absolutely real.

We cannot simply give up anxiety for the 40 days of lent like we can give up potato chips, or whatever has a hold on us, as our genetics, history, physical state, diet, social connections, perceptions, spirituality, and concurrent challenges all feed anxious feelings. So, whether anxiety comes from a specific trigger, or is a more general response to the stresses of life, intensified by the ever-present risks of the pandemic, is there something we can give up on this journey through lent? Maybe some of the pride in how we are running our life? Some of our heavier expectations? Some of our resentments?

Today's scripture reminds us that God cares. He is with us, and He will lift us up out of the stew of anxiety in His good timing.

*God! I don't exactly know what it means to cast my anxiety on You, but I'm going to let go of a few things, so please try to catch me!*



Karan Giesbrecht  
Food Security Coordinator & Dietitian at UGM

## DAY 5 - MONDAY, MARCH 7<sup>TH</sup>

*(Matthew 25:40, NIV)*

**"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"**

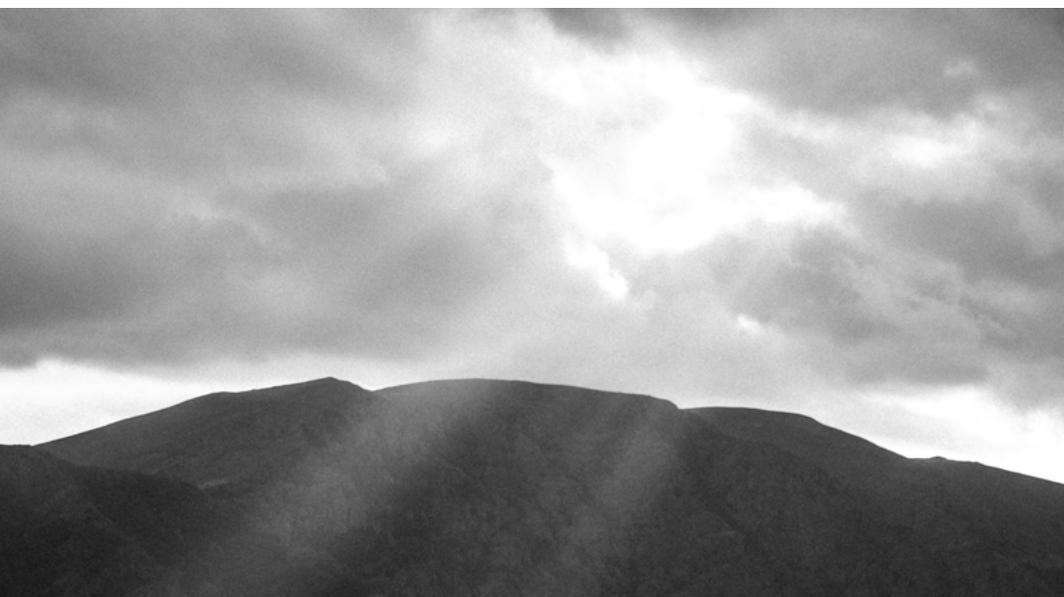
The women and men who have been part of Mother Teresa's order have found their work sustainable across the years because each of them keeps a routine of daily prayer. Even amidst the sounds of desperate people, blaring horns, cars, and people selling their wares, they gather for regular times each day to still their body, mind, and spirit before the Lord in prayer. Mother Teresa's Sisters pray six hours a day and work five hours a day. They also have a regular rhythm of rest—one day a week; one week a month; one month per year; one year in every six. Years ago, a friend of mine visited Mother Teresa in Calcutta and asked her, "With all the staggering needs in the world, how do you keep going?" She replied, "We pray the work: we do our work with Jesus, for Jesus, and to Jesus." Mother Teresa knew that her labor on behalf of the poor was more than anything else an expression of her devotion to Christ.

*God, fill me with your Spirit and help me do my work with Jesus, for Jesus, and to Jesus.*



Ken Shigematsu

*Pastor of Tenth Church, and author of God in My Everything*





## DAY 6 – TUESDAY, MARCH 8<sup>TH</sup>

*(Psalm 33:5, ESV)*

**“He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.”**

Since March 2020 it has been easy to feel that the only steadfast, or constant, emotions have been anxiety, frustration, or fatigue, due to the constantly changing nature of our world. There are so many events occurring beyond our personal, human, control. For some of us, it’s easy to turn inward during emotional anguish, and to consider how deeply individually impacted we are and seek to find areas of control in whatever ways we can. But we aren’t alone in our burden, or our sorrow. Each moment of isolation, anger, sadness, or fear that we individually face – our neighbors are likely facing similar emotions and obstacles, and some (many) are likely to have added barriers to the resources and support that could be life saving.

If we open our clenched fists, to release the cords of control we think we have, sand simply slips through our fingers. But if we enter a room, palms out, ready to receive and make space for the needs of others, we may be encouraged to feel God’s enveloping, steadfast love, guiding us forward.

*Father God, find in me the resolve to openly embody the fruit of the Spirit – seeking space for others and recognizing that in me, YOU move and fill the word with love. Allow me not to fall into myself, but to find YOU in the shared emotions of those around me, and to seek ways to break down barriers so all people may access needed resources.*



Nicole Mucci  
Manager, Media Relations and Communications at UGM

## DAY 7 - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9<sup>TH</sup>

*(1 John 3:16, NIV)*

**This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.**

What does true love look like? It looks like Jesus, laying down his life for us. This verse helps me understand the other (more famous) John 3:16: "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son."

"*In this way*" I ought to love my sisters and brothers too. By laying down my life for them. How? For me, it's laying down my time. I'm a bit of a time freak. I love routine, schedule, and being on time. But time keeps getting shorter for me. I'm now in my 50's. My life is at least half over.

