

Love

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

~ John 13:34

"And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

~ 1 Corinthians 13:13

January 2026

Lexington United Methodist Church

Where We Seek, Serve and Share Christ

www.lexmoumc.org

Office: 660-259-2483

Rev. Andrew Sanders, Pastor
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417-770-6731 (cell)

Liz Johnson,
Administrative Assistant
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Janet Thompson,
Music Director

Sarah Black,
Council Chair

Sunday worship: 11 a.m.
Children's Sunday School: 10 a.m.
Adult Sunday School: On hiatus
Young Couples Class: 10 a.m.
Youth Group: Sundays 6 p.m.
Worshiping Winds Rehearsal:
Sundays, 9:30 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal: Sundays 10 a.m.



Christ is working within us With love, grace, compassion

Greetings to you and warm prayers as we begin this year with excitement and energy that is pulsating through our church! I am grateful and encouraged as people continue stepping forward in response to the Holy Spirit's prompting.

<https://share.google/b4zCXXi6MUsBsrj0z>



Rev. Andrew Sanders

We celebrate **Jacob Lamb** and **Shawn Hodgeman** as we witness their growth as disciples and look forward to how God continues cultivating their path in discipleship.

Shawn is actively discerning where God may be leading him by taking lay leadership classes through our Missouri Conference Absorb Learning Platform. If you would like to explore the many opportunities available for lay training, please visit the Absorb Learning Platform here:

A heartfelt thank you, to **Chelsea Huffman** for joining our Kids Time Team. Chelsea shared a wonderful lesson using Jesus' teaching about a dirty cup, reminding our littlest disciples that when we follow Christ, we are made clean from the inside out. (photo on the back page of this newsletter.)

Jesus teaches, *"First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean,"* from Matthew 23:26.

That message is not just for children. It is for the whole church. As Christ works within us, that inner transformation becomes visible through lives marked by love, grace, and compassion. What

Pastor continued on page 3

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sundays: Worshiping Winds rehearsal
9:30 a.m.

Choir Rehearsal: 10 a.m.

Sundays at 10 a.m.: Adult Sunday School with Liz Johnson, facilitator. On hiatus until February 22 (beginning Lenten study). Feb. 22nd Lenten study is: "Why Did Jesus Have to Die?" by Adam Hamilton. Books available now—8 spots open. Sign-up sheet is in the hallway.

Sundays at 10 a.m.: Children's Sunday School with Donna Slusher & Katie Dye.

Sundays at 10 a.m.: Young Couples Class, "A Disciples Path: A Guide for United Methodists" by James Hamish, with Sarah Black, facilitator—open to all ages.

BABY GRACE: Call for diaper needs: Lauren Negrete—660-251-8109 or Jen Coen—660-232-4190.

Mondays: Quilters at 1 p.m.

HARVESTERS DISTRIBUTION: Monday, February 9, 9 to 11 a.m.

YOUTH GROUP: Sundays at 6 p.m.

WOMEN OF THE CHURCH MEET: Friday, February 13, at Noon for carry-in meal in the Choir Room.

CHURCH COUNCIL TEAM MEETING: Monday, February 16, 6 p.m.

ASH WEDNESDAY: Feb. 18. Service is at 5:30 p.m. and is the beginning of Lent.

COMMODITIES: Thursday, February 26, 8:30 to 11 a.m.



February 1	Tucker Herbst
February 7	Debbie Hatfield
February 11	Seth Seitz
February 13	Lyndsay Reynolds
February 24	Mylan Huffman

*Did we miss your birthday? Please reach out to Liz Johnson in the church office: 660-259-2483 to let her know of a missed birthday.

**If you're on Facebook, visit <https://www.facebook.com/LexMOUMC> where we have announcements, photos, and events as well as birthday wishes!

Church COUNCIL

Liz Johnson | Secretary

Present: Rev. Andrew Sanders, pastor; Sarah Black, chairman; Liz Johnson, secretary/finance secretary; Roger McFadden, trustee chair, Thomas Rowland; Janae Fuller, finance co-chair, Sharol McMullin, Memorials; Pam Johnson, Nominations team; Scott Slusher, finance; Phillip Davis, PPR; Jim Martin, PPR chair; Cheryl Cooley, PPR; Jennifer Coen, Baby Grace; Jacob Lamb, Shawn Hodgeman, Lay Leader candidate; Teri James, treasurer; Steven Fuller, Lay Member to Annual Conference (via phone).

