

A sunset over mountains with a cross silhouette. The sun is low on the right, casting a golden glow over the scene. The mountains are silhouetted against the bright sky, and a large cross is visible on the right side of the image.

Level Up

LENT DEVOTIONAL 2025

WEST SIDE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Level Up
A Devotional for Lent 2025
by
West Side Missionary Baptist Church

Edited by Rev. Dr. Rashaunda Cade

DAY 1

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

When We Go Low, God Takes Us High

Associate Pastor, Rev. Angela Tate

1 Pet 5:6 (NLT)

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.

We live in a world where the words “humility” or “be humble” are almost like curse **words**. Unless it’s in a song by today’s hottest rap artist, no one is really interested in being humble. We are told to be boastful, toot our own horns, promote ourselves and our abilities. We have been sold a bill of goods that says that’s the way you get ahead; that’s the way you get noticed.

While that’s the world’s wisdom, God’s word says that He opposes the proud but He gives grace to the humble. In fact, when you read God’s word, you come to understand that humility is the way to go!

Proverbs 22:4 True humility and fear of the Lord lead to riches, honor, and long life.

Proverbs 15:33 Fear of the Lord teaches wisdom; humility precedes honor.

Psalms 138:6 Though the Lord is great, he cares for the humble, but he keeps his distance from the proud.

The word even says that being humble leads to our land being healed, leads to our very salvation.

We have learned that being in relationship with Jesus is ripe with favor and reward. While living our lives in a lowly, humble estate might not seem all that appealing, we have an especially wonderful assurance of how God will reward our humility. That when we humble ourselves under His mighty power, at just the right time He will exalt. And God’s elevation is something that man can’t manufacture. Just when you think you have an idea of what it would mean to be blessed, here comes God and does things even better than we could ever think or imagine. Stay humble and keep doing the right thing, for at just the right time, your elevation, your next level is coming, just don’t give up! (Gal 6:9 ATV – Angela Tate Version).

Lord, thank you for the strength it takes to walk humbly before you. Help me to resist the urge to be puffed up or to brag or to engage in self-elevation strategies. Help me to wait on you and watch you exalt me, at just the right time. Amen

DAY 2

Thursday, March 6, 2025

We Must Know Our Value

Bro. Armand Buford

Psalm 139: 13-14 (NIV)

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Before we excel to the next level, we have to understand our God given, intrinsic value. Do you understand how intricately God designed you? Do you know that He thinks about you? Do you know that he loves you? Not the perfect you. Not the scholar you. Not the sports award winning you. But just you.

You have value just as you are. Not because you've done anything great and wonderful or reached a certain level in life but simply because God created you.

Whatever journey you are on, it is critical that you understand who you are and how God specifically created you. Psalm 139:13 states that God created our inmost being. This includes your personality, your tendencies, and all your unique idiosyncrasies. He knows everything about you, your thoughts and the intents of your heart. Through his miraculous nature he knit you together, physically, mentally and emotionally. He knew you before you were even born.

Think of yourself as computer program and God as the programmer. Your DNA is literally coded with specific details that make you who you are. And you are wonderfully made! The next level in your life will come with its own set of tests, trials and obstacles, and it will require confidence that you are enough, and you belong. But will you go to the next level just trying to impress others? Or try to prove to yourself and others that you belong? Or will you be secure in the fact that God, in his loving kindness, looks at you as his child and loves you and has placed you where you are for a purpose? Know that you are his masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10) and you are created in His image (Genesis 1:27).

Take time today and read Psalm 139 and make it personal. Take time to consider how special you are to God and how intentional he was in your creation.

DAY 3

Friday, March 7, 2025

Answering the Call
Sis. Tenecia Strayhorn

Exodus 3:1-4 (NLT)

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it." When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied.

There is a story of a man who set up his voicemail on his phone, but his outgoing message to callers had not registered beyond his initial, "Hello." As a result, there was an exchange between the voicemail and one caller that went like this:

Ring...Ring...Ring..."Hello."

"Hello. Hello. . . hello!" (Click.) Then they called back.

Ring...Ring...Ring..."Hello."

"Hello, hello. . . hello, hello!" (Click.) They called back one last time.

Ring...Ring...Ring..."Hello."

"Hello, hello. . ."

After giving up, they called their cell phone provider's customer service, because something must be wrong with the connection. "You see, he says, 'Hello,' but he won't say anything else." The customer service rep simply responded, "I'm sorry. We can only connect you with your party. We cannot make him talk to you."

This reminds me of how we sometimes treat God. He is trying to get through to us. He repeatedly reaches out, and all he gets back from us is a surface level "Hello." I went to church, hello. I said my grace before I ate, hello. I even said a quick prayer when I woke up this morning, hello. But he wants more. He wants to have deep and meaningful relationship with us but we're not answering the call. Jesus has connected us to God through his death on the cross, but ultimately the choice is up to us to keep the conversation going. For Moses, the call came through a burning bush. For you, it may be the small voice in your head or a tug on your heart or a burning passion to champion a cause that's important to you.

God is calling you to the next level and that requires more time spent in His word and in His presence. The next time God calls, will you give him more of you?

DAY 4

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Something Told Me

Sis. Patricia Allen

John 10:27 (NKJV)

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Some time ago, I made the mistake of overlooking major details while focusing on seemingly important matters. For instance, one morning, I had an appointment and rushed through my routine, determined not to be late. Unfortunately, the traffic was extremely slow, which increased my frustration. Eventually, I accelerated, maneuvering around slower cars.

After leaving the heavy traffic behind, I had only a few miles remaining to reach my destination. Feeling relieved, I attempted to relax. At that very moment, something urged me to turn around and go home. Being so close to my destination, I tried to dismiss what I thought was an impulse. I couldn't. So, reluctantly I made a U-turn and headed back home.

Upon entering the house, I detected a burnt odor. Rushing into the kitchen, I was horrified to find a small fire burning in a pot I had inadvertently left cooking on the stove. Next to the pot was my cell phone. Panic-stricken, I grabbed a box of baking soda and extinguished the flames. Fortunately, both my house and phone remained undamaged. It was then that I realized the something urging me to return home was, in fact, the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Overcome with gratitude, I knelt and thanked God for His grace and mercy.

After regaining my composure, I retrieved my phone to reschedule my appointment. To my surprise, I discovered I had a new text message that read: "Please call the office when you receive this message. We need to reschedule your appointment." Despite all my efforts, the scheduled appointment had already been cancelled!

Since that incident, my relationship with God has deepened and I've learned a valuable lesson. Instead of hurrying to what seems important, I try praying first, listening for the voice of God, and responding willingly to His directions. As we embark on this new year, I pray we let go of whatever causes us to question and or not heed the voice of God. Amen

REFLECTION DAY
Sunday, March 9, 2025

How is God calling you to level up?

DAY 5

Monday, March 10, 2025

Get off the Boat!

Rev. Michael Bobo

Matthew 14:22-29 (NLT)

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!" Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water." "Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus.

I want you to remember a few things about this passage. The first is that God is with you. In this passage, Peter and the disciples were caught in a storm. In the distance they saw a man walking on the water. Initially they thought it was a ghost, shouting "It's a ghost!" But Jesus replied, "Don't be afraid! Take courage! I am here." A lot of times we struggle in life because we forget one simple truth: God is with us. No matter what's going on, God said He would be with us.

Next in the story Peter said, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water." I noticed a few things. First, Peter had a relationship with Jesus, which allowed him to know and listen to His voice. This passage never mentions that Peter looked at his buddies to see if they were coming with him. No, Peter simply heard the call and got out of the boat.