God says, "Tim, lay down your time. There's a child in your life who needs you to lay aside your tight schedule, sacrifice your time, and play with them. Or, you're walking briskly to your next meeting, and you make eye-contact with that person sitting alone on the sidewalk. Stop! Lay down your time, Tim. Ask how they're doing. Maybe even ask permission to give a hug!

*In this way*, God laid down his life for us. May our prayer be to help others also know what true love is.



Tim Kuepfer

*Pastor of the English congregation of Chinatown Peace Church*





## DAY 8 – THURSDAY, MARCH 10<sup>TH</sup>

*(Hebrews 13:15-16, NIV)*

**“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”**

I’m new here at UGM and so it’s been quite a few years since I’ve been face to face with visible poverty. To be honest, my life in suburban Langley is rather insulated. In considering Lent, I feel as though the things that I’m giving up seem quite privileged in comparison to the struggles of our neighbours here at UGM. It’s a difficult tension and I don’t yet have a resolution, but I want to be faithful in the small things too. Though there may be the less immediate poverty of spirit and more acceptable forms of addiction in my neighbourhood, Jesus is needed here.

To ‘love my neighbour’ for Lent, I have committed to baking 24-hour cookies (with as many safety protocols I can follow) for 10 families in my townhouse complex with a note of gratitude or introduction since connection has been so lacking due to COVID.

Openly professing Jesus still feels risky to me, but people can conceive of a variety of stories for our kindness. So, I think accompanying loving actions with a clear narrative is important if I want to show Jesus’ love and care instead of my own.

*Jesus, help me to share you but not be preachy. Amen.*



Leslie Rosenau-Lai  
Church Relations Advisor at UGM

## DAY 9 – FRIDAY, MARCH 11<sup>TH</sup>

*(Matthew 25:35, NIV)*

**“For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.”**

Hospitality. As someone who grew up in a family restaurant, I often reflect on our hospitality industry. Hospitality is an act of a friendly and generous invitation towards guests – often friends, and sometimes strangers – into a space for food, shelter, and rest.

With the pandemic causing waves of restaurants and public community spaces of shelter to close their doors, those with greater material needs are hit the hardest. Free meal program guests line up outdoors rather than warm up inside, interactions shift from welcoming visitors to limiting visiting, and smiles on faces are shielded behind our masks.

How can we as God’s people be intentionally creative in extending generosity and welcome to strangers during a season where we feel more hostility and rejection? For myself, I am praying for a posture that welcomes interruptions and sacrifice into my day so that I can be attentive to God inviting me to opportunities to practice biblical hospitality. For lent, I am committing to asking myself *how can I bring joy and service to a stranger today?*

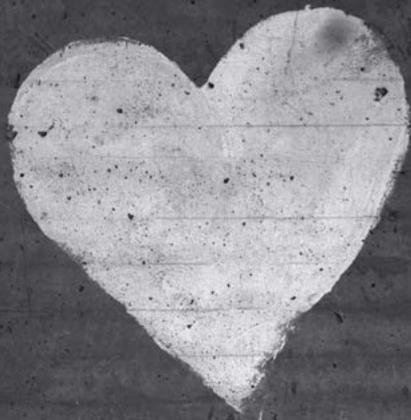
*Father, help me to develop a posture of attentiveness to someone who needs your hospitality today.*



Elaine Cheng

*Owner of social impact business, Food Connections Consulting*





## DAY 10 - SATURDAY, MARCH 12<sup>TH</sup>

*(Matthew 6:21, NIV)*

**"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

I like to think of myself as someone who is spiritually minded. I like to think and live by spiritual principles. I also live in a physical body that has a disconnect with these spiritual principles. I am aware of a struggle that is taking place within myself. There is a danger in living this life and putting too much trust and emphasis on things that we can see and touch. These are indeed necessary items and I believe that God wants us to have what we need and to prosper, yet I want my treasure to be in things that are lasting for eternity.

My heart is where I live and where I make decisions about things that I value and find important. I value a continued and deepening relationship with my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

During these 40 days of Lent, my focus and intention is on spending quality time reflecting on scripture and reading more of Jesus words about faith. I know that God's promises can be counted on as solid ground.

*Lord, thank you for your unfailing promises. Help me to focus my attention on lasting treasures that can never fade or lose their beauty. Amen.*



Ed Grift  
Outreach Worker, Mobile Mission at UGM

## DAY 11 - MONDAY, MARCH 14<sup>TH</sup>

*(Proverbs 31:8, ESV)*

**“Open your mouth for the mute,  
for the rights of all who are destitute”**

Before the words of Proverbs 31 were ever for us to obey, they were first the words spoken to a child-who-would-be-king from his mother. We can imagine the scene: little King Lemuel bouncing on the knee of his mother, hearing these words repeated over and over.

Proverbs 31:1-9 is a picture of what a king should be, and it perfectly prepares us for the coming of King Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel we read that, in Jesus, “the blind receive their sight...lepers are cleansed...the deaf hear...the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matt. 11:5-6).

Kings and people in authority fail us all the time. All of us have, at one point or another, been rejected a fair hearing or trial. But the good news is that King Jesus both sees and hears us. Financial or social status has no bearing on whether he hears our case. King Jesus will always do what is right, just, and true. Our response, then, is simple: to act as ambassadors for this kind of King. When we speak up for the silenced in the name of Jesus, we give witness to a new kind of Kingdom. A Kingdom that will outlast all other kingdoms. A kingdom ruled by the good and just King Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, help us to believe that King Jesus will right every wrong. Give us faith to be his ambassadors of Jesus' good and just kingdom. Amen.*



Jacob LeFave  
Lead Pastor at Christ City Church East Vancouver





## **DAY 12 - TUESDAY, MARCH 15<sup>TH</sup>**

*(Isaiah 1:18, NIV)*

**Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.**

I used to help others when I was asked or when I was made aware of their needs. Only when I became a widow myself, did I learn we can't always tell when someone is in need. Unless someone knew my story, I looked ok. How would anyone know there was so much pain and suffering that lay beneath the surface. Did they know how exhausting it was just to make it through the day? Then when there were additional obstacles, it became so overwhelming that there was no energy left to fight or ask for help. Over the 40 days of Lent, I am seeking to better understand the food insecurity challenges facing our guests so I can advocate on their behalf.