Pastor Andrew opened the meeting with prayer.

Sarah introduced the new council members.

Pastor Andrew | Spiritual Development. Pastor read from Acts 8 which describes the early church's expansion, persecution, believers scattering and spreading of the Gospel.

Pastor Andrew | Leadership Development: Jacob Lamb and Shawn Hodgeman joined the church on January 11th. Shawn has found a calling to the ministry and will be taking UMC lay leadership classes and exploring his calling. Pastor Andrew also talked about two lady visitors we had on January 18th and who came to sew with the quilters group on Monday and have let it be known they would return.

Finance Team: Phillip moved, seconded by Sharol to accept the December/end of year 2025 finance report – so passed. Teri said the last 3 months of 2025 were better than the previous part of the year. She noted that we paid 50% of the total 2025 apportionments and returned \$2,000 of the more than \$7,000 we had borrowed from savings (to pay bills) – after a successful March to the Manger on December 24th.

Baby Grace | Jennifer Coen: Lauren

Negrete has stepped back from running Baby Grace to work administratively, while **Jen Coen** will handle the other operations of the ministry. Jordyn Ortega has volunteered to assist with distribution days. Jen said they need to clean out the Baby Grace room – getting rid of items they will no longer carry, are broken, unusable or dirty. She would like to set a time to have volunteers and to reorganize the room once they've cleaned out unusable items. She would like to establish policies for Baby Grace, including yearly paperwork, records, determine who can pick up for other families, etc. She would like to stop opening Baby Grace on Sundays from 10 to 11 a.m. which has not been working out. She read off a list of items Baby Grace will only accept for donations – Liz J will get this out on Facebook, the newsletter, the weekly Thursday email and other areas. Also – we are not accepting ANY donations at this time. When we do begin accepting donations again, we will post a sign to "please coordinate drop-offs/donations" with the church office or "**Jennifer Coen.**" *We will no longer accept the following: Blankets, Socks unless they're new, Toys, Books, No stuffed animals or soft toys, Breast pumps, Used Under Pants, Jarred Baby Food (we will accept baby formula), Cribs, Car Seats, and Pack 'n Plays.*

Once Baby Grace has moved out the old furniture and reorganized its room, we will move onto a second phase of establishing policies and new hours of operation.

Youth | Pastor Andrew: We are going to have a lock-in and eventual move down to the WELL for the youth. We also would like to have folks volunteer for a Sunday night meal for the youth, or contribute to a donation fund of approximately \$25 to go toward a Sunday night meal. Currently, we have 5 to 9 youth attending on Sunday nights.

Trustees | Roger: He has, this week, cleaned out the lights throughout the church and changed filters.

Regarding the thermostats and FLC

Council continued on page 3

Pastor... continued from pg. 1

God is forming within us is meant to be reflected outward into the world.

This month, we will explore the different kinds of love found in Scripture. Join us each Sunday as we pray for our nation, pray for our leaders, pray for our town, and pray that as a church we reflect the Spirit of Christ in love to the world.

Scripture reminds us, *“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God,”* from 1 John 4:7.

Our hearts also break when any life is lost. We hold in prayer all those who have been affected by the destruction of lives in Minneapolis. We lift up every person involved, every family grieving, every community shaken, and every heart searching for healing. In moments like these, we turn again to prayer and action asking that God’s justice, mercy,

and peace would prevail, and that love would guide our response rather than fear or indifference.

When things go awry, and they do as we are reminded daily by the news, we are tempted to respond the way the world responds. But Christ is love. To act indifferent toward one another is to push Christ aside in favor of something less. Friends, that is not true love. Jesus is clear when he says, *“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another,”* from John 13:34.

Our sermon series this month will grow us together as we learn how to walk with one another through **PHILIA** love, rooted in friendship and shared life, **STORGE** love, formed through family and deep belonging, and **AGAPE** love, which is self giving and sacrificial. We will end by reflecting on the unconditional love of God, the love that meets

us in our brokenness, restores what has been wounded, and calls us to live as people shaped by grace.

In response to what we have been given, we are called to share that same unconditional love, the love that saw humanity’s brokenness could not be healed by law alone, and so God gifted us Jesus Christ!

Scripture proclaims, *“But God proves love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us,”* from Romans 5:8.