The final thing I noticed is that everyone heard Jesus speak, yet no one else moved. Peter heard the voice of Jesus, fixed his eyes on Him, and obeyed. He got out the boat and walked to Jesus on the water. In that moment it did not matter that his friends were not coming. It didn't even matter that it was water he had to walk on. The only thing that mattered was that Jesus said, "Come." Peter heard the words, and he answered the call. This was only possible because Peter remembered 3 things. God is with you, listen to Jesus, and keep your eyes on Him.

Question: What is possible for us as believers and as a church if we will only remember these 3 things?

DAY 6

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

It Looks Different
Rev. Ronald Bobo, Jr.

Romans 12:2 (EASY)

Do not become like the people who belong to this world. But let God completely change the way that you think, so that you live differently. Then you will understand what God wants you to do. You will know what is good. You will know what pleases God. You will know what is completely right.

Everyone cannot appreciate the idea or beauty of being different. As a child, most saw being different as a point of ridicule, disqualification or outcast. Even past our adolescence we feel the pressure to conform and blend in with those around us. Many times we just care too much about what's on the outside and our perception of a world that may judge us and categorize us as "less than."

The world's standards should never take precedence over God's standards!

First off, we have to be **Built different**. We need to rely on the Spirit, not the world for guidance and wisdom. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."

Next, we **Fight different**. Fighting may seem aggressive, but we are not going to walk into glory without opposition. Ephesians 6:12 reads "We are not fighting against human enemies. Instead, we are fighting against the rulers and the powerful spirits that have authority over this dark world. We are fighting against the bad spirits who live in the heavens." It will be our prayers that remain our best weapon. A weapon in battle, prayer is not a last option but always our best option.

After a good fight we are victorious. We **Win different** – Our treasure is not here on earth but set on high. We boast only on Christ, the real champion. As followers of Christ, winning is not always obvious and in your face. Winning was solidified when Christ died and rose from the dead for us. Our ultimate flex is not that we are blessed here on earth, but that victory was won the moment Christ took care of business for those that would believe.

Leveling up is not a status obtained but a goal that is always in pursuit. God created us to be different and look different using different gifts to obtain a common goal to make his name famous and glorious.

As a believer, can people tell your life looks different?

DAY 7,
Wednesday, March 12, 2025

8

Get Ready and Stay Ready: The Importance of Preparedness
Sis. Shantana T. Stewart

Proverbs 6:6-8 (NIV)

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

“The Ant and the Cricket” is one of my favorite children’s stories. It teaches the importance of being prepared. In the tale, the ant is diligent, prepares for winter by working during the summer and eats well when the snow comes.

The cricket, on the other hand, sings and dances in the summer, does not lay aside food for winter and is on the verge of starving when it comes.

At work, I have learned when I am like the ant, and I prepare and plan, the more I experience good results. While emergencies still arise, because I have prepared, I can usually shorten the crisis, or at the very minimum, soften its impact. For example, when I am able to prepare employees and ask them questions a reporter is likely to ask before a media interview, the result is often much better.

This principle of preparedness is true in the Kingdom of God as well. When we are careful to read and live God’s Word, seek His face in prayer and ask Him to fill us with His Holy Spirit, we, by His grace and mercy, prepare and store up provisions for winter or trouble.

When we worship and praise God, we store up provisions. When we call on the name of Jesus and plead His blood, we store up provisions. When we use our spiritual gifts at church and in the marketplace, we store up provisions. When we do good to those who hate us and pray for those who spitefully use us, we store up provisions.

Identify a sluggard area in yourself where Leveling Up in Jesus is needed. What spiritual discipline can you apply to eliminate this area, so you are ready for winter or attacks from the adversary?

DAY 8

Thursday, March 13, 2025

How Bad Do You Want It?

Rev. Burton Barr

Matthew 16:24 (NIV)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Quitting is one of the easiest things in the world to do. I should know. I was the master of it. If colleges gave degrees in quitting, I could have graduated *summa cum laude*. The problem was, I quit school.

School wasn't the only thing that I quit. I left my first wife after one year of marriage. I quit preaching the gospel three years after being ordained. I was kicked out of the Marines before my tour of duty was completed. During the first fifty years of my life, the only thing that I had ever completed was a prison sentence. I would have quit that, too, if I could have.

The reason that many of us don't succeed is because we don't want it bad enough. We don't want that degree bad enough to put in the work that it would take. We don't want to make the sports team bad enough to practice when we don't feel like it. We don't want to excel at our job bad enough to go that extra mile. When things get uncomfortable or too difficult, we quit.

Mediocrity doesn't just happen in the secular world. It also happens in some of our spiritual lives. Some of us don't want to do what it takes to be disciples. Becoming a Christian is easy. All you have to do is repent of your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. But if you want to be a disciple of Jesus, you have to work at it. Bible study and prayer are very important. You also have to make sacrifices. Jesus said, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*" We can't quit because things get tough or we get tired.

Do you want to be a true disciple of Jesus? If so, how bad do you want it?

DAY 9

Friday, March 14, 2025

Level What? Level Up!

Deac. Philippe B. Cade

Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV)

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

If you are a gamer, “Level Up” has a distinct meaning for you. It signifies the advancement of one's “character” to the next level of development. Examples of this include something as simple as Pac-Man, or Mario or Luigi in one of the 50+ Super Mario games, or “The Foundation” in Fortnite.

In continuing with this thought, “Leveling Up” is not an easy task. It takes a variety of steps and actions, including understanding the game mechanics, learning from setbacks, practicing strategically, and taking the time to build skills. In fact, “Leveling Up” allows your character to grow stronger, enhance skills and abilities, and take on more challenging tasks ... at the next level.

The same happens in a spiritual sense. Although it's not easy, we should be working every day to “Level Up” – i.e., doing the things to advance our “character” to the next level of development and to allow our “character” to grow stronger, build and enhance skills, take on more challenging tasks, and press forward as Paul encourages us in Philippians 3:14.

Below are three ways that we can press forward and “Level Up” in our own spiritual journeys:

- Practice being a promise keeper – do what you say you will do.
- Practice being nice and empathetic to others, regardless if others are nice to you.
- Practice exhibiting humility – prioritize the needs of others over your own.

I challenge you over the next 30 days to lean on your video game skills – spend a bit of time “practicing” per the list above, and it will result in your strengthening and developing your character and going to the next level.

DAY 10

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Turning Back to Move Forward

Sis. Jessica Hurn

Isaiah 30:18 (NLT)

So the Lord must wait for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion. For the Lord is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for his help.

Have you ever felt like rebelling against God? I know; I know – we won't admit that. But have you ever felt like any of the following?

God, I've waited long enough.

I've tried Your way, and it isn't working.

Waiting is causing me to suffer.

I've asked, but You haven't answered, so I'll just do what I think is best.

I'm confident in what to do. I don't need to consult God on this.

This is exactly where Israel was in Isaiah 30. Instead of consulting God, they made an alliance with Egypt, thinking it would protect them from Assyria. But it turned out to be a bad deal, and their choice hurt them – and hurt the Lord.

When We Choose Control Over Trust

How often do we do the same? We say we trust God, but when His timing doesn't match ours, we take matters into our own hands. We pursue jobs, relationships, or financial decisions out of fear rather than faith. We turn to coping mechanisms instead of waiting on His provision. Just like Israel, we seek security in something that cannot truly save us.

God's Invitation to Return

But even after Israel's mistake, God didn't turn away. Instead, He longed to show them grace.

A better version of our relationship with God – **our next level of faith** – comes when we **repent and trust Him**. That's when we stop running to our "Egypt" and start running to Him. If you feel stuck, maybe it's not because God hasn't moved – it's because He's waiting for you to return and rest in Him.

Is there an area in your life where you've been trying to control the outcome instead of trusting God? This week, take one step of faith by surrendering it to Him and waiting on His direction.

REFLECTION DAY
Sunday, March 16, 2025

How are you responding to God's call to level up?