*Lord, please allow my ears to hear and my voice to speak for our guests who cannot because I know you love and provide extra protection for those in need. Amen.*



Sharon Dong  
*Director at Food for Families (CityReach Care Society)*

## DAY 13 - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16<sup>TH</sup>

*(Psalm 140:12, NIV)*

**I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy.**

I'm often haunted by visions. Visions of people I've met and places I've visited.

Line ups of men down countless city blocks in El Alto, Bolivia on a Friday night - paying \$2 to commodify women enslaved in brothels. 6-year-old girls in Sodo, Ethiopia collecting filthy water in Jerry cans rather than being where they should be, in school - all so their families just survive one more day. Convoys of Cambodian women squished like sardines into open-air trucks - 50 per truck. Hundreds of them, on their way to their 16 hour shifts in sweltering textile factories in the Kampong Chhnang region.

*Where is the justice?*

There are many other visions such as these that continue to haunt me. I'm moving from the place of being haunted by them to embracing the transformation within myself that creates advocacy and action.

The crux of this passage exhorts us that God, in all His attributes - is *always* on the side of the oppressed, the afflicted and the wronged. We may not see immediate justice in these areas, but we can be assured it *will* be carried out - in this world or the hereafter. May our visions that haunt each of us, become the transforming agents of change; tethered by a mindful posture of eradicating the injustices we encounter daily.

*Lord, open my eyes to all injustices that surround me and help me to always be on the side of the oppressed, the afflicted, and the wronged. Amen.*



Rob McKinley  
*Manager, Church Relations at UGM*



## DAY 14 - THURSDAY, MARCH 17<sup>TH</sup>

*(Isaiah 58:6, NIV)*

**Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?**

I'm reminded that God's love for the lowly and the destitute is profound. He gave Isaiah these words to respond to Israel's horrific injustice and idolatry. Even their fasting had become corrupt, as it was a grand pious display, when all the while they sought their own pleasure and oppressed the vulnerable. I think these words are needed just as much today, and to make it more personal, they're needed in my life. I too at times have been more concerned with how I'll be perceived by others, or my own selfish gain, than my loyalty to God and truly loving my neighbour.

Throughout Lent, with God's help, I'm committing daily to look for opportunities to be the hands and feet of God that this verse calls for.

*Heavenly Father, help me to be about your business. Daily breathe new life into me I pray, that I may reflect your goodness wherever you lead.*



Cody Dodd  
Manager, Maintenance & Custodial Services at UGM

## DAY 15 - FRIDAY, MARCH 18<sup>TH</sup>

(Mark 12:30-31, NIV)

**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”**

**“With all...”**

Reflection on Mark 12:30-31

“...With all...with all...with all...” these two words echo in me as I read Jesus’ words. They are simple words that I have read before and would have served as a comfort to me in the past. Yet this time, I feel anxious and frustrated - anxious from feeling like I cannot live up to Jesus’ commandments and frustrated that Jesus would ask so much of me when I feel like my “with all” is not worth very much at all.

“What value can I offer to Jesus, or to my neighbour, when I am still learning to accept the limitations of my one broken heart?” But then I think, maybe all I need to hear right now is that my “with all” is in fact enough in His eyes. Perhaps it is enough to offer what I have, no matter how seemingly little, to another. It is no secret to Him that my love is limited, but Jesus has offered Himself, His “with all,” to me first...so that I might be blessed to be a blessing to the people around me.

Over these 40 days of Lent, I’m challenged to ask Jesus what my “with all” looks like to Him in everyday life. Every morning, I am also asking Jesus to help me slow down for long enough to see my neighbour as a special person that He has placed in my path - to listen to, to care for, and to connect with.

*Jesus, I confess that I have been holding back my “with all” out of fear. I often dismiss myself and the gifts I have (tangible and intangible) and as a result have withdrawn my care from others. In this season of Lent, I bring my whole self to you and am open for you transform me from the inside out. Help me to change deeply and to be free to bring my all in loving my neighbours. Amen*



Claudia Ho  
Global Coordinator, Refugee Support at Tenth Church



## DAY 16 - SATURDAY, MARCH 19<sup>TH</sup>

*(1 Samuel 2:8, NIV)*

**“He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and on them he has set the world.”**

What a stunning thing to say! It’s not enough that the One who established the cosmos in all its glory should notice those whom society has tossed onto the garbage pile. For by the same irresistible power and righteous wisdom with which he made and sustains the universe, he lifts the lowliest into the highest places of honor, overturning social structures which seem as unalterable as the Sun. The thought is all the more beautiful and arresting for coming in the middle of Hannah’s Song (which anticipates Mary’s in Luke 1). A few verses earlier we find Hannah so distressed by ridicule for being barren that even her silent prayer (the first silent prayer recorded in Scripture) is misinterpreted by the priest as drunken mumbling – “only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard”. Now, as she presents her son Samuel – living proof that the LORD delivers – to that priest, her voice resounds forever as it offers one of the most stirring poems in the Bible.

*Oh LORD, how many years must I endure until you birth what my heart yearns for yet cannot produce on my own? As I wait for you to answer my prayer, Holy One, Christ my Rock, help me not to dismiss my neighbour’s strange mumblings as intoxication or mental illness, and give me eyes to see that in the mystery of your love even drunken ramblings can become groans your Spirit brings to you with its own “sighs too deep for words.”*



Jonathan Bird  
Church Engagement Specialist at UGM

## DAY 17 - MONDAY, MARCH 21<sup>ST</sup>

*(Proverbs 14:31, NIV)*

**Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.**

How does oppressing the poor lead to contempt with God? What is the correlation?