Through grace, Christ’s sacrificial love restores what was broken.

Let us take with us these words found in 1 Corinthians 13:13, *“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”*

Let us bathe in the righteous love God has placed upon us, a calm and steadfast love that overcomes evil, injustice, and oppression. May we always choose to respond in love.

Council Cont’d from page 2

heaters: Steven will check with Curt regarding the FLC thermostats. One of them ran 21 hours in January with no one renting the facility with the exception of Commodities using it the fourth Thursday of the month. Currently, it is the southwest thermostat that runs colder than the northeast thermostat, therefore it runs more frequently. Both are set at 62 degrees. We will be getting the new thermostats installed soon for the rest of the church building.

PPR | Jim Martin: We are interviewing applicants for the open Nursery position. The pay is \$10/hour.

Ride Share: Sarah said that Karen Yates is now in need of rides to and from church. Shirley Link has let it be known that she would like to attend, too, and needs a ride. A sign-up sheet for drivers will be set up in the hallway outside the sanctuary. **Scott Slusher and Janae Fuller** have already indicated they’re happy to provide rides.

Quilters | Sharol: The quilters took 10 sleeping bags and a carload of stuff to City Union Mission who told them that we are their best source for sleeping

bags – which always contain extras such as socks, sweatshirts, devotionals, toiletries and other necessities. The Lazarus Ministries Group received a recent donation of sleeping bags and clothing, too, and said we are also one of their best sources.

Women’s Club: Sarah said that they are working on increasing membership/attendance this year.

Blessing Box | Shawn Hodgeman: Shawn and Jacob have talked with Pastor Andrew about getting a Blessing Box built and installed on the church property. There is a blessing box at the other end of town but no resource at our end of town. We asked for Shawn to get the dimensions for the blessing box and we will then get the building materials and request congregants to donate nonperishable food items. We will need volunteers to maintain the blessing box.

Coat donations: It was mentioned that having a coat drive would be a good idea, suggested by Kathryn Roberts via Shawn and Jacob, to give out to those in need. Liz J suggested we could have people purchase new coats as they go on sale at the end of the season, store in the coat room and give out on a needed basis.

Leadership Covenant: Sarah asked Andrew to think about a 2026 Leadership Covenant for the February meeting.

Children’s Sunday School: Scott said with two adults in Donna’s classroom, the class could be split into two classes (by age).

The January meeting was adjourned.

The February Meeting will be Monday, February 16, 6 p.m.

We now have a way to digitally tithe to Lexington UMC via PayPal. Simply visit our website: lexmoumc.org and click on DONATE in the upper right menu.



You do not need to be a PayPal member to tithe a gift. Just follow the prompts after clicking “Donate.” You can even choose to tithe, or gift to the Memorial fund or Endowment. You can also scan this QR code to be directed to our website.



Lexington United Methodist Church
1211 South Business Highway 13
Lexington, MO 64067

First
Class
Stamp

WORSHIP: Sundays 11 a.m.

Children's Sunday School is 10 a.m.

Young Couple's Class: 10 a.m.

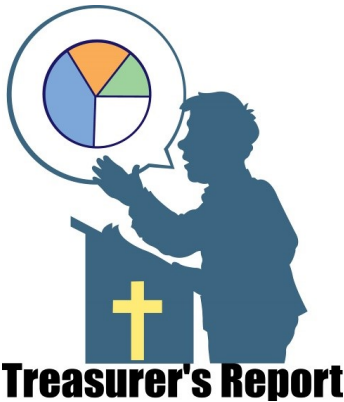
**Adult Sunday School: 10 a.m. On hiatus
until February 22nd.**

Choir Rehearsal: 10 a.m.

Worshiping Winds Rehearsal: 9:30 a.m.

ONLINE: lexmoumc.org

JAN.: 2025



Treasurer's Report

January Offering: \$ 7,499.00
Jan. Expenses: -\$15,137.21
Total (tithe) -\$ 7,638.21
Year to Date (as of 1/31): -\$ 7,638.21
****January full finance report is not available at
press time.**
*Avg. Expenses 2025 \$ 13,641.00 (per month)
Building Rentals Jan.: \$ 675.00
In January quarterly taxes are due as are MO taxes.