DAY 11

Monday, March 17, 2025

Working to Make Partner

Sis. Tiara Hopson

Luke 5:5-7 (NLT)

“Master,” Simon replied, “we worked hard all last night and didn’t catch a thing. But if you say so, I’ll let the nets down again.” And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

Have you ever seen a movie or television show where someone is working tirelessly to move from an associate to partner? Their days are painfully long. Their relationships suffer. Their best effort feels like the bare minimum. They often compete in rivalries where the winner must be willing to do anything. Eventually, you start to question if the individual’s work ethic deserves applause or criticism. If achieved, the rewards are great but questionable.

So why work to make partner? The rewards. An associate works for the company and is compensated accordingly, but a partner enjoys the benefits of ownership, greater profits and rewards, and responsibility. Now, what if God is offering you a partnership backed with His promises of great rewards?

The rewards awaiting us from God are undeniably greater than we can imagine, but we begin to see them when we partner with Him towards His Master Plan. God has entrusted each of us with a piece of His plan. As associates, we might find ourselves simply checking a list. Saved? Check. Church on Sunday? Christmas concert? \$20 offering? Check, check, check. But God wants partners – people who are invested in His plan and take ownership to ensure their part is “Well done.” Like Simon, a partnership with God is a long day after a long day. It’s going indoors for church AND outside to make disciples. It’s SMBS AND Howard Thurman. It’s giving a tithe AND an offering. It’s knowing your gifts AND using them to level up the Body. It requires sacrifice, perseverance, and obedience. And, like Simon, the rewards are so great you may need help from a partner or two as you receive God’s blessings.

Prayer: God, Your partnership is invaluable. Help us see the blessings and rewards awaiting us by becoming partners. And help us not grow weary in well doing and that more partners will be added to Your fields. In Jesus’ name, amen.

DAY 12

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

A Damascus Moment

Sis. Sharon V. Jacobs

Acts 9:3-4 (NKJV)

As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Saul, who persecuted Christians, was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus. Jesus asked him why he was persecuting him. Saul was blinded on the road to Damascus and for three days while in Damascus. His vision was restored during a visit from Ananias who laid hands on him. Paul immediately started preaching in the synagogues that Christ is the Son of God. After having been the one that persecuted Christians, he was chosen to be one of the greatest missionaries.

Saul's name was changed to Paul, and after his conversion he preached across the Roman Empire. The journey of Paul was not easy. There were plots to kill him; he was beaten, jailed, and shipwrecked. Many did not believe that he was a disciple. But nothing stopped him from proclaiming Jesus Christ; he never turned back from his mission. Paul seemed like an unlikely person to be chosen to proclaim Jesus Christ. But we are not in that category. We should willingly walk with Jesus Christ and unashamedly proclaim Him.

The church has a mission to go to the "Next Level" and needs all of us to support that mission. First, we should look within ourselves to seek how to move our spiritual life to the "Next Level." After that we will be in a position to support the church in its mission.

Christians do not need a Damascus moment, because we already proclaim in Jesus Christ. Are you ready to go a step further and support the church in its mission to the "Next Level?"

Dear Lord, we come to you today asking for the strength to look within ourselves and find out what the next level is for our spiritual lives, so we can support the church in its mission to the "Next Level," allowing us to seek souls that need to learn about salvation.

DAY 13

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Just In Case

Sis. Gwendolyn J. Wesley

Ephesians 6:11-12 (GNT)

Put on all the armor that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil's evil tricks. For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age.

I get teased about my attempts to be prepared for the unexpected. I remember taking a mother-daughter trip with my sister and friends. We were “dressed to the nines” as we strolled down the streets of New York City. I must admit, however, that I looked a bit like a “bag lady.” Laugh if you want to, but I was prepared! I had extra everything – gloves, scarf, hat, and even an extra pair of socks – **just in case**. As the wind picked up, someone asked, “Do you have an extra scarf in your bag that I can use?” Another asked, “Do you have another hat in there?” Yes, I was ready. My car is no different. The glove compartment contains the basic stuff—proof of insurance and car registration. Additionally, there are snacks, face masks, a window-breaking device, flashlight – **just in case**. (Don’t ask me about the trunk.) My motto: “Better to have and not need than to need and not have.” So, I always carry these things with me.

This preparation regimen was developed through life experiences to take care of **physical** needs.

But what does my **spiritual** preparation look like? Satan is on the prowl every day! Thanks be to God that I don’t fall for his old tricks. But then, he steps up his game. When one thing doesn’t work, he’ll try something else, hoping to catch me unprepared for his attack.

I’m leveling up and shoring up my “**just in case**” equipment. The whole armor of God is my protection. I’m putting it on. The word of God is my instruction manual. I’m studying more to better understand, apply, and share it through unabashed testimony and teaching. Prayer is my connection to my power source – Jesus the Christ. I’m staying in communication with Him constantly – asking for wisdom, discernment, and courage for the **just in case!**

Question: What is your “**just in case**” equipment and how are you preparing to use it?

DAY 14

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Leveling Up!

Rev. Dr. Justin M. Shamell

Ezekiel 36:26 (NLT)

And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.

Have you felt that you are a disappointment to yourself, family and God? Have you questioned your self-worth and purpose? Have you felt drained and depleted? Have you felt like throwing in the towel? Have you said that 2025 will be my year for leveling up?

Life can be challenging when we lose faith and instill a stubborn and stony heart, which can hinder our progress in moving to the next level in life. I would like to share this good news with you during this season of Lent: God offers restoration that will allow you to take your life to a new level of heart, spirit and praise. This can be made possible when you turn your stony and stubborn heart over to God. God is the only one who can assist you in leveling up in life by renewing your heart and providing a new spirit. Are you ready to forget those things that happened in 2024? Take a few moments to ponder how leveling up in 2025 would look?

In the text, once again God is providing the Children of Israel with an opportunity to restore their relationship with God. Once again, the Children of Israel are being held accountable for their misdeeds and disobedience to the teaching, instructions and covenant with God. God promised the Children of Israel leveling up, if they would repent and return to God. With their repentance, God promised the following: 1. I will give you a new heart; 2. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart; and 3. I will give you a tender, responsive heart. This message to the Children of Israel is available and applicable to us. God is ready to give us a tender and responsive heart. Are you ready to go to the next level in all of your areas of your life (physical, mental, emotional, financial, and spiritual)?

Prayer: God, I seek repentance for my stubborn heart. I request that you would renew my spirit and give me a tender and responsive heart. In the Name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

DAY 15

Friday, March 21, 2025

Where Is Your Brother?

Rev. Burton Barr

Genesis 4:9 (NLT)

Afterward the LORD asked Cain, "Where is your brother? Where is Abel?" "I don't know" Cain responded. "Am I my brother's guardian?"

In the fourth chapter of the book of Genesis, the story of Cain and Abel is told. Cain allowed the powers of sin to overtake him, and in a fit of rage, he killed his brother, Abel. Afterwards, God asked Cain an intriguing question: "Where is your brother?"

I want to ask you that same question. Where is your brother? I'm not talking about your biological brother. I'm talking about your brotherhood. Brotherhood is described as a society or community of people linked by a common interest or religion. A brother can be a relative, a friend, or someone that you know.

We all know someone who is hurting. They may have lost their home or their job. They may have gone through a divorce or are estranged from their children. Someone close to them may have recently died, or one of their family members is in prison. They might be battling with an addiction, or they just need a helping hand or an encouraging word. The bottom line is, they are hurting. God is asking you, "Where is your brother? Can you see the hurt? Can you see the pain? Where is your brother?"

