

Woman, Why Are You Weeping?

Daily Meditations for Lent

John Timmerman



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CONTENTS

Introduction	What We Can Know 1
<i>Day One</i>	The Faithful and True 5
<i>Day Two</i>	The Carpenter: The Person and the Profession 8
<i>Day Three</i>	The Carpenter: Human Craftsman 11
<i>Day Four</i>	The Carpenter: The Divine Builder 14
<i>Day Five</i>	Builder of the World 18
<i>Day Six</i>	The Carpenter: A Work for the World 21
<i>Day Seven</i>	The Precious Stone 24
<i>Day Eight</i>	The Security of Stone 28
<i>Day Nine</i>	Remember the Stone 32
<i>Day Ten</i>	The Comforter 35
<i>Day Eleven</i>	The Comforter: In Loneliness 39
<i>Day Twelve</i>	The Comforter: In Aging 42
<i>Day Thirteen</i>	The Comforter: In Grief 45
<i>Day Fourteen</i>	The Comforter: In Suffering 48
<i>Day Fifteen</i>	Eternal Life 51
<i>Day Sixteen</i>	The Bread of Life: Broken for You 54

<i>Day Seventeen</i>	The Bread of Life: Our Essential Nutrient 58
<i>Day Eighteen</i>	The True Vine: Our Personal God 61
<i>Day Nineteen</i>	The True Vine: Shed for You 64
<i>Day Twenty</i>	The Temple 68
<i>Day Twenty-One</i>	The Law 71
<i>Day Twenty-Two</i>	The Living Water 74
<i>Day Twenty-Three</i>	The Living Water: Drink From the Well 77
<i>Day Twenty-Four</i>	The Living Water: Flow River, Flow 81
<i>Day Twenty-Five</i>	The Living Water: The Lake of Life 84
<i>Day Twenty-Six</i>	The Door: Knocking 88
<i>Day Twenty-Seven</i>	The Door: Opening 92
<i>Day Twenty-Eight</i>	The Intercessor: Owning Our Sin 94
<i>Day Twenty-Nine</i>	The Intercessor: Owning Our Grace 98
<i>Day Thirty</i>	The Blessing 101
<i>Day Thirty-One</i>	The Resurrection and the Life 104
<i>Day Thirty-Two</i>	The Messiah 107
<i>Day Thirty-Three</i>	Son of God—Son of Man 110
<i>Day Thirty-Four</i>	A Quiet Place 113
<i>Day Thirty-Five</i>	Receiving the Gift of Quiet 117
<i>Day Thirty-Six</i>	Lamb of God: The Covenant 120
<i>Day Thirty-Seven</i>	The Sacrifice 124
<i>Day Thirty-Eight</i>	Some Call Him Lord 127
<i>Day Thirty-Nine</i>	Woman, Why Are You Weeping? 130
<i>Day Forty</i>	The Faithful and True: Resurrection Sunday 133



THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE

What do we prize above all things in our human relationships?

When I was examining a short story in an American Literature course once, I paused in the flow of discussion. I sensed that we were discussing the story like some disembodied fairy tale, something that could not possibly be true. It was, basically, a love story: one young woman's longing for an ideal love, only to find reality constantly intruding on it. It was a love story of loneliness and loss. Certainly I want the students to tackle a literary work in intellectual ways, but I also want them to embrace it with the heart.

So I stopped the discussion. "Without pausing to deliberate," I said, "write down the top three qualities you look for in a future spouse." As the comments quickly started to flow, I began to list them on the board. Many were typical. A good provider. A sense of humor. Open with emotions. Friendship. The list went on. But beyond question, the most highly valued quality, appearing repeatedly, was faithfulness. I don't think a single person had left it off their individual lists.

I think those students recognize that we live in a time when promises of fidelity snap as easily as a twig. They also don't want it to happen to them. They want to avoid the pain and loneliness, to be sure, but they also want to have someone on whom they can depend, who will not change, who will be there for them in their time of need.

We value faithfulness, not as a puppy-dog slavishness, but as a deeply committed devotion. I will be there for you. For better or worse. For richer or poorer. In sickness and in health. These are the treasures we

long for, the ones that make our lives rich beyond compare, no matter what our circumstances.

Precisely at this point, Jesus reaches into the most profound mystery of our spiritual and psychological nature. Our human relationships, even the best-intentioned of them, have a tragic way of breaking down. It is so very hard to be faithful and true to all that we wish to be. Saint Paul had no more success than any of us: “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19). I can read the testament of my own life in those lines.

Fidelity is also one of the most highly valued qualities in Scripture. From its earliest accounts (Adam and Eve in Eden) through the latest directives to the Church, fidelity is the value that leads to blessing; infidelity causes destruction and loss of relationships. Threading through every single one of those situations, however, is the granite-like assertion that our God—who never changes—is faithful and true.

Deuteronomy 32:4 testifies that “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, / and all his ways are just. / A faithful God who does no wrong, / upright and just is he.” In a world strewn with broken faithfulness, how can we begin to comprehend that? David, who knew well the results of infidelity, similarly testifies to God’s unfaltering faithfulness. With a powerful fervor, that flawed warrior of Christ, Saint Paul, states that “Jesus Christ our Lord...is faithful” (1 Corinthians 1:9). In Jesus, we find our true home where we dwell in faithfulness.

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus appears as a rider on a white horse (signifying purity) and is called “Faithful and True” (19:11). At the close of this study, we will return again to that powerful name. That is where our Lenten passion leads—to the victorious rider called Faithful and True.

But that powerful image of the rider must also appear at the start. Isaiah prophesied “a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (53:3). Can this be the same victorious rider of Revelation? In a sense, Jesus earned the “right” to be called the Faithful and True. His journey was one of suffering. The glory of Lent lies in the victorious rider; the reality of Lent also lies in the “one from whom men hide their faces” (53:3).

As we engage the names of Jesus that help us better understand him

as our Lord, our friend, and our Savior, we remember that we get to know him through suffering, but we rejoice with him through victory. All this hinges on a name and a promise: he is the Faithful and True.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

Prayer

Lord, here at the very outset,
when I come looking for calm and peace,
wanting to set my heart on your heart,
placing my will in your will,
please strengthen me on the journey.
Keep me, Lord, faithful and true.
Amen.