Teri James: Treasurer

Liz Johnson: Finance Secretary

Janae Fuller, Mary Kate Alkire: 2026 Finance
Co-Chairs

Sarah Black: 2026 Council Chair

Jim Martin: 2026 PPR Chair

Pastor: Rev. Andrew Sanders

*"Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he
shares his bread with the poor." ~ Proverbs 22:9*



LENT BEGINS
ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

5:30
P.M.



CHILDREN'S TIME
A hearty welcome
and thank you to
Chelsea Huffman,
at left, presenting
her first Children's
Moment on Jan.
18th. We are happy
to have you join
our Children's
Ministry team!

Sunday, February 1, 2026

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

The Beatitudes paint a comprehensive portrait of a Christian disciple. They describe what we are, not what we do. —John Stott

Do you feel blessed? I hope so, because it's a wonderful thing to feel blessed. Not just lucky. Not just fortunate. Blessed. That deep sense that your life, with all its imperfections, is somehow caught up in grace. That you're not just existing — you're living with purpose, held by something greater than yourself.

Every year, global studies are released trying to answer a simple but elusive question: Who are the happiest people in the world? And year after year, the Finnish people consistently rank near the top. Denmark and Iceland often follow. The United States tends to lag a bit behind.

Researchers tell us that the happiest people in the world aren't necessarily the wealthiest or the most powerful. Instead, blessedness seems to track with other things — a sense of trust in others, purposeful work, strong community and a feeling of security and meaning in life.

When Jesus sat down on the hillside and began to teach the crowds, he was no doubt talking to people who didn't feel particularly blessed. But when Jesus was done with them, it was a different story.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit ... those who mourn ... the meek ... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” he said.

These are not people the world usually calls blessed. And maybe that's the point.

Jesus wasn't talking to kings or scholars. He was speaking to ordinary people — tired workers, grieving parents, worried hearts and quiet souls. And he called them blessed.

If you're reading this from a chair you seldom leave, from a bed where your body finds rest, or from a place that feels far from the noise and busyness of the world, remember that you are not forgotten. You are still blessed.

- If your body is slowing down, but your faith remains steady, you are blessed.
- If you mourn for the loved ones, mobility and independence you've lost, you are blessed.
- If you pray for others, show kindness to caregivers or whisper encouragement over the phone, you are blessed.

Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven belongs to you.

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your gentle words of blessing. Help me remember that even in stillness, I am seen, loved and called your own. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday:** Job 21-24
- Monday:** Job 25-27
- Tuesday:** Job 28-31
- Wednesday:** Job 32-34
- Thursday:** Job 35-37
- Friday:** Job 38-42
- Saturday:** Psalms 10-12

Verse to Remember

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.

—Job 19:25

COMPOUND INTEREST

Take all of these words and create compound words using all the words once! 32 words = 16 compound words. EXAMPLE: flower + pot = flowerpot.

TUB

FOOT

FIRE

MOON

BOY

DOG

MAN

GRASS

BUTTER

BRUSH

BALL

SHINE

FLY

HOUSE

SUN

LIGHT

COW

GROUND

TOOTH

FISH

KEY

PLAY

BOARD

SHOE

BOWL

JELLY

BATH

BEAN

HOPPER

PAN

HORSE

CAKE

WRITE THE COMPOUND WORDS HERE:

- ANSWERS:**
 doghouse, fireman, fishbowl, toothbrush, football, sunshine (OR sunlight), moonlight (OR moonshine), keyboard, cowboy, playground, horseshoe, bathtub, jellybean, butterfly, grasshopper, pancake.

Sunday, February 8, 2026

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:13-20

Neither sugar nor salt tastes particularly good by itself. Each is at its best when used to season other things. Love is the same way. Use it to “season” people.
—Vera Nazarian

Jesus famously said that we are the salt of the earth. “If salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?” (v. 13).

Let’s take a moment to think about saltshakers. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some are made of fine crystal with silver tops, sitting proudly on a formal dining table. Others are simple glass jars, resting on kitchen counters or tucked away in picnic baskets. Some are fancy. Some are plain. But as receptacles for salt, they all serve the same purpose.

But here’s the thing: no matter how beautiful or well-made a saltshaker is, it’s not doing its job unless it gets shaken. Unless the salt comes out, it doesn’t matter how pretty or practical the container is. Salt has to leave the shaker to make a difference.

This is the perfect image for what Jesus says in today’s reading from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5: “You are the salt of the earth.” Not, “You might be,” or “Try to be” — but you are.