Cain gave the answer that all of us have thought about, "Am I my brother's keeper?" You have been hurt. You have been disappointed. People that you love have lied to you, stole from you, and fooled you time and again. You have cried many tears because of the things that they have done to you. But God is still asking, "Where is your brother?" God told Cain something that we all need to hear. He said, "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." God does not want anyone to perish. That is why He is so patient. Remember, He was patient with you, too.

The next time you pray, say, "Lord, here is my brother. I am putting him in your hands." Then trust God to do the rest.

DAY 16

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Won't He Do It?

Rev. Dr. Rosalind P. Denson

Isaiah 41:10 (MSG)

Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you.

Don't you just hate it when someone makes a promise but doesn't keep it? They might say, "If you loan me \$50.00, I'll pay you back in two weeks." But two months have come and gone, and the debt is still unpaid.

Or perhaps someone says, "Sure, I'll be there tomorrow to help you move." But when tomorrow becomes today, you find yourself sweating alone.

Maybe it was an anonymous email promising a \$4500 refund on your auto policy, if you just click the enclosed link and give your personal information.

In this passage from Isaiah, God says, "I will give you strength. I will help you. I will hold you steady and keep a firm grip on you."

My friends, when the great I AM says, "I WILL," you can take that promise to the bank. Our great God is a promise keeper. He is not a man that He should lie. Rest assured, He makes His promises with love, power, and authority! He wants to help and is well able to do so. There is no God like our God.

We don't have to fear that we'll be left in the lurch, disappointed again, or taken advantage of.

Even if we made our own mess, thought we knew better than God, or broke our promise to Him, He assures us that He is still our God. You can trust Him. He'll never leave you. He'll always love you and His help never fails.

Application: Take a moment to think of one thing you need God to help you with.

What areas of your life need strengthening?

What life event or circumstance has knocked you down and you need His strong hand to get up?

Take whatever it is to the Lord in prayer.

Affirm to yourself: My God will help me.

My God is with me. I don't have to worry.

REFLECTION DAY
Sunday, March 23, 2025

What are you learning through God's call to level up?

DAY 17

Monday, March 24, 2025

The Lord is Always Near

Sis. Sharon V. Jacobs

Matthew 6:11 (KJV)

Give us this day our daily bread.

Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort.

I recently woke up again panicky and shaky from a nightmare I was having. It was like I was in a horrific place and was struggling to get out, but everywhere I turned things got worse. It seemed so real, and I was so scared not knowing how I could save myself. After I woke up, I laid in bed glad it was just a nightmare but still shaking. I didn't know what to do to calm myself down, but I found myself praying. I prayed and prayed and slowly started to settle down. After praying I reached for my devotions that I read every day. I read through them all, along with the suggested scriptures.

After finishing the devotions, I recited Psalm 23 and prayed The Lord's Prayer. Psalm 23 reminds me that God is with me, caring for me, and that even though I may go through tough times, He will always be with me. The Lord's prayer reminds me the Lord will give me what I need for the day, and as such, I do not have to worry about tomorrow. After praying, doing the readings, and reciting the scriptures, I was completely calm and ready to face the day and whatever might come my way. One must continue to go to the next level spiritually to ensure that we have the tools to get through tough times. As we move higher spiritually, we are able to support the church in our mission to "the Next Level."

What do you do in times of fear, darkness, or trouble? Do you turn to the Lord or try to work it out on your own?

Heavenly Father, thank you for keeping me and being my constant companion especially in times of fear, trouble and darkness. Remind me that You are always near.

DAY 18

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

As For Me and My House, We Will Serve the Lord

Bro. Orlando Bryant

Joshua 24:15 (NKJV)

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

I come first giving glory, honor and praise to our great God, for He is worthy of all praise!

When we worship the Lord at our church, He comes in and visits with us. It is the same when my wife and I worship the Lord at home. He also comes and visits with us there.

While God was visiting us in our home in the beginning of January, He saw something dangerous that we did not see. To take care of the problem, I believe God called the gas company, and the gas company called us to make an appointment to change the gas meter. While changing the gas meter, a dangerous leak was discovered. It was carbon monoxide (a colorless, odorless and poisonous gas). Our gas had to be shut off until we could get the problem fixed.

I am glad God comes and visits our home when we worship Him – and even when we don't. I believe God had a plan (which was not my plan). He had blessed me to be able to work overtime on my job, so I was planning what I was going to buy for myself (oops! buy for us). But that was not what God had planned. Proverbs 16:9 says, "Man makes his plans in his heart, but God directs his steps." This is Bible verse is so true!

The Holy Spirit led me to take my overtime money – which I had planned to spend on us – and get the gas leak fixed. God is always right on time! I was looking at the news, and they said when it is cold like the cold weather we recently had, that's when carbon monoxide is most dangerous. It kills because you cannot see it, smell it or feel it. But God sees all things – things seen and unseen.

The Bible says in John chapter 4 that true worshipers will worship God in spirit and in truth, and Hebrews chapter 11 says that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. We are true worshipers and are diligent seekers of the Lord our God and His Word. Therefore, we are receivers of His protection and His blessings.

Reflection: Wouldn't you like to receive the blessings and rewards of the Lord? Level-up this year; serve the Lord at church and at home!

PS: A word of advice - Please get a carbon monoxide detector for your home.

DAY 19

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Leveling Up with Jesus

Deac. Euclid C. Strayhorn

Psalm 46:1-3 (NIV)

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

Over five years ago, I had gone to the doctor for a checkup. It was a referral from another doctor because of some health issues. The doctor presented me with a life changing diagnosis, for which she gave me a bunch of pamphlets. She refused to listen to any of my responses and immediately diagnosed me with the worst-case scenario. It was a complete shock to my system. I went home, looked at the diagnosis in man's perspective, and started to make arrangements for my upcoming possible demise.

I went to my pastor and asked him to commit to deliver my eulogy in the future, and I started taking steps to prepare for the inevitable upcoming end that seemed to be waiting for me.

One day after reading scripture, meditating, praying and leaning on God for strength and encouragement; I was encouraged, and I committed to moving forward. I started talking to others who had experienced similar health issues, and it seemed that my man's perspective needed to change to a perspective that fully depended on God. I have since put my ego aside and learned to lean on God's word and encouragement in reference to my health condition and ongoing issues.

You see, God is our refuge and our strength, and he is ever present help in times of trouble. I have learned this. I have also learned to communicate my needs through prayer with others. It was difficult for me to do this at first, but in conversations I've learned that other people have the same condition that I have and even worse – they're in higher risk stages.

So I have just learned to trust completely in God. There is nothing else in this world that could help me. And there is nothing else in this world that is as awesome and incredible as my God. He is my go-to; He is my strength. He is my encourager, and he is bigger than anything in this world. And He will be the same for you.

DAY 20

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Transformative Glory

Sis. Yaya Buford

2 Corinthians 3:16-18 (NLT)

But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord – who is the Spirit – makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.”

The majority of us desire to level up, become the best versions of ourselves and obtain complete fulfillment in ourselves, but not everyone decides to seek the LORD.

Navigating life without the Spirit of God is like..

A horse without hooves,
the sun without the heavens,
Soil without seeds,
and marriage without the “I do.”

None of these things makes sense, neither does seeking to “level up” apart from the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of God that enables believers to be transformed from glory to glory in the image of God. This means that our spirit man is being changed and transformed by God’s Spirit, and we become more and more glorious; in other terms, we are being “leveled up” spiritually.

I want to challenge your idea of growth. Is growth always physical, or is it sometimes defined by divine experience? Is growth only defined by an action taken, or may it be defined by a heart change?

When you turn to the Lord, and the “veil” is removed, you have nothing left to hide. You are now enabled to see and reflect the glory of the Lord in your life, and to be transformed daily. The struggle standing in your way of getting to the next level cannot be removed until you turn to the Lord. Every. Single. Day.

We love celebrations, finish line cheers, congratulations, parades, cake and ice cream, but what about the journey of transformative glory?