We rarely call contempt by its actual name. I use words like self-esteem issues, tending to be 'hard on myself', being my own worst critic, or beating myself up. We use contempt to escape feelings of shame, guilt, powerlessness and helplessness to survive experiences that feel God-less. Contempt is the insidious, destructive act of calling something that God calls good less than good. This leads to treating it as such.

Contempt is like the trigger on a pinball machine. Once that trigger hits that ball (our language), it is catapulted, and that ball (spoken or unspoken) will hit everything that dares to get in its path. The inner dialogue and the language we use ping pongs through us and our interactions until the degenerative language leads to acts of oppression as punishment to ourselves and others for being less than.

Contempt travels through us at our own invitation. Jesus, our Gentle Savior, invites us to displace this insidious violent language and see His goodness in ourselves and others.

**Action:** Name one area in your life where you have welcomed self-contempt as a way to mitigate feelings of being less than. Ask the Holy Spirit for fresh eyes to see that area of your life as good and redeemable.

*Gentle Savior, your invitation to me today is to see the contempt that exists in me as dishonouring to you. Help me speak words of honor and kindness to myself and others.*



Adrienne Brown  
Social Enterprise Expansion Advisor at UGM

## DAY 18 - TUESDAY, MARCH 22<sup>ND</sup>

*(Matthew 5:38-39, NIV)*

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.’”**

Arguments and confrontations can lead to violence (so obvious). Often the violence is sudden. A surprise, both to the person who is struck, but also to the person who strikes. Jesus says, “turn to them the other cheek also.” If we follow Jesus’ command literally, then in that moment of holding back a violent response, in the seconds that it takes to pause, a few things can happen.

First, by pausing we demonstrate our trust in Jesus who faced violence like we can’t imagine on our behalf. He knows what we’re going through, and he promises to be with us.

Second, the pause extends grace to the violent person, just like Jesus extends grace to us. As sinners our sin put Jesus on the cross, and he still extends grace to us and forgives us.

Third, the pause lets us consider if we had a role in triggering the violent response. We all know that some people don’t need a reason to be violent and we shouldn’t hang around to be hit, but in many cases, it takes two.

If violence flares up in an argument or confrontation take a moment to turn the other cheek (literally or figuratively) and in that moment pray, “Jesus, help!”.

*Lord Jesus, today would you help me to be a person of peace. Please help me to pause before reacting, and when I do, flow into that space. Amen.*



John Hall  
*Executive Director at Mission Central*



## DAY 19 - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23<sup>RD</sup>

*(Matthew 5:4, NIV)*

**“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”**

This strange blessing can be wrapped up in the word “lament”. Lament is a faithful complaint, an acknowledgement that things aren’t right, but that hope is not lost. Within the promise of God’s blessing it is ok to be sad, to have unmet expectations, to repent, and to flood our beds with weeping. Lament assumes that God hears our cry and that we can receive his help. This is not to say that all our difficulties will be resolved as we think they should. Making *that* empty promise is one of the worst things that we can do. Rather, in the *act* of lament we are given hope and comfort in knowing that Jesus and others are walking alongside us. Lament teaches us that shared pain is somehow eased and shared joy is magnified. Lament is not despair; it is careful observation of a fallen world matched with an appropriate response that includes the possibility of comfort and joy.

Consider sharing something you are lamenting with God and with one other person, and be prepared to hear their lament as well. Pray with each other if you can, making this an offering of love to God and to your neighbour.



Aaron White

*Communities Director at 24-7 Prayer Canada, and also serves at Jacob’s Well, the International Association for Refugees, and Westminster Theological Centre. He is the author of Recovering: From Brokenness and Addiction to Blessedness and Community.*



## DAY 20 - THURSDAY, MARCH 24<sup>TH</sup>

*(Psalm 33:20-22, NIV)*

**We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.**

Among the many things I love about working with people in recovery is learning the hard-earned life lessons our clients teach us. Someone recently told me that to stay sober, we must do three things every day:

1. *Clean house* - you can take this literally, but it also means to own up to your resentments and judgements, and make amends if you hurt someone.
2. *Trust God* - if you are reading this devotional, you probably have a good idea of what it means to trust God **and** you will spend the rest of your life learning to put this into practice in your day-to-day life.
3. *Help someone* - you can lighten the load for others and lift your own spirit when you express love in tangible ways.

This bit of AA wisdom is good advice for living well, even for those who are not on the path towards sobriety, although we can all admit to something we could have a healthier relationship with: perhaps sugar, screen-time, media, and other distractions.

*God, during this season of Lent, as I learn to wait and trust in Your Holy Name, show me where I should clean house today?*



Karan Giesbrecht  
Food Security Coordinator & Dietitian at UGM

## DAY 21 - FRIDAY, MARCH 25<sup>TH</sup>

*(Matthew 5:6, NIV)*

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."**

My super pregnant wife had insatiable hunger cravings. Did you know that it can be a challenge finding pho (Vietnamese soup) after 2:30am? This was before smartphones, so I drove to every pho place I knew of. Finally, we found what we were looking for on Hastings near Main in Vancouver just before 4am closing time. Words cannot describe how satisfied my wife was when she ingested the object of her intense desire, coupled with my satisfaction of seeing the love of my life being *filled*.

Do I hunger and thirst for things to be *right and acceptable* in the eyes of God? Sometimes, like when I slow down to build relationships with refugees seeking protection in Canada. Sometimes not, like when my selfish appetite drives the way I spend my time, it exceeds my passion for God's kingdom of *right living* where everyone is treated like we like to be treated. It is in these moments that Father God is faithful to remind me that my selfishness does not produce the righteousness that God desires in me. It is not *right and acceptable* to exclude newcomers from our communities. May our cravings be influenced by God's outrageous love for foreigners, outsiders, and refugees. Ask God to bring an outsider into your life today.