You have enough life experience to honestly say you have been shaken, discombobulated, turned upside down and inside out. You are old enough to know better and, as someone has said, “young enough to want to do it anyway.”

You are an old salt — and in a good way. You may not be “out and about” like you once were, but you still have salt to share. Your prayers, your wisdom and your quiet encouragement season the lives of others in ways you may not even see or imagine.

Jesus doesn’t measure saltiness by how public your work is. He sees the quiet influence you carry: the family member you still counsel, the caregiver you bless, the church you pray for. That’s salt being poured out.

So don’t worry about the shaker. It’s not what it used to be, that’s for sure! But if you’re alive (and clearly you are), you still have salt to share, you’re still preserving grace, still bringing out goodness, still making life taste a little more like heaven.

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me salt, even when I feel poured out. Help me to bless others, not by doing more, but by being faithful where I am. Let my life still season the world with your grace. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday:** Exodus 1-4
- Monday:** Exodus 5-7
- Tuesday:** Exodus 8-10
- Wednesday:** Exodus 11-13
- Thursday:** Exodus 14-17
- Friday:** Exodus 18-20
- Saturday:** Psalms 13-15

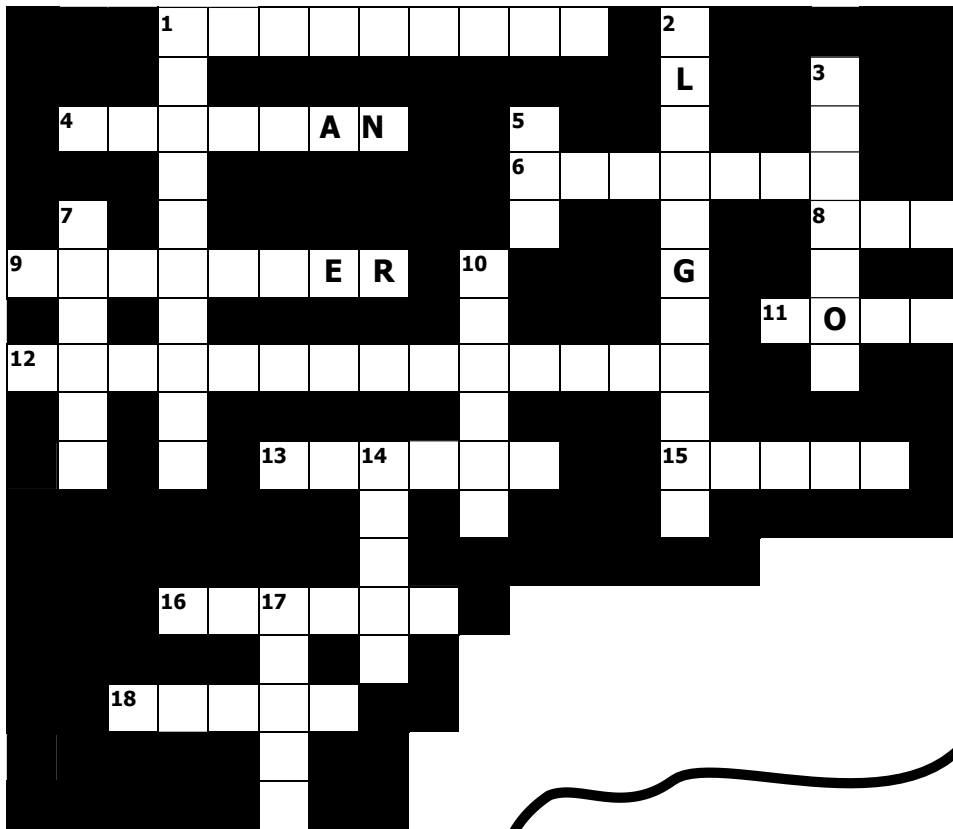
Verse to Remember

You shall have no other gods before me.

—Exodus 20:3

CROSSWORD CLEANING!

The theme of this puzzle is cleaning items.