This journey is only seen in the secret place between you and the Spirit of God. Your next level is awaiting you, right on the other side of the veil, but first, turn to the Lord through fasting, prayer, Scripture, repentance, and complete dependence upon the Lord.

Reflection: In what areas of my life do I need to partner with the Spirit of God more and submit to Him in communion (practically, spiritually)?

DAY 21

Friday, March 28, 2025

Skip, Skip, Skip...

Sis. Gwendolyn J. Wesley

1 Corinthians 13:11 (ESV)

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

I recently watched a clip of young co-workers who asked their much older supervisor if he could skip. He paused for a moment then replied, “Yeah, I think I can still do that.” He was recalling what he **used to do** when he was a child. Now, however, he couldn’t seem to get his feet to move with his legs while he tried to hop, thus creating a skip. His attempts were hilarious! After trying and failing, he and his coworkers embraced each other in a spirit of camaraderie and mutual respect. They laughed until they could hardly stand! The supervisor had allowed himself to be vulnerable and humbled by the situation for the team’s sake. That showed confidence and maturity.

Spiritual growth is similar. It requires that we reflect on our faith journey and recognize that skills used in the past may require recalibration. Not that we forget past experiences, but that we don’t bemoan what we can no longer do or get stuck dwelling on what used to be. If we do, we miss out on our blessings and opportunities to bless others.

We mature as we gain confidence in our faith by imitating Jesus Christ. He became vulnerable to show us how much He loves us. He embraces us with grace every day. He could have denied the cross and saved Himself the humiliation and pain, but for our sake, He endured it all. This is our blueprint for how to love others – extend grace, forgive, be patient, be kind, and meet their needs.

I may not be able to skip like I used to. That skill was useful and fun **back then**. Today forward, I’m recalibrating and retooling to **earnestly** pray for those who seem fixed on self-promotion, greed, and lack of concern for others. I’m stepping up my game to be more like Christ. How about you?

Question: What area(s) in your life need recalibration for your personal spiritual growth?

DAY 22

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Press Toward the Next Level

Rev. Dr. Darlene T. Davis

Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV)

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

One of the wonderful things that happens when we “get saved” is that we start a great journey. We get to travel **with AND to** Jesus. He is everywhere on this journey. He is the source and initiator of the journey; He is the goal of the journey, and He is the transportation for the journey, AND He is the prize for completing the journey. It seems like the journey is all in His hands, and it is true that He is in control of the journey; however, we have a big part to play.

In order to reach our goal and get the prize, we have to be like Paul and **PRESS** toward the next level. Sometimes it will take a strong push, a straining move, a hard shove to move forward. Pressing toward the next level means making conscious choices and taking intentional actions in order to move forward. We have to want it so much that we choose it, strive for it, invest in it.

Maybe the choice is more prayer or more Bible study or more quiet time. Maybe the action is taking a class or participating in a particular ministry.

“If you limit your choices only to what seems possible or reasonable, you disconnect yourself from what you truly want, and all that is left is compromise.” Robert Fritz

What is God leading you to choose or intentionally act on in order for Him to do His part and move you to the next level? Today, listen as God speaks His next level will into your life.

Prayer: Dear God, today, help us to hear your specific will for our journey, give us what we need to press forward, and then God give us the willingness to receive it and the strength to push through any obstacles or circumstances that stand in our way, and not settle for the compromise. In Jesus’s Name, amen.

REFLECTION DAY
Sunday, March 30, 2025

How are you growing through God's call to level up?

DAY 23

Monday, March 31, 2025

Distractions

Bro. Cortney Strayhorn

Galatians 5:16-25 (NLT)

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

Has your flesh, or your sinful nature, become a distraction from who God has called you to be? That's a question for everyone, since we all are fighting our flesh daily. The battle can become a difficult daily task. For example, something could happen that will pressure you to react according to your flesh. You can give in to your sin, or you can ask God to help you throughout the day, so that you don't react in your sinful nature.

God gives us options each day we wake up. First, we are to give him praise for waking us up. Also, we are to study His word daily, because it protects us from ourselves, so that we don't get easily distracted by sin. Whether your distraction is anger, lust, running late, jealousy etc., be mindful to keep your heart and mind on the Lord whenever these distractions happen. The Lord knows what your intentions are, and He knows your heart. We have good intentions to be obedient and not let anyone or anything distract us from our calling, but sometimes a friend, or family member, or even a classmate may push our buttons. So how do you respond? Do you get distracted?

Dear Lord, in this time of need, can you help me to not get distracted by my flesh or anything that would take me away from you. Draw me closer to you Lord and help me to call on you when I am distracted. Thanks, Lord. Amen

DAY 24
 Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Leveling up our Serve
 Rev. Korey Davis

Mark 10:45 (NIV)

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

As Christians we are called to be servants, and servants, serve.

Let us focus on leveling up our serve during Lent. In the sports arena, tennis players seek to improve their serve. Baseball pitchers train to improve their serve. Volleyball players practice to improve their serve. The key to winning the game is in the serve. The key to winning souls for Christ is in our serve.

Leveled up service is one of humility, love, and selflessness, just as Philippians 2:4 indicates.

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Jesus himself is the ultimate example of leveled up service – washing his disciples' feet, healing the sick, feeding the hungry and sacrificing himself.

Jesus devoted his entire life to the service of others. And like Jesus, we must be all in.

Today set aside eight minutes of uninterrupted time to reflect on your level of spiritual service and how you can use your spiritual gifts to serve others in eight meaningful ways.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

DAY 25

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Leveling Up through Trials

Sis. Nia Hodges

James 1:2-4 (CSB)

Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

Have you ever played a video game where you had to complete challenges to move to the next level? No matter how talented you are, you can't just start at the hardest level and expect to win. You have to learn from experience, sharpen your skills, and fail a few times before you're truly ready for the next challenge.

Faith works the same way. We often ask God to place us in positions we're not yet prepared for – leadership roles, relationships, new opportunities – but without the endurance that comes from trials, we lack the strength and wisdom to succeed. God doesn't just hand us the next level. He grows us into it.

James tells us to consider trials as joy, not because they feel good, but because of what they produce in us – endurance, maturity, and completeness. Every challenge you face is not meant to break you but to build you. When we endure with faith, we come out stronger, more prepared, and more aligned with God's purpose for us.

So, the next time you find yourself in a difficult season, ask yourself: What is God trying to develop in me? Instead of praying for an easy way out, pray for endurance to level up. Because when the trial ends, you won't be the same – you'll be stronger, wiser, and ready for what's next.

Reflection & Challenge

What is a trial you are currently facing, and how might God be using it to prepare you?

Instead of resisting hardship, how can you embrace it with joy, knowing it's making you stronger?

DAY 26

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Leveling Up Through Humility

Rev. Marlon Rhodeman

James 4:10 (NIV)

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.

In our pursuit of success, we often think that leveling up means striving harder, proving ourselves, and showcasing our strength. But God's way to true elevation is different – He calls us to humility. When we surrender our pride and trust Him completely, He positions us for a breakthrough far beyond what we could achieve on our own.

In the movie, *Facing the Giants*, there's a powerful scene where a football player is challenged to carry a teammate on his back while blindfolded. Without seeing the finish line, he has to rely solely on his coach's voice, pushing past exhaustion. What he doesn't realize is that he goes farther than he ever thought possible – reaching the end zone.

This scene is a perfect picture of humility before God. When we “close our eyes” to our own understanding and lean on God's voice (Proverbs 3:5), He strengthens us beyond our limits. The football player didn't make it by his own ability – he made it by trusting his leader. Similarly, when we trust God fully and humble ourselves before Him, He lifts us up in ways we never imagined.