*Thank you, God, that you love me so much that you are moving me away from my insecurities and selfishness, and moving me towards hungering and thirsting for you, and for your righteous ways to be known on earth as it is in heaven. It is in Jesus' name we believe and pray, Amen.*



Patrick Elashuk  
*Pastor of International Missions at Tenth Church*





## DAY 22 - SATURDAY, MARCH 26<sup>TH</sup>

*(Job 11:18, NIV)*

**You will be secure, because there is hope; You will look about you and take your rest in safety.**

Lent is a time to attune ourselves to the places where the Kingdom of God has not yet fully come into being. It is a time of longing but also hope for what could be. I always feel hesitant to admit my longings and hopes because it feels so vulnerable to vocalize things that might not come to pass. If I don't say it, then I can avoid disappointment. But that is a numbing response and not compatible with a full and meaningful life.

When we rest, we come to an opportunity to slow down, enjoy what we have accomplished, and delight in who we are. I find rest difficult. Not working on the other hand, is not difficult at all. Unfortunately, those two are not the same. Rest requires me to not seek accomplishment, affirmation, entertainment, or escape. It requires me to simply be present with myself, warts and all.

As I consider our friends that struggle with housing, I am reminded of how there is not always a safe place for them to rest.

During this season of Lent, would you consider choosing to put down your phone after 8 pm and rest?

*Lord, may you give us the courage and discipline to face ourselves as we rest.*



Leslie Rosenau-Lai  
Church Relations Advisor at UGM

## DAY 23 - MONDAY, MARCH 28<sup>TH</sup>

*(Matthew 25:40, NIV)*

**The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'**

When I first came to UGM, I thought I understood the context of this verse. I believed that it was all about serving the poor, standing up for social justice and caring for Humanity as brothers and sisters. Over the years I have come to learn that there are several different interpretations of who is meant by "the least of these". Most Christians would read it to refer to the poor and those in need; others interpret it to refer to Christ-followers and others might refer it to mean Matthews' intended Jewish audience. After nearly 17 years of working at UGM, I now read this verse with an "eternal view". Either interpretation leads us to the ultimate end - that there is judgement for our actions or lack of actions.

The truth is that whatever we've done for the "least of these" we have done to Jesus. Our service, my service is to Christ alone. May it be so.

*I encourage you to look up the lyrics to: In Christ Alone and let it be your prayer during this season of Lent.*



Rob Thompson  
*Director of Housing & Support Services at UGM*





## DAY 24 - TUESDAY, MARCH 29<sup>TH</sup>

*(John 15:12-13, NLT)*

**This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.**

Love others like God loves us. That is a high bar! God pursued us, sees beyond our behavior, and fiercely keeps loving us. He loves when we do not love back. Can we love others like that?

God leaves no wiggle room for compromise on this primary command to love. We must love those we do not like, and those who do not like us. Sometimes loving well means maintaining healthy boundaries or holding God's perspective toward the other.

Loving like *this* is easier with people I meet in passing. It is harder with those closest to me - who experience me when I am tired or frustrated. Intimate relationships do not create problems, they *reveal* them. My closest friends are a mirror, showing me how consistently I care. Jesus invites us to love by laying down our lives. Most of us will not be required to physically give our lives, but in my community house of friends, especially through this season of Lent, I am challenged to love in ways that sacrifice my preferences, opinions, and rights. This is rarely easy!

*God, help me keep rehearsing the truths that inform my life: You are love, and to live well is to love well.*



Karen Reed

*Seeking to be a good neighbour in East Van*

## DAY 25 - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30<sup>TH</sup>

*(Luke 6:35, NIV)*

**But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.**

This verse is one of the summary statements in the Sermon on the Plain, Luke's alternative to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, which makes it one of the high points in Luke-Acts, a distillation of the gospel. Yet it seems hard news to be commanded to give so one-sidedly and without limit! Especially in the context of addiction, mental illness, trauma, and systemic deprivation.

Are the children of God to be consoled that our reward will be great "in heaven" (v.23) once the End comes to our self sacrifice? No! For the Kingdom of God comes near to us even now (Lk 10:9-11), as we hear and act on Jesus's words (v.47): in the face of all that floods against us (v.48), we become like a "well-watered garden ... a spring whose waters never fail" filling up the hungry and oppressed (Isaiah 58:10).

*Jesus, thank you for continually filling us with your Spirit. May your grace overflow our limitations and bring life new life in our midst.*



Jonathan Bird  
*Church Engagement Specialist at UGM*





## DAY 26 - THURSDAY, MARCH 31<sup>ST</sup>

*(Amos 5:24, NIV)*

**“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”**

As I read this scripture I am reminded that justice and righteousness are meant to be a part of who we are and woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. Into our words, our thoughts, our time... I often can be so caught up in what is happening in my world, that I forget that my life is meant to be poured out as an offering. A life directed by the things that are closest to God's heart. Loving those around me and unceasingly moving toward justice with the guidance and blessing of God's righteousness.

I need to begin to pause in the moments that I feel overwhelmed by my own struggles and ask God to show me where I can invest and work toward justice in the lives of those around me. During this Lent season I am writing down at least one thing per day that I can tangibly do to work toward seeing justice and righteous flow in and through me.

*Lord, help me to get outside of my own needs and struggles so that I can be a vessel for you to flow through as You break down barriers and injustice for my neighbours. Help me to see your heart for others far more than I see myself. Amen.*



Tara McDonald  
Senior Manager, Women's Recovery & Housing at UGM

## DAY 27 - FRIDAY, APRIL 1<sup>ST</sup>

*(Romans 12:1, NIV)*

**“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”**

This is an astounding *invitation*. When we read through Romans Paul has shown us how before we wanted or recognised our need for God’s love, he was patiently and generously reaching out to us. Then he *purchased* us and gave Himself to us in the person of His Sacred Spirit! Now our Holy and Almighty God accepts, even calls us to use our very bodies and minds as vehicles and expressions of worship.