CLUES

- 1 Across: Type of soap
- 1 Down: Apparatus to clean dishes
- 2. Vigorous physical effort
- 3. Used when washing hair
- 4. Used to hold debris
- 5. An old or torn cloth
- 6. Added to water to form cleaning solution
- 7. To whiten
- 8. Can be wet or dry
- 9. A cleaning powder
- 10. Pail
- 11. A water tube
- 12. Used to clean clothes
- 13. Used to remove dirt on knickknacks
- 14. To vigorously rub
- 15. To brush away
- 16. Used to clean carpets
- 17. Fabric
- 18. Used to sweep

- ANSWERS:**
- Across**
- 1. detergent;
 - 4. AN
 - 9. ER
 - 10. G
 - 11. O
 - 16. Used to clean carpets
 - 17. Fabric
 - 18. Used to sweep
- Down**
- 1. dishwasher;
 - 2. elbow grease;
 - 3. shampoo;
 - 4. dustpan;
 - 5. rag;
 - 6. ammonia;
 - 7. bleach;
 - 8. mop;
 - 9. cleanser;
 - 10. bucket;
 - 11. hose;
 - 12. washing machine;
 - 13. duster;
 - 14. scrub;
 - 15. sweep;
 - 16. vacuum;
 - 17. cloth;
 - 18. broom.



February 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

Transfiguration Sunday, February 15, 2026

Scripture Reading: Matthew 17:1-9

*How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear! It soothes his sorrows,
heals his wounds, and drives away his fear. —John Newton*

I've stood on a few mountaintops in my lifetime, like, for example, the Klein Matterhorn in Switzerland, Pikes Peak, Mount Evans and Longs Peak in Colorado. To get to the top, one requires a cable car, two can be conquered by car, but the last insists on a good pair of legs.

There's another one: Mount Tabor in Galilee, known as the traditional site of the Transfiguration. A few years ago, my daughter and I drove to the top where two churches sit, one a Franciscan chapel.

Of course, our minds wandered back to the gospel accounts (like the one in today's reading from Matthew) about what happened long ago. On that mountain, Peter, James and John experienced something utterly breathtaking. They saw Jesus transfigured before their eyes. His face shone like the sun, his clothes dazzling white. Then Moses and Elijah appeared, representing the Law and the Prophets. It was a moment of scary splendor, filled with meaning, history and wonder. And yet, in the end, the cloud of glory lifts, the visions fade, and all that remains is Jesus only.

How powerful is that? These three disciples saw many things that day, but in the end, their eyes were drawn to the one who mattered most: Jesus.

As we grow older, our lives often become quieter but not necessarily less cluttered. There are still distractions: health issues, financial concerns, the noise of the world on TV, worries for loved ones, regrets from the past or questions about the future. These distractions, while real, can blur our spiritual vision. They can keep us from focusing on the One who is the source of peace, purpose and hope.

But in this mountaintop moment, we are reminded of what truly matters. It's not Moses. It's not Elijah. It's not our past or future, our regrets or our fears. It's not the noise of the world or the uncertainty of tomorrow. It's Jesus only.

And here's the good news: we don't have to climb a mountain to see him. Wherever we are, whether in a quiet room, a hospital bed or our favorite chair by the window, we can look up and find him near. He is with us. Always.

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in a world full of distractions, help me to focus on you alone. Just as Peter, James and John saw only you at the end of the vision, help me to look past my worries, my aches, and my fears to see your face. Be my vision today, and always. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

Sunday: Exodus 21-24

Monday: Exodus 25-27

Tuesday: Exodus 28-31

Wednesday: Exodus 32-34

Thursday: Exodus 35-37

Friday: Exodus 38-40

Saturday: Psalms 16-18



WORD BOX

The answer for each numbered clue will be the same down and across.

CLUES FOR WORD BOX

1. One who keeps money
2. On top of
3. Casts a ballot
4. A happening
5. Takes it easy

1	2	3	4	5
2				
3				
4				
5				

THE BIBLE? OR NOT?

The English language is full of everyday sayings many of which surprisingly trace their roots all the way back to the Bible, while others have emerged from literature, folklore and even old proverbs. In the list below, you'll find 20 familiar expressions. Your challenge is to identify which ones come from the Bible. *Circle the expressions that come from the Bible. Leave the others unmarked.*

1. The writing on the wall
2. Bite the bullet
3. By the skin of your teeth
4. A drop in the bucket
5. Burn the midnight oil
6. Scapegoat
7. The blind leading the blind
8. A stitch in time saves nine
9. Apple of his eye
10. Go the extra mile

