

Old South Church in Boston

LENT 2025

Weekly Devotional





Along the journey of Lent, we offer you this playlist
as a companion for these 40 days.

INTRODUCTION

The days we are living through are filled with chaos and outrage. When I open the news or scroll through social media, I can feel that chaos and outrage move into my body. My chest tightens with fear. A knot of half formed responses tangle in my stomach. Anger rises in my throat. If I let myself stay in this place for very long, I do not like what it does to me. I become snippy with my colleagues, impatient with strangers, angry over everything and nothing. I know that this is not the way I want to live. But what is the alternative, burying my head in the sand? I don't want to live that way either.

If you're anything like me, you could use some good old fashioned spiritual discipline to help get through these days. For the season of Lent, Old South has created this devotional booklet to help you not only get through the days, but to thrive. There are six practices that are drawn from scripture that are based on the fruit of the Spirit that from Galatians 5. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This booklet contains simple, practical disciplines that anyone can benefit from. These are things like placing intentional limits on the times and ways you read the news (get a paper newspaper!). Leaning into a practice of prayer and meditation in order to ground yourself with the one on whom we base our hope. Choosing one issue or cause to devote yourself to in order to increase your impact and stop from feeling like flotsam and jetsam.

These practices build upon one another, and you definitely can (and should!) continue practicing them well past the end of Lent. Or perhaps it will take you all of Lent to put even one of these into practice and begin to see the growth of that fruit of the Spirit. We hope this devotional will be a grape help to you. That's the only fruit pun, I promise.



Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Job 38:4-7

SELF CONTROL

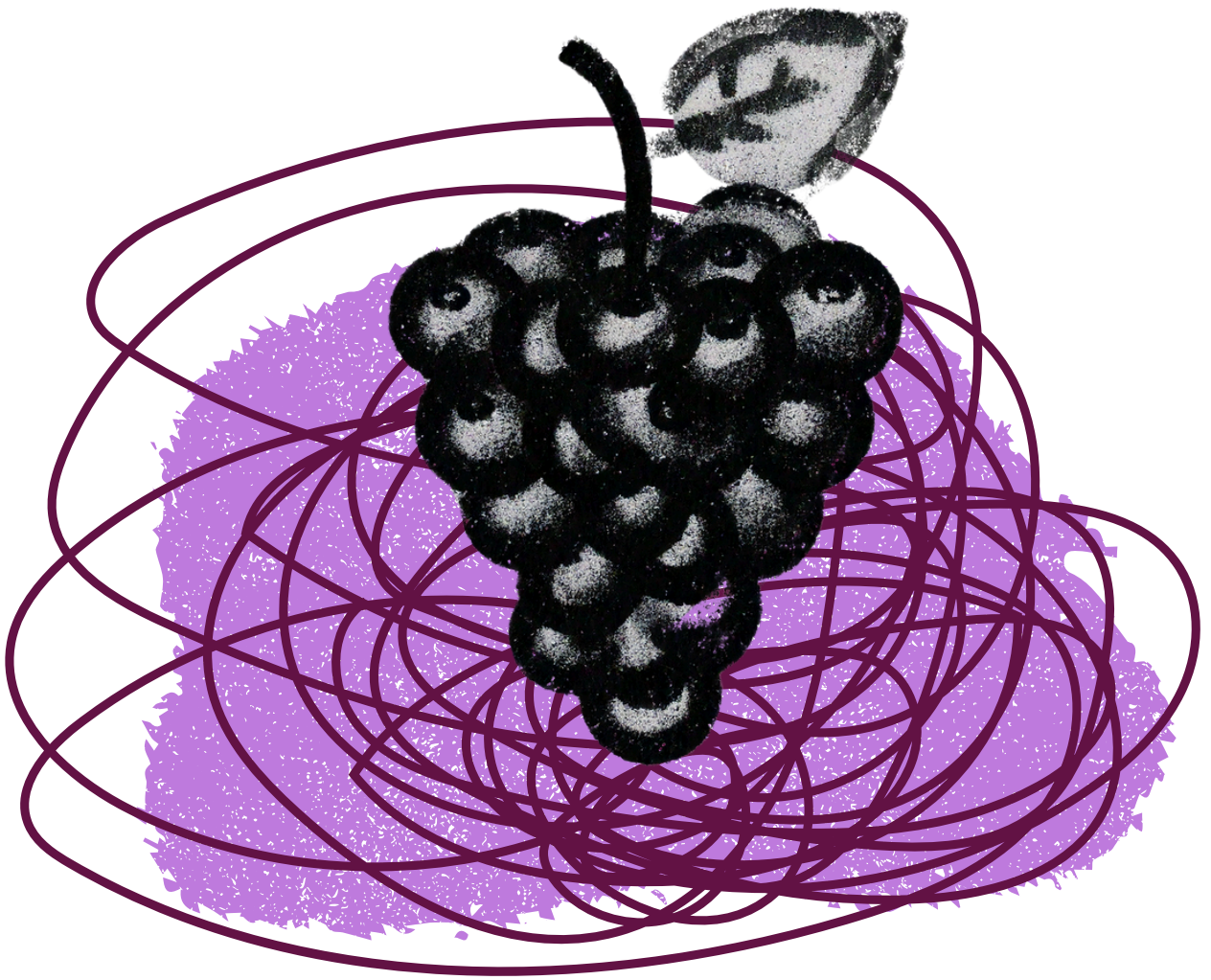
Week 1

There is absolutely, positively, incontrovertibly, undeniably, more news than you can keep up with in a day. Getting news online is like drinking water from a running tap. I can fill my belly to bursting and the tap will just keep on running.

In seasons of life like this one, I feel the temptation to just read one more article. Scroll for one more thinkpiece. Hunt for that one social media post that perfectly sums up the challenge of the day. And it leaves me feeling frazzled. Attention split, spirit scattered, joy diffused. It's important—critical even—to set limits on how I engage with the news.

For me, I set particular times in the day during which I will read the news. For you it might be that you renew your subscription for a real, honest to goodness paper version of a newspaper and allow that to be the only way you get your news. Or perhaps it will be a huge step just to give yourself one day a week when you don't read the news. That hugely important breaking news update will still be relevant tomorrow. And, if it isn't, was it all that important to begin with?

Self-control in this way is a form of humility. Of understanding that I do not, will not, and cannot know everything there is to know in the world. I won't even be able to know everything that I would like to know. And that's okay. It is a gift of the spirit to give myself those limits, and I encourage you to give yourself that gift too.



Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?

Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?

Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Romans 2:3-4

FORBEARANCE

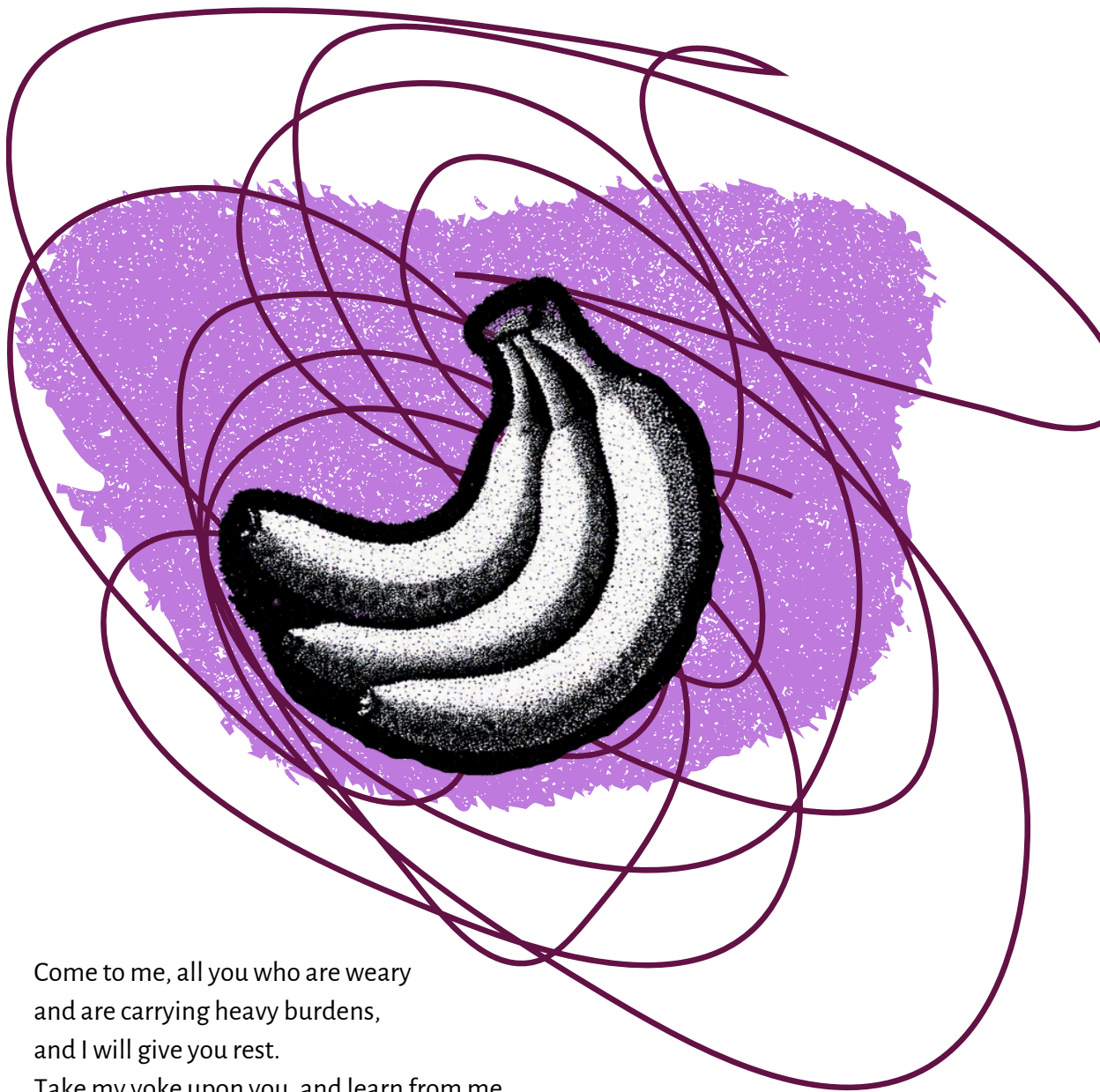
Week 2

If you grew up singing a Fruits of the Spirit jingle in Sunday School, you probably don't remember the fruit of "forbearance." "Patience" is likely more familiar, and it means about the same thing, so what's with this new word? In Galatians, the Greek word μακροθυμία ("makrothymia") describes this fruit of the spirit. This term means patience, yes, but it is patience of a specific kind. It is a patience demonstrated amidst challenging interpersonal circumstances. Forbearance is PEOPLE PATIENCE.

People can be hard to deal with, especially in the digital age. God knows this just as much as we do. In the passage from Romans above, God demonstrates forbearance by graciously withholding judgment against us, even though we deserve it. Given this example from God, Paul calls us to withhold our own harsh judgments against others, whether or not they deserve it.

God's forbearance toward us also challenges us to acknowledge that all of us, even our enemies, are in a state of grace. Amidst this common good, we remember who has granted us this grace in the first place. Beneath our anger we are beloved, and through repentance we can return to this place of belovedness.

Practice: When you read something posted online that provokes, angers, or frustrates you, take a moment to view and/or consider the human being behind the statement. Look for the author's "signs of life" - a profile picture, a name, even a typo! Pause to observe this life, until you feel your anger subside. You are united with this person by a common good - the love of God, even if the other person doesn't extend that love to others. Pray that they might feel this love in abundance.



Come to me, all you who are weary
and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

GENTLENESS

Week 3

When Jesus traveled with the disciples, teaching and preaching, their lives were not full of what we might think of as ease or gentleness. They walked from place to place, often not knowing where they would lay their heads at night. They encountered many who needed a tangible taste of the good news of the gospel - injured people, hurting people, those who needed food and those who needed liberation.

Their yoke - meeting people pushed to the margins by political and religious power - came with work. Daily labor, fear and uncertainty were surely on the journey with the disciples. And yet, Jesus promises that he is gentle and humble in heart; he says that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. We might wonder how this could be - and may find an answer in the verses that follow this one. Matthew 12 starts with Jesus and the disciples picking grain to eat on the Sabbath - taking care of themselves so that they might continue in their work of liberation and healing.

Offering gentleness to the world starts with how we treat ourselves. It starts with self-compassion, and with tender care for our hearts, bodies and spirits. Though it may feel counter-cultural (the Pharisees criticize the disciples and Jesus for breaking the rules), tending to your own pain, fear, uncertainty and labor with gentleness is exactly how you stay in the work of the gospel. The yoke is easy because it starts with gentleness.