So often we struggle with our failures. Can we now receive this invitation with worship manifested in our chosen thoughts and behaviors... and receive the blessing of Grace - amazing us!

*Lord, I kneel and offer myself, body and mind. All and everything I am.*



Jack Wagner  
*Counsellor, Men's Recovery at UGM*





## DAY 28 - SATURDAY, APRIL 2<sup>ND</sup>

*(Leviticus 9:15, NIV)*

**Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.**

I strive to be a person who advocates for - and lives my life through the lenses of justice. And yet, I simply cannot *will* this to be. I have blind spots. Many of them. I also lack wisdom. The type of wisdom only that the Living Christ can provide. I show (and have shown) partiality when I'm self-absorbed, when my eyes are on myself. I show favouritism when I want or need something. I know I can do much better.

Over these 40 days of Lent, I'm undertaking intentional actions to level the playing field. Each day, I'm committed to engaging in at least one conversation with someone who has greater material needs than I - and am spending 10 minutes in daily meditation to search myself on the ways I convey favouritism. When I'm tempted to do so, I ask the question, "*What's my motivation behind this?*" then ask for God's help in changing my heart to reflect His.

*Lord, conform me to be more like you I pray. Make my time on this earth one that reflects your heart of justice and kindness to my neighbours. Amen.*



Rob McKinley  
Manager, Church Relations at UGM

## DAY 29 - MONDAY, APRIL 4<sup>TH</sup>

(Matthew 5:14-16, NIV)

**“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

In western culture, we often use the word “vocation” synonymously with our job or career. We talk about someone having a vocation as a teacher or plumber – and so they may. When Jesus spoke about his people’s vocation, however, he focused on their *larger purpose*, their overall calling to bear witness to the image of God.

In this passage, he challenges the common conception of their vocation as the nation who comes out on top through violence. Instead, Jesus offers a vocation to be light on a hill that dispels light... and salt that preserves all that is good. This is how people would see God *through* them.

When you think of your vocation, do you think of your calling to dispel darkness and preserve all that is good? How might you live into your vocation, personally and as a community?

I want to suggest two practices I have found meaningful for this Covid-laden Lent:

1. Knock on your neighbor’s door and ask how they are doing. Please do this (within proper protocols of course)! Just getting someone who is isolated to open the door and talk with another person will let in some light.
2. Take a moment each day to commend and bless one person who is doing good. Blessing is a divine act that preserves the goodness of our world.

*Grant me the creativity to be light and salt this Lent, especially in a time of isolation.*



Tim Dickau

*Director of Citygate and teaches as an associate at the Center for Missional Leadership at St. Andrew’s Hall*

## DAY 30 - TUESDAY, APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>

*(Psalm 139:23-24, NIV)*

**Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**

This prayer invites God into our inner places – those filled with anxieties, doubts, stillness, pain, vulnerabilities, yearnings, heartbreak and joy. As we invite the Spirit to travel with us on our journey inward, our discovery will undoubtedly reveal truths about us that are difficult to admit. Yet, the call has always been to repentance, to change our ways when we sin. Some of the most embedded messages about ourselves and others come from our first families.

Growing up, the urban poor were used as examples to shame me into a stronger work ethic, underlined by the false belief that the poor deserved their lot due to their own shortcomings. This would then further compound into racist beliefs about Indigenous people as we would see a disproportionate number of them amongst the urban poor. This was undergirded by the hidden desire to be like white people (who caused much of their generational trauma), as the places of power were often found with them. My parents' experience of Britain's colonization of Hong Kong played a large role in shaping that racism and the belief of white supremacy, which I am working to dismantle in my own life.

What are the racist beliefs that you have learned in your life? How can you admit them and repent by dispelling those lies in others?

*Spirit, lead me to honest and courageous reflection, so that I can see clearly and repent of the things that are not of your way. Help me to recognize the humanity in every person, so that reconciliation can truly begin.*



Leslie Rosenau-Lai  
Church Relations Advisor at UGM

## DAY 31 - WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6<sup>TH</sup>

*(Deuteronomy 15:11, NIV)*

**“For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.”**

As I explore this scripture, the message rings true throughout history. God created us to live in harmony, to love our neighbours and our enemies, as He first loved us. He instructed Moses to share with the Israelites his commands. God called them to open their hands to their brothers and sisters. If we read the scripture directly prior He says: *“Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.”* I find that throughout my day, as I bless others with food, clothing, love, empathy and compassion, He blesses me in return. When given the opportunity to pray with individuals, I feel the presence of God with us. I know that what I am doing comes from God and it brings me much joy to be doing what He has called me to do.

God came to earth in human form and walked among us, to teach us how to love and serve one another. He spent his time in fellowship, mostly with the marginalized - sharing the Word of God. He also came to reveal his likeness; showing us His love and how He desires to have an intimate relationship with us.

As I walk through Lent, I am opening my hands to find more ways in offering love and support to my neighbour. I am turning off the television for a week and spending more time in prayer and reading the Bible. I am blessed and thank God every day, that He has called me to minister to the vulnerable in our community.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you that you love us so much that you sent your son to show us what it means to open our hands wide and to help the needy and the poor in our communities. Thank you for your unfailing love for us. During Lent, we pray for opportunities to share the gospel and to plant seeds of hope in lives that desperately need you. We pray that you will provide opportunities for us to give generously and to love our neighbours - much more than we love ourselves. Amen.*



Shelley Stout  
Outreach Worker, Fraser Valley Mobile Mission at UGM



## DAY 32 - THURSDAY, APRIL 7<sup>TH</sup>

*(Romans 12:12, NIV)*

**“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”**

Often when faced with a challenging or unprecedented situation, I respond emotionally and automatically, many times in ways that don't consider the impact on those around me. Of course, I have the freedom to respond in ways that reflect how I feel, but I don't think I've ever given much thought to how my responses or reactions could actually be selfish or negatively influence others.