If you're feeling stuck or striving in your own strength, take a step back. Surrender your plans, humble your heart, and let God lead. When you do, He will elevate you to places you never thought you could reach. True leveling up comes not from pride, but from surrender. Trust Him, and He will lift you up!

Prayer: Father, in this life's journey, though tests and trials come, help us to remember not to rely on our own strength, but to remember that You said in this world we shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; You have overcome the world. So help us to trust in You with all our heart and lean not unto our own understanding. But in all our ways acknowledge You, because you will direct our paths. Thank You. Amen.

DAY 27

Friday, April 4, 2025

Level Up to a Brighter Level of Glory

Deac. Christopher L. Cade

2 Corinthians 3:18 (TPT)

We can all draw close to him with the veil removed from our faces. And with no veil we all become like mirrors who brightly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are being transfigured into his very image as we move from one brighter level of glory to another. And this glorious transfiguration comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Paul has packed a lot in this verse, and there is a lot we could discuss. Let's begin with one word: transformation. We can be transformed to be like Jesus and get to higher levels of glory. That's super exciting. But how do we do it? How do we get to higher levels? What does it take to level up?

Check out the first part of the scripture. We can become like Jesus by drawing close to Him. The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we become like Him – transformation.

When children start playing a sport at a young age, do they play at the highest level? Of course not. People are born with a talent, but it takes great effort to get to that next level. They have to develop their bodies physically and prepare their minds to learn the rules and strategies of that particular sport. They just don't show up to the first practice and know how to execute the plays at the highest level. The transformation to a high-level athlete takes years of work, dedication, focus, sacrifice, and endurance. They have to exercise, develop muscles, maintain a proper diet, study plays, practice, and increase stamina.

Spiritual growth and becoming more like Christ also require work, dedication, focus, sacrifice, and endurance. We have to increase our bible study and prayer, apply biblical teachings to our daily lives, serve others, fast, meditate, be obedient, and fully rely on God. We have to nurture the spirit and deny the flesh.

Well, this seems super daunting. How can we consistently do all of this? You cannot. It is the Lord working in you and through you that allows you to grow spiritually. You cannot do this in your own power. The Holy Spirit needs to be leading, guiding, and empowering you. He will do His part, but you have some work to do as well.

Are you ready to reach the higher levels of glory? It won't be easy, but I guarantee you it will be worth it.

DAY 28
Saturday, April 5, 2025

Less is More

Associate Pastor, Rev. Angela Tate

Luke 12:15 (NKJV)

And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

We know Jesus to be lots of thing in our lives: healer, sustainer, deliverer, SAVIOR! We also know Him to be our great teacher. As we read the gospel accounts, we see example after example of Jesus teaching. Sometimes He's teaching through sermons, sometimes as He is healing someone, and often times he is teaching through parables.

In Luke 12, He is teaching about the rich fool. Someone yells out from the crowd to Jesus asking Him to tell his brother to share the inheritance they have received. Jesus can't be bothered to get in the middle of this sibling rivalry, so He says back to the brother "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own" (Luke 12:15 NLT).

He then proceeds to tell the parable of one who had acquired so many possessions, so much material wealth, that he decided to build large barns to store it all in. The man purposed in his heart that he was going to sit back and take it easy! He was going to eat, drink, and be merry! There was no mention of sharing with the poor, helping his family, using his resources to allow him more time with his family. There was absolutely no mention of giving thanks to God or asking God what He would have him to do with such great wealth. He no doubt thought he had leveled up, and he had, when it came to possessions and money, but he was below valley level in his relationship with God and God's people. His focus was on the temporary, but God calls us to put our focus on that which is eternal.

God is not mad at us for acquiring things and money, but let us take heed to not become greedy, because our lives does not consist in the abundance of the things we possess. The abundant life that Jesus promised, the leveled up life, is one with Jesus at the center, Jesus as the focus, Jesus and a relationship with Him as the primary and constant pursuit. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me for the times I placed possessions above being in Your presence. Continue to draw me near to You and cause me to be content with relationship with You. Amen

REFLECTION DAY
Sunday, April 6, 2025

How is God's call to level up helping you serve others?

DAY 29

Monday, April 7, 2025

From not Knowing to Knowing

Bro. Orlando Bryant

Malachi 3:8 & 10 (NKJV)

(8) “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say ‘In what way have we robbed you?’ In tithes and offerings.... (10) Bring all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in My house. And try me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts. “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”

I would like to share with those who are questioning how they can level up by giving their tithes and offerings.

In my young Christian journey, I did not understand what it meant to give, let alone 10% of every dollar. I would dread offering time or that Sunday when Pastor would preach on tithing. How could I pay my bills and tithe?

While I was thinking about how I could pay my tithes, I had no problem receiving the blessing of forgiveness of my sin, the blessing of healing of my deteriorating body, the grace and mercy I received every day. I was looking forward to every Sunday, because God is good, but not so I could pay my tithes.

But fortunately, faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.

When God says, “Try Me” in Malachi, I now lean on Proverbs 3:5 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” In being obedient to His word, the Lord made a way for me to give my tithes. (I don’t know how He did it, but He did.) The Word of God is true! My cup overruns with blessings!

Now I know that there is a new level of blessings – blessings of joy, blessings of unspeakable peace. All kinds of blessings! They don’t stop. (HALLELUJAH!!)

Reflection: So won’t you try Him so you can receive blessings on a new level!

DAY 30

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Leveling up as We Grow Our Faith
Rev. Dr. Gwendolyn DeLoach Packnett

Psalm 116:12 (KJV)

What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?

Many of us precious saints can recall receiving mail from AARP as we made our way to turning 50 years old! We were welcomed to this distinct organization that provides benefits uniquely designed for its members. Indeed, belonging has its privileges.

As believers, we know of the spiritual benefits that come with knowing Jesus. But what are the benefits to our connection with West Side MB Church? How can we "level up" as we grow our faith as members?

In addition to anointed preaching, at West Side MB Church, we are provided some spiritually-centered benefits to enhance our Christian growth and development. They are designed to bless the body of Christ. Let us level up in 2025 and grow stronger in our faith as we make a committed decision to expand our personal Christian education through the many courses West Side offers and also through Sunday Morning Bible Study classes. Let's take advantage of MAC Ministry offerings and Youth Church and Fellowship. Perhaps you can benefit from connecting with the Women's Missionary Union, Prison Ministry, Dance Ministry, Men of Valor, working with the food pantry, or the myriad of other full rights and privileges afforded us at West side.

We can then render unto God a better version of ourselves as we grow in His knowledge, grow in our faith, and do good works that will bring Him glory. Take the 2025 challenge and level up as you grow your faith in these challenging times.

What shall you render unto God for all his benefits towards you?

DAY 31

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

Rise

Rev. Mary Adou Gbougbo

John 11:23 (NKJV)

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Not long ago, I woke up to find a dead deer in our backyard. It was lying there lifeless, motionless, with its head resting underneath the shadow of a tall evergreen tree. Because there were no signs of trauma, I couldn't help but wonder how it got there. After all, it's not every day a deer finds eternal rest in one's backyard. "Aww, the poor thing," I said aloud, thinking about who I should call to remove this beautiful creature. But before I could, the deer suddenly started moving, digging its hooves into the ground and kicking its long, hind legs in the air, trying with all its might to stand up. It seemingly knew it had just escaped the sting of death. As it started to rise, I began cheering it on as I watched it dash back into the wilderness.

In the story of Lazarus, Jesus tells Lazarus' sister, Martha, "Your brother will rise again." Because Lazarus had been dead for four days, Martha thought Jesus meant that Lazarus would rise on the last day. But Jesus tells her Lazarus would be raised from the dead *that* day and she would bear witness. He tells her, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." Jesus then asked Martha, and I also ask you, "Do you believe this?" Believe that Jesus is the Life and that He came so we can have life and have it more abundantly.