11. Barking up the wrong tree
12. My brother's keeper
13. Rise and shine
14. A house divided cannot stand
15. Let sleeping dogs lie
16. Wolf in sheep's clothing
17. Cast the first stone
18. Can a leopard change its spots?
19. Burning the candle at both ends
20. Wash your hands of it

Answers to Word Box: 1. saver, 2. above, 3. votes, 4. event, 5. rests. **Answers to "The Bible?"** 1. Daniel 5:5-31; 3. Job 19:20; 4. Isaiah 40:15; 6. Leviticus 16:10; 7. Matthew 15:14; 9. Psalm 17:8, Zechariah 2:8; 10. Matthew 5:41; 12. Genesis 4:9; 13. Isaiah 60:1; 14. Mark 3:25; 16. Matthew 7:15; 17. John 8:7-11; 18. Jeremiah 13:23; 20. Matthew 27:24. **Not from the Bible:** 2, 5, 8, 11, 15, 19.

First Sunday in Lent, February 22, 2026

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

You may be alone and feel forsaken. But your Redeemer walks beside you, even if unseen. — Joni Eareckson Tada

Have you ever been on I-80 in southern Wyoming? The stretch from Laramie to Green River is a long, desolate wilderness of barren hills and sagebrush, isn't it? Nevada, likewise, is home to seemingly endless miles of unfriendly terrain.

The wilderness can feel like a lonely place. It's quiet. It's still. And sometimes it stretches on longer than we'd like. Perhaps, in this season of life — whether due to age, illness or limitations — we find ourselves in our own kind of wilderness. The world outside moves quickly, while our days may pass slowly, with long silences in between.

But take heart: Jesus has been to the wilderness, too.

He was not there because he'd done anything wrong. In fact, he was led there by the Spirit. For 40 days, Jesus fasted and prayed. He faced hunger, loneliness and temptation. The enemy whispered lies, twisted Scripture and offered him easy escapes. But Jesus answered with truth, drawing on God's Word, remaining rooted in his identity and calling.

Often, we face subtle temptations. Nothing like turning stones into bread or jumping from temple heights, but rather the temptation to give in to discouragement, to feel forgotten, or to believe that our season of usefulness is over.

This is not true. If Jesus found strength and purpose in the silence of the wilderness, so can we.

Jesus was not alone. The Spirit was with him. And angels came and ministered to him. We are not alone either. The same Spirit that was with Jesus is with us now, in this moment.

Our prayers matter. Our wisdom matters. Our faith, refined through years of joys and trials, is a quiet testimony that strengthens others. The wilderness may feel desolate, but it is never wasted. It's where God's strength becomes visible in our weakness.

So, if today feels long or lonely, remember: Jesus understands. He has walked the wilderness before us. And he walks beside us now.

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for walking ahead of me, even into the wilderness. When I feel forgotten or alone, remind me that you are near. Strengthen me, as you were strengthened. Help me find peace, even in quiet places. In your name. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday:** Romans 1-4
Monday: Romans 5-8
Tuesday: Romans 9-11
Wednesday: Romans 12-16
Thursday: Proverbs 1-3
Friday: Proverbs 4-7
Saturday: Psalms 19-21

Verse to Remember

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

—Psalm 19:14

CAPITAL INVESTMENTS!

The answers to the following clues have one meaning when capitalized and a different meaning when not capitalized. Find the answers and write them in the spaces provided. Then unscramble the circled letters to reveal a very old person from the Old Testament.

Capitalized

1. A large country in Asia
2. Denver football player
3. Slavic language
4. A planet
5. City in Iowa
6. Expensive car
7. Citizen of country near Pakistan
8. Soft drink
9. Month
10. Epic poet
11. Greek god of shepherds
12. Credit card

Non-capitalized

1. porcelain tableware ___ ___
2. untamed horse ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
3. to shine something ___ ___ ___ ___
4. a silvery element ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
5. a couch ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
6. buns ___ ___ ___
7. woolen blanket/shawl ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
8. slang for illegal drug ___ ___ ___
9. rhythmic movement ___ ___ ___ ___
10. baseball's biggest hit ___ ___ ___ ___
11. utensil ___ ___ ___
12. passport stamp ___ ___ ___

SECRET PERSON ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

Answers: 1. china, 2. bronco, 3. polish, 4. mercury, 5. davenport, 6. rolls, 7. afghan, 8. coke, 9. march, 10. homer, 11. pan, 12. visa. Secret Person: Methuseleh.