Over these days of Lent, instead of reacting with complaints, impatience, venting, or worrying, I am trying very practically, to put into practice what Paul charges to the church of Rome. When faced with the unexpected, I will love those around me well by choosing to have joy and be *hopeful*, being *patient* and waiting, and *faithfully* engaging God in prayer.

*Abba, would you work in my heart, so that my responses to situations reflect Yours. Instead of making a show of my 'right reactions' before others to get attention or affirmation, may my actions, responses, and disposition instead encourage and uplift my neighbour. Amen.*



Rachael Allen

*Executive Coordinator/Communications Curator at UGM*

## DAY 33 – FRIDAY, APRIL 8<sup>TH</sup>

*(1 John 3:18, NIV)*

**“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”**

John begins this sentence as if he is speaking to little children. As a grown man, I might take offence. I don't appreciate being talked to like I am a little boy because it is humiliating, and even a blow to my self-image... my ego. Yet, in life, how many times have I still been trying to deal with things in an emotionally immature way? Often, the best way to talk to me is to talk to me as if I were six years old. Then I would understand.

John is addressing children in this verse, but its application is for all: children, young people, and adults. The truth of God is so elementary that children can receive it. And if a child can understand it, surely an adult such as myself can as well. The message is simple: love cannot be merely talk. There must be some action. Love is demonstrated through behaviour or, as John puts it, “in deed.”

If all I ever did was talk about love, would there be any truth to back up what I'm saying? During this season of Lent, I am purposely giving up my opportunities to be heard and understood so that I can allow someone else an opportunity to be heard and understood.

*Lord, thank you for the opportunity to learn about what love is and thank you for demonstrating just how far you were willing to go to prove how much you love us. Help me to appreciate truth and to receive instruction in a childlike manner so that I can obediently follow what you have revealed is your will from your Word.*



Andrew William John Funston  
*Outreach Worker, Hastings Chaplaincy & Outreach at UGM*

## DAY 34 – SATURDAY, APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup>

*(Matthew 18:2-5, NIV)*

**“He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”**

As the son of a youth pastor, I heard this verse fairly often while I was growing up. It was somehow always given a happy spin. Children have value and we should give them central roles in our worship service: children’s story time at the front of sanctuary before being dismissed to Sunday School, reading out the Scripture before the sermon, rotating duty as ushers, maybe even performing “special music” during the offering. Faith means having childlike wonder at and trust in God, and also being patient and (above all) obedient.

Although these interpretations and applications may be correct, they miss the harsh rebuke Jesus is making and the difficult path of discipleship he’s calling us to. I’ve done pretty well becoming an adult by my culture’s reckoning. I’ve climbed out of ignorance by getting three degrees. I’ve become financially independent. I’ve left the insular community of my upbringing and fashioned an identity of my own within a cosmopolitan foreign city. I’m a husband and father.

But Jesus is telling me I can’t enter his Kingdom by these means? I want to be an adult, not a child! I get that I’d be healthier if I let go of my pretensions of competency and self-sufficiency, yet therapy is showing me just how much harm I experienced as a child. God, you want me to be vulnerable like that again?! To submit myself to authorities? To accept that you can make me whole and holy only to the extent I allow my identity to be shaped by an adoptive church family?

*Jesus, help me to let go of my false maturity. Help me to become healthily dependent and safely trusting.*



Jonathan Bird  
*Church Engagement Specialist at UGM*



## **DAY 35 - MONDAY, APRIL 11<sup>TH</sup>**

*(Psalm 27:14, NIV)*

**Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.**

I recently had to do a medical test which required that I have nothing to eat or drink for a day. I often review the symptoms of dehydration with clients, or anyone around me who mentions that they have a headache or feel sluggish. When we are in a particularly heavy season, or just having a hard day, we can forget basic self-care practices like hydrating, which then amplifies any challenge we face.

On the day of my medical test, when I had to sit through most of a day before I could even sip some water, I struggled. Although I knew that consuming anything would lead to serious nausea later that evening, it was still hard. I was even tempted to steal a few ice-chips from someone else in the clinic. And I must admit that it was not my willpower that kept me from drinking something that day. If the care staff tending to me had not been so diligent, I would have caved. But I did manage to wait. And rarely have I ever enjoyed anything as much as that first glass of water after my test.

*God, give us Your heart, and the willpower, and the community support we need to wait when necessary, so we can really savour the gifts You have for us in Your good time.*



Karan Giesbrecht  
Food Security Coordinator & Dietitian at UGM



## DAY 36 - TUESDAY, APRIL 12<sup>TH</sup>

*(Psalm 62:5, NIV)*

**For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.**

When you meet me, after learning my name, my love of food will become quickly apparent. Being from Hong Kong, it's something of a cultural centerpiece. When I am eating with my Chinese family, it's common to discuss how good the current meal is along with reminiscing about past meals and planning future ones. I come from a lot of privilege when it comes to food as I have never had to worry about my next meal and a diverse array of food has always been available to me.

I find it overwhelming when considering the many ways that the issue of food affects people locally and globally. It's hard to picture being silent while waiting for these injustices to be addressed. Yet, that is exactly the place that I find myself all too often. My voice becomes small when my hope is to be accepted by others.

Waiting in silence before God typically clarifies His voice and gives me the conviction to speak up. My hope of acceptance then slowly shifts away from friends and family and towards Jesus.

During this Lenten season, I am fasting from meat, which inevitably gives me the opportunity to speak about how food insecurity affects so many people.

*Spirit, help us to silence our appetites, hearts and minds so that we may hear your leading in how we should speak up.*



Leslie Rosenau-Lai  
Church Relations Advisor at UGM

## DAY 37 - WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13<sup>TH</sup>

*(James 2:14-17, NIV)*

**What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."**

In this passage, James highlights the ineffectiveness of faith without corresponding action and calls us to whole faith. "Go in peace" was a typical expression of the Jews. In a similar situation today, we might end a conversation by saying, "God bless you" or "I'll pray for you." As Jesus demonstrated in His earthly ministry, whole faith embraces the complete self answering to the complete needs of others.