As for the deer, I later learned that it simply had the wind knocked out of it. And sometimes life can knock the wind out of us. Yet, we must rise. We have to get back up and keep going. Keep hoping, keep trusting, keep believing, remembering: "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living just because He lives."

This week when life knocks the wind out of you, how will you seek Jesus to help you rise up?

DAY 32

Thursday, April 10, 2025

Education to Salvation

Sis. Shay Davenport

John 3:4 (NIV)

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Being educated has always been seen as a privilege in many cultures – from Biblical times and even to present times. As a parent, you celebrate the accomplishments as your toddler masters the alphabets, colors, and shapes. You look forward to your kid being promoted to the next grade level. And when it is graduation time, whether high school or college, this feeling of achievement is felt by many. The once child has become an adult, leveling up during each season of life’s journey! Now, it’s time to apply all the education received by becoming a productive citizen.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. This means that Nicodemus was very educated and seen by the people to be fair and just. What is astonishing about Nicodemus is that even though he had reached a very prestigious level in society, and he knew the laws, and he knew that there was more to Jesus than just performing miracles and teaching about God, Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus as a teacher (by referring to Jesus as “Rabbi”) and that Jesus was from God. He visited Jesus at night and asked, “How can someone be born when they are old?”

You see, Nicodemus was asking Jesus how could he be saved. Nicodemus’ education prompted him to reflect on a physical birth; while Jesus’ response reflected being born again spiritually. In summary, Jesus replied that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

While education is still a privilege and is needed, leveling up in your relationship with God promises an eternal life with Him. Nicodemus initially approached Jesus by himself at night as a caution because of his (Nicodemus) standing in society. Nicodemus realized that his studies to become a Pharisee and holding a position with the Jewish Council were not enough, based on what he witnessed when observing Jesus. Nicodemus leveled up in his faith, was born again, and received salvation.

Reflect on how your relationship with God has evolved over this past year. Have you leveled up in your journey with Christ?

DAY 33

Friday, April 11, 2025

Leveling up in Grace

Rev. Dawn Jones

Galatians 2:20-21 (NIV)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

In these verses, we find Paul using a confrontation that he had with his fellow apostles to teach the Galatian church about being justified, or saved, by faith. He is correcting the idea that believers are saved by following the Law, also known as the Mosaic Laws or the first five books of the bible, rather than their faith in Jesus. Jesus told us that He came to fulfill the Law, which is what Paul is emphasizing here. Because of Christ, we are saved through Him, not our works according to the Law. The church in Galatia was losing sight of what and who really saved them. They began to buy into the old Jewish ideas that they were somehow saved by following the law to the tee and earning righteousness.

Now it's easy for us to read this and shake our heads in judgment towards the church in Galatia; however, we often buy into the idea that our good Christian behaviors and deeds somehow make us more righteous, worthy, and holy than others. We may feel that if we pray more, serve more, or act "better," we will be more righteous. But Paul challenges this mindset; if righteousness came through the law, then Jesus' sacrifice was unnecessary. On our best day, our righteousness is still like a filthy rag!

The truth is grace is a gift. We can't work for it, we can't deserve it, and we can't add to it. When we try to earn God's favor, we diminish the power of the cross. Now this doesn't mean that we don't strive to live a life of righteousness in this next season. It simply means that we acknowledge the work of the cross in our lives and that any righteousness that we achieve is because of the grace of God and His sacrifice on the cross – not our good Christian behaviors. We are called to *receive* grace and live in it daily, allowing Christ's righteousness to work in and through us.

This is good news!

As we enter this next level, we can rest and walk in the freedom of God's grace. Let go of the pressure to perform and embrace the truth that Jesus has already done this work on your behalf.

DAY 34

Saturday, April 12, 2025

Come up Here
Sis. Lolita Buford

Revelation 4:1-2 (ESV)

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

It is widely believed that the apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation during his exile on the island of Patmos. God had rescued John from torture and death but allowed him to be sent into isolation. During this season of exile, God transmitted the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which we now know as the Book of Revelation.

Chapter 4 marks a turning point in the vision as John hears the heavenly command: "Come up here!" John was exactly where God intended him to be. Having sat at the feet of Jesus when the Savior walked the Earth and fulfilled his call to ministry, John was now positioned to receive a higher level of revelation. God opened the doors of heaven and revealed to John supernatural insights about the past, present, and future, along with guidance for how the church should navigate impending evil while looking ahead to the Lord's ultimate triumph and eternal reign.

In this season of spiritual growth, or "leveling up," I believe God is calling His church to "come up here" (or rise higher). He is ready to reveal His mind and heart, but we must be in the right position to hear and respond to His call.

Challenge: How can you achieve stillness to hear from God? Through Jesus, our high priest, the doors of heavenly access are open, and God is inviting us to a deeper intimacy with Him. Each day, set aside quiet time to "come up here" and receive heaven's direction for your life and those you are called to in this generation.

REFLECTION DAY
Sunday, April 13, 2025

How is God's call to level up helping you grow closer to God?

DAY 35

Monday, April 14, 2025

What is your **S.H.A.P.E.**

Sis. Sharon V. Jacobs

Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Years ago, the church read the *Purpose Driven Life*, a book by Pastor Rick Warren. It challenged us to determine what on earth we are here for. The term **S.H.A.P.E.**, an acronym which refers to five specific characteristics of who you are – your **Spiritual Gifts**, **Heart**, **Aptitude** (abilities), **Personality**, and **Experiences** – was highlighted in the book.

Considering the church’s mission of the “Next Level” it is a good time to revisit **S.H.A.P.E.** **Spiritual gifts** are the special abilities that are given to every believer to share God’s love and serve others. The **Heart** reflects dreams and desires and includes the passion and drive to help move the church to the next level. Everyone has an **Aptitude** (abilities), talents which are natural to each of us. Seeking God to find out which of those abilities you have can be used to assist God’s people and the church. Your **Personality** is different from anyone else’s; God made us all unique in that way. Understanding character and temperament determines how you relate to others, respond to opportunities, and define your purpose to be used to spread God’s light and word. We all have gained a multitude of **Experiences**, which God allowed, that molded us into the individuals that we are. There are family experiences, educational experiences, vocational experiences, job experiences, and spiritual experiences. Some of these experiences have been good, but some have not. However, we have learned from the problems, pains, hurts, and trials we have lived through. These experiences, good and bad, shape the way to support the “Next Level” mission of the church.

What is your **S.H.A.P.E.** and how can you use it to help further the “Next Level” mission of God’s people and the church?

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your word and the blessings You have bestowed on us. Give us the courage to boldly use our gifts to be a blessing to our church and everyone we come in contact with.

DAY 36

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

So, Little Faith?

Rev. Jennifer Strayhorn

Matthew 17:19-20 (NLV)

The followers came to Jesus when He was alone. They said, “Why were we not able to put the demon out?” Jesus said to them, “Because you have so little faith. For sure, I tell you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to over there,’ and it would move over. You will be able to do anything.”

Faith – we have faith in ways that we may not realize. For example, we sit in chairs without inspecting the bolts or knowing the manufacturer. We access an elevator or escalator and rarely think of its failure factor. We get on an airplane without any knowledge of the pilots' credentials. Well, I do.

When it comes to placing faith in God, we are fearful, hesitant, and resistant. He is greater than a manufacturer – He is the Creator. He does not have a failure factor because He cannot fail, and He has more “flying hours” than the most decorated pilot. He is the ultimate pilot. Noted theologian, St. Augustinian, stated that *“faith is both an adherence of the mind to supernatural truth and a humble surrender of the whole man to the grace of Christ.”*

God is challenging us to “level up” our faith. In this passage, Jesus calls out the disciple's unbelief. They *said* they had faith but *did not believe* that God had the power to cast out demons. Their words said he could, but their hearts did not line up. Honestly, often I am exactly like the disciples. I know what the Word of God says, yet when faced with a harassing situation, why does my heart waver?