If you want to strengthen your self-compassion, journaling can help. Try writing a letter to yourself as though you were writing to a loved one. Spend a few minutes reflecting on or praying about the strengths and gifts you name.



Look, we are not unspectacular things.

We've come this far, survived this much. What
would happen if we decided to survive more? To love harder?
What if we stood up with our synapses and flesh and said, No.

No, to the rising tides.

Stood for the many mute mouths of the sea, of the land?

What would happen if we used our bodies to bargain
for the safety of others, for earth,

if we declared a clean night, if we stopped being terrified

From 'Dead Stars' by Ada Limón

FAITHFULNESS

Week 4

Look up the whole poem. Read it slowly. Listen to it. Read it again. Limon's poem elucidates what faithfulness can be in these days when so much is at stake. These days, everyday, the question posed with every sunrise and every sunset is: to what will you be faithful? Faith lies not so much in words or beliefs, but in deeds. We are all faithful to something: to efficiency, to progress, to family, to ourselves, to God. We incarnate our faith through our everyday, mundane choices and every once in a while we incarnate our faith in choices of great cost and consequence. To be faithful to God, Lover of the lost and the least, is to choose day-by-day, minute-by-minute to align ourselves with the priorities of God: feeding the hungry, sheltering the lost, welcoming the stranger, loosing the bonds of oppression.

This week, find one, particular, concrete way to enact your faith. Sign up to be a host family or to support one of our host families through our New Neighbor Task Force. Join fellow Old Southerners in serving at common cathedral. Send financial support to the Mass Transgender Political Coalition at www.masstpc.org/donate or by using the QR code below. Find one concrete way to embody God's love in the lives of others.



Donate to Mass Transgender
Political Coalition



If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

James 2

GOODNESS

Week 5

In Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, Little Red Riding Hood delivers a sobering bit of truth. Reflecting on the charming, though dangerous, Big Bad Wolf, she says "Though scary is exciting, nice is different than good". She's right. The real impact a person has on those around them is more telling than their manners. Some of the most tender-hearted people I know can come off as brusque or prickly. But below that pointy exterior is a person who does so much to improve the lives of those around them. That is, I think, what the scripture is thinking of when saying that "goodness" is a fruit of the spirit. Goodness is much more than mere nice-ness. Goodness means actually improving the lives of those who are around you.

Goodness and niceness don't always mean the same thing, in fact they're sometimes in tension. When I've had physical therapy for injuries, I would hardly have called my PT "nice". But they certainly did me a lot of good. People who have made meaningful reforms in the world are often not particularly nice. Lyndon B. Johnson got the Civil Rights Act passed and, by all accounts, LBJ was a jerk.

These days we're living in are quite likely to test your patience, make you prickly, perhaps push you into hard conversations. Don't be too hard on yourself if you aren't perfectly polite all the time. Remember, the Holy Spirit is empowering you to actually improve the lives of those around you.

Do a bit of good in the world every day. Don't make it something grand, make it concrete. Dog-sit for a neighbor, call someone on the phone who you know is lonely, fill one of those impossible to fill volunteer spots on the PTA. Do a bit of good in the world, it will make you feel better, I promise. Because goodness is a fruit of the Spirit. Niceness, on the other hand? That's more the Big Bad Wolf's specialty.

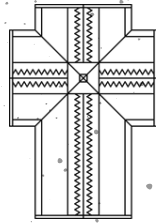


JOY

Week 6

We enter now into Holy Week, going with Jesus into Jerusalem and setting our sights toward calvary. A strange time to speak of joy. And yet, perhaps it is exactly now that we are ready to meditate on joy. The solemn journey of forty days behind us and, just ahead, upon the horizon, the shadow of the cross lurks with its horrors. Joy is not the absence of grief nor the disappearance of terror. Perhaps, joy, real joy—deep joy, lasting joy—is only found in the midst of real life, which is always a confluence of unspeakable horrors, breathtaking beauty, and holy mundanity.

The poet Ross Gay took on a spiritual practice of noticing one delight every day and cataloging them in *The Book of Delights*. Gay writes over a tumultuous year, every day finding a delight and celebrating it in detail. This week, as we journey through this Holy Week, I offer this practice: find one delight every day. Write about it in detail. Let it sink into you. Let it transform you.



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