Whole faith makes room to present our physical and spiritual selves to God. In turn, we demonstrate in our interactions that God loves all of what makes us fully human.

Action: We all tend to be more apt at answering either spiritual or physical needs. Which one are you more bent towards? When you respond on your preferred side this week, be mindful of the whole person and aim to incorporate both in your response.

*Lord, I bring my whole self to you today. Guide me, Holy Spirit, to come into an awareness of areas of my being that I have yet to surrender to you.*



Adrienne Brown  
Social Enterprise Expansion Advisor at UGM





## DAY 38 - THURSDAY, APRIL 14<sup>TH</sup>

(Micah 6:8, NIV)

**He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly, and to love mercy  
And to walk humbly with your God**

Can justice and mercy co-exist? Our hunger for vindication is only matched by our plea for forgiveness - depending on if we are the *recipient* (justice) or *perpetrator* (mercy) of said injustice. Only within the humility of the Risen Christ can true justice and mercy co-exist.

During my travels, I've chatted with gang members in Brazil who had been recruited by the age of 13. They discovered redemptive, empowering work in a meaningful graffiti program through a church collective. They now beautify neighbourhoods with their art.

I've worked with people advocating for young teenage girls caught in the overwhelming epidemic of human trafficking and prostitution in Cambodia, Bolivia, and the Philippines - all of them, ever resilient in their praxis of mission. Many victims are now helping other vulnerable girls through creative social enterprise initiatives that empower women who have been trafficked - spiritually, economically, and emotionally while their restoring God given dignity.



I've been awed by the radiating faces of conservation agriculture farmers in Ethiopia holding a taro root - as proud as if it were their newborn child. These practices have given new leases on life for families facing dire circumstances of extreme poverty. Indescribable joy in sharing both their practices and crops to others - all while facing community, cultural, and political challenges.

The common denominators amidst these unjust circumstances?

- *Justice* has power when ideas that are aligned to God's nature are brought to life
- *Mercy* comes alive through the above definition of justice
- Justice and mercy are woven through the keystone of Micah 6:8 - *Humility*

This is the humility as defined to us in Philippians 2:5, '*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ, Jesus*'. Not the same mindset as a political party, my neighbour, or a particular ideology... the same mindset as Jesus. Only Jesus.

*Lord, help me give up my own 'truths' for your Truth and be your ambassador in every moment - clothed in your justice, your mercy, and your humility. Amen.*



Rob McKinley  
Manager, Church Relations at UGM



## DAY 39 - FRIDAY, APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup>

*(John 13:34-35, NIV)*

**A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**

In his last address to his disciples before his death, Jesus gave a striking "acid test" description of how a watching world would know that we were truly his disciples. This acid test was not determined by our *love for the world*, but rather, by our *love for one another*.

I would like to offer that the best way that we can love our neighbours in this city is by loving each other in the family of faith. Of course, it is not "either/or," but too often, we have attempted the former without the latter, and both are needed. Perhaps, it's like saying that the best way parents can love their children is by loving each other, creating a secure place for the children. In the same way, by loving each other as disciples of Jesus, we create a "house of love," where people who are alienated and estranged feel safe to "come home."

Of course, this is easier said than done. It's easier to "love" people we agree with, but what if we disagree? Every generation of disciples has



grappled with profound disagreements, often resulting in bitter divisions. Yet, it is possible to *disagree lovingly*. The early church experienced fierce disagreements, but it was said of them, “Behold how they love one another...”

Here in our own city, there is a remarkable diversity among disciples of Jesus, theologically, demographically and culturally. What if this Lent, in a world that is increasingly divided over culture wars, politics, and now issues around the Covid pandemic, we chose to go a better way? Without minimizing the issues at stake, what if we chose to pray for, and refuse to speak evil of those with whom we disagree, knowing how much Christ has first loved us? If Jesus commanded us to do this for our enemies, how can we not do this for one another? In so doing, we are truly loving our neighbours.

*Lord, you have loved us eternally and unconditionally in spite of our sins and failings. Now, make us instruments of that same love towards one another in the family of faith, that we may be a gift of love and reconciliation from your heart to a divided and broken world. Amen.*



Gordie Lagore  
Lead Pastor of Vancouver Eastside Vineyard Church

## DAY 40 - SATURDAY, APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup>

*(Zechariah 7:9, NIV)*

**This is what the Lord Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.'**

Justice, mercy and compassion. This verse reveals the heart of God. His Spirit empowers and His Word teaches us to love our neighbor and show compassion to the last, the least, and the lost. Christ Himself saw the harassed and helpless crowds and had compassion on them. The definition of compassion is to "suffer with" and as a follower I must remember, God has called me to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for me. He is my example of enduring love and obedience, and I must follow in His steps.

Whatever Lent practices you may have chosen this year, think about how they help you to draw close to Jesus. Whether you gave some things up or adopted new spiritual disciplines into your life, let them stem from God's Word and a place of adoration and worship of the Lord Almighty.

*May the Lord help us to draw ever near to Him and be moved by the suffering of the poor, marginalized and lost.*



Fari Maghami

*Assistant Pastor & Eden Ministries at Coastal Church*



Union Gospel Mission has been feeding hope and changing the lives of men, women, and children for over 80 years. Through its seven locations in Metro Vancouver and the City of Mission, UGM provides outreach, meals, alcohol and drug recovery, and housing to those struggling with poverty, homelessness, and addiction. The heart of the mission is to demonstrate God's transforming love, ease the burden of the most vulnerable, rebuild the lives of the broken, and offer dignity to those who feel cast aside.

**TO FIND OUT MORE, VISIT [UGM.CA](http://UGM.CA)**



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*Union Gospel Mission acknowledges with humble gratitude that our sites are located on the traditional unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Kwantlen, Qayqayt and the Sto:lo First Nations*