Jesus was not measuring the *amount* of the disciple's faith but the *kind* of faith – faith in his supernatural ability to drive out demons and move mountains. Little faith is great faith when it is cohered to God's limitless capacity. God does not call us out for an emotional moment, but when we minimize God's ability from our vantage point, we are missing His omniscience.

For “next level” faith, we must fasten our hearts and minds to the truth of the Word and humbly surrender ourselves to Christ consistently. Nothing is impossible for God, absolutely nothing. Saying, knowing, believing, and exercising this fully comes by pulling away from the minimal faith of the world and allowing our whole mind to be immersed in the supernatural truth of God's Word. This will help my heart and your heart to have mountain moving faith.

What kind of faith do you have?

What will you do when your heart wavers?

How will you adhere to supernatural truth?

DAY 37

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Level Up for Change

Rev. Joy Rhodeman

Isaiah 59:19b (NKJV)

When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.

Our society is constantly evolving, redefining what is acceptable and good. Failing to adapt can leave us disconnected, as seen in:

- Fashion – Trends change each decade, making old styles outdated.
- Technology – We’ve moved from handwritten letters to instant AI-generated messages.
- Consumerism – Shoppers once flocked to stores like Famous Barr, but now Amazon, TikTok Shop, and Temu bring instant gratification with just a click.
- Social & Political Shifts – Morality, justice, and laws are redefined over time.

While some changes are beneficial, others can be harmful. The evolution of time reshapes our perceptions, often blurring the lines between right and wrong. Yesterday’s norms may now be condemned, while past taboos become acceptable. If we aren't discerning, we risk adopting values that drift further from God's truth.

But while the world shifts, God remains constant. When the enemy brings chaos, God raises His standard to protect and guide His people. When fear and doubt overwhelm, God lifts a standard of truth and victory. When morality wavers, God reestablishes His righteousness. And when struggles weigh us down, God pushes back the tide and realigns us with His purpose.

If society evolves to meet its challenges, we should expect God to level up in the supernatural to overcome every attack of the enemy, and He does! He redrew boundaries for His people throughout history: He empowered Moses to stand against Pharaoh’s oppression. He anointed David to take down Goliath. He sent Jesus to bring salvation to a lost world. And today, He empowers you to stand firm, overcome confusion, and resist compromise. God’s standard never falls – it only rises. So, it’s time for us to level up!

As the world changes, ask yourself: Are you aligning with God’s standard or the world’s? The enemy will bring new challenges, but God always has a greater response. Trust in His power to “level up” in your life.

Prayer: Lord, as the world changes, help me stand firm in Your truth. When the enemy comes in like a flood, remind me that You are greater. Raise up Your standard in my life and help me walk boldly in Your purpose. Amen.

DAY 38

Thursday, April 17, 2025

By Any Means Necessary

Sis. Patricia Allen

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.

At times, when challenges and problems persist, despite our faith as Christians, we may be tempted to take control ourselves. We become so preoccupied with the adverse circumstances that we neglect prayer, adopting a mindset of resolving issues “by any means necessary.” This “by any means necessary” approach had overtaken the person mentioned below. She maintained her trust and belief in God; however, when He did not act swiftly enough, she decided to address her situation on her own terms.

Frustrated by repeated property damage and the perpetrator's alibis, a woman decided to falsely claim that she was an eyewitness to the act. Prepared with another witness if needed, she was determined to report the latest incident to the police and claim she had witnessed it. As she began to report the matter to the officer, his phone rang. He excused himself and answered it. Soon he put the call on hold and asked her to confirm details about the suspect's appearance. Speaking back into the phone, the officer relayed her response.

When the call ended, he informed her that she unknowingly had parked her car in front of an unmarked detective's office. He had witnessed the suspect damaging her car and was in pursuit. The officer assured her that they would handle the matter, and she did not need to complete the complaint. Since the detective had observed the incident, he would press charges.

The woman realized with relief that a resolution had been provided that did not involve her “by any means necessary” approach. She silently thanked God for His intervention! She knew it was only by His grace that she had not committed the sin of lying.

When life gets tough, resist the urge to act impulsively. Instead, "level up" by praying and patiently waiting for God's guidance. Trusting in God helps us avoid sin and find the best outcome.

DAY 39

Friday, April 18, 2025

Are you Willing to Endure?

Sis. Candice Farrell

Proverbs 14:23 (MSG)

Hard work always pays off; mere talk puts no bread on the table.

The Process

It is tempting to focus solely on the end goal, but Proverbs 14:23 encourages us to value the process. The journey of hard work is not without its challenges, but these very obstacles shape and refine us. Each moment of sweat is an investment in future results. As we persist, we develop resilience, character, and a deeper understanding of our capabilities. The process itself becomes a source of growth and fulfillment.

At the beginning of the year, our Pastor gave us the vision to “Level Up” in all aspects of our lives. With this vision in tow, we look at the passage to find that we must be willing to endure and go through the process to reap the rewards. Far too often, we are consumed with society’s “highlight reels,” but rarely are we shown what actions were taken to get to the final result. An Olympian does not just show up to the track for the first time and sprint to a first place finish and the same goes for us. Much like an Olympian, we should go through the process to master the skills of our respective interests. Proverbs 14:23 highlights the value of hard work and encourages us to embrace the journey, trust in God’s faithfulness, and remain steadfast in our efforts.

Faith and Perseverance

Working hard is an act of faith. It requires us to trust that our efforts will bring about positive results, even when the path is uncertain. Proverbs 14:23 reassures us that our labor is not in vain. As we push through difficulties, we must remember that God sees our struggles and honors our dedication. Our faith in His promises sustains us, giving us the strength to continue even when the harvest seems far off.

Harvesting the Rewards

The harvest, though distant, is assured. It is a peak of the seeds sown through our hard work. Each step taken, each effort made, contributes to a future filled with blessings. We must not be discouraged by the time it takes to see the fruits of our labor, the outcome, the finished product. Instead, let us be motivated by the vision of the harvest that awaits us. As we continue to be persistent, we will eventually witness the tangible results of our perseverance.

Prayer: Lord, help us to have faith and perseverance through the process, so we will be able to harvest your rewards. In Jesus’ name, amen.

DAY 40

Saturday, April 19, 2025

God's Detour

Pastor, Rev. Dr. Charles H.N. Bobo, Sr.

Exodus 13:17-18 (NIV)

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle.

After ten plagues, Pharaoh finally let the children of Israel go. They were free, and all they needed to do was leave Egypt. To leave, they could have travelled a route that was a nice, short distance to their destination. However, if they were to take the shorter way, they would run into problems, and they might have to face war from a group of people called the Philistines. If that happened, then more than likely, they would change their minds, return to Egypt, and go back to a life that God had delivered them from. So instead of going that shorter route, God gave them another way to travel. A Detour. By definition, a detour is a different or less direct route to a place that is used to avoid a problem.

This wasn't just any detour, but rather a God led detour. This detour would keep them from returning to an old way of life. God had them go some hundreds of miles out of the way, on foot, just so they did not have to be tempted to go back to their old lifestyle. If it had not been for the detour, they may have never made it to their destination at all.

There may be times when we are given a detour from our current course. And while we cannot see the reason why the detour has been given to us, we should be grateful that God has rerouted us. When God gives you a detour, just know that He is keeping you from a problem down the road that you can't see.

The next time you encounter a detour in your life, ask God to guide you on the longer route. Don't avoid it – embrace it and be grateful for it.



REV. DR. CHARLES H.N. BOBO, SR.,
SENIOR PASTOR