



GRACE NEWS & NOTES



March 2025

Song Focus: “Change My Heart, O God”

As we enter into the Lenten season, I find myself trying to understand and learn about what this time is really about. It may not quite mean the same to everyone, but for me, it is a time of personal reflection and what I can change about myself to live a more pleasing life for God.



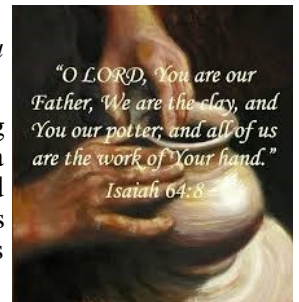
In Psalms 51:10 it says this: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me....restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit.” This verse resonates with me especially during Lent. So during the weeks of Lent we will be singing “Change My Heart, O God” as our hymn of preparation.

This song was written in 1982 by a man named Eddie Espinosa. He had been a Christian since 1969, but he knew there were things in his life he needed to discard. He also felt his faith had become complacent. He began praying that God would change him and to keep him away from the things in his life that prevented his faith from growing. He asked God to change his heart.

Not long after he started asking God to change his heart, he was driving in his car, heading to his work as a counselor at a high school. He was thinking about his desire to be nearer to God when suddenly a melody and lyrics came flooding into his mind! He had to pull his car over, and frantically searched for paper. He finally found a yellow scrap of paper and wrote down the words as fast as he could! Here’s what he wrote:

“Change my heart, O God, make it ever true. Change my heart, O God, may I be like you. You are the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me, this is what I pray.”

A song was born in that car, a true gift from God. One of Eddie’s friends knew about the song and told their Pastor about it. He asked Eddie to sing it for him and he knew this would be a wonderful praise song for his congregation, The song spread like wildfire to area churches and soon became a very popular song. It became published and the rest is history. Although Eddie’s career continued as a school counselor, he continued to write music and had almost 40 songs published!



One of his biggest moments for this particular song was when Eddie got to lead it in front of thousands of men at a Promise Keepers meeting in Dallas, TX. He and his wife still travel and lead music at conferences and events.

I hope and pray that as we sing this beautiful song at the beginning of our worship service, it will draw all of us closer to God and that we will feel his presence. May all of our hearts be “changed”!

Becky Styninger, Director of Music and Worship

On the Path to Victory



After moving to a college town, Pastor Kendra Thompson learned about the athletic phenomenon known as March Madness. And after a nondenominational upbringing, as a young adult she learned about Lenten traditions.

Lent and the NCAA college basketball tournament, which usually coincide, both point to the divine, Thompson argues. “In Lent, with each day we are drawn closer to the crushing reality that we’ve crucified our God. And yet we are also faced with an impossible victory: that death did not win, that our God is raised in Jesus

Christ,” she writes. “Likewise, watching college basketball invites us into a season of hoping in unlikely possibilities, marveling at upsets, and giving thanks to God for the connection we find as his people.”

Like fans swept up in high-stakes games, Jesus’ disciples abandon everything to follow him. Lent might be “holy madness,” Thompson muses. It’s “an opportunity to ‘feel’ our religion, not just in our heads but with our skin, our voices, even in the anxieties of our prayers.”

Free Tax Preparation & Filing Services

The Okawville Senior Center welcomes back AARP Foundation Tax Aide to offer FREE tax return preparation and filing services. This service is available to anyone, **NOT** just senior citizens. Participants do not need to be a member of AARP or a resident of Washington County. IRS certified volunteers will be onsite once a week up until the tax deadline. Call (618) 243-6533 to make an appointment — no walk ins.



New Small Group Study!

Too many of us walk through life feeling like we don't measure up. We always seem to thirst for more. We think if we could only work harder or be better, we could be enough. But the truth is, we will never be enough. Thankfully, we don't have to be.

In this eight-session, video-based Bible study entitled "Nothing to Prove", biblical scholar and author Jennie Allen walks through key passages in the Gospel of John that demonstrate how Jesus is enough. No more pretending. No more performing. No more fighting to prove yourself. Jesus alone is sufficient for all your needs.



This fulfilling and thought-provoking study begins **Tuesday, March 4th at 11:30 a.m.** Books will be passed out before the meeting on March 4th, so please let the church office know of your interest in the group if you have not already done so. We would love to have you join us (and don't forget to bring your lunch)! All are welcome to take advantage of this midday fellowship opportunity in the Grace Library!

Camping Ministries

Online registration is now open for 2025 summer camps through the Illinois Great Rivers Camp & Retreat Ministries. Grace UMC provides a scholarship to cover most of the camping fee for those wanting to attend. All that camp will cost you is \$25! The church will take care of the deposit and the rest of the fees (the average cost of each camp ranges from \$375 to \$600). Please talk to Pastor Leanne if you are interested in sending your child to camp.



There is an early bird discount for those completing their registration for an overnight camp fee and paying a \$50 deposit by **March 15, 2025**. They will receive \$25 off their overnight camp fee at East Bay, Epworth, or Little Grassy camps. Camp fees are then due in full by May 1st, unless other payment arrangements have been made.

Questions on registration, payments, or scholarships, please call 309-365-7531. To register for camp, visit their online site at igrc.campbrainregistration.com

MARCH

BIRTHDAYS

Mar. 4 Morris Roetemeyer
5 Margaret Snyder
7 Terry Campbell
 Kourtney Hake
8 Elyse Rench
14 Max Reeder
17 John Luessenheide
20 Sarah Staley
28 Selina Reynolds

ANNIVERSARIES

Mar. 4 Len & Terry Campbell

Congratulations everyone on your milestones! If your name was not included in our list, please inform the office so that we can update our records.

February Report

| Date | | Offering |
|-------|----------------|------------|
| 02-02 | | \$4,313.00 |
| 02-02 | Online (Vanco) | \$ 298.59 |
| 02-09 | | \$2,294.99 |
| 02-09 | Online (Vanco) | \$ 498.88 |
| 02-16 | | \$2,464.74 |
| 02-23 | | \$2,544.00 |

Online Giving is a total amount given for each week.

Total SPPR Budget for 2025 is \$226,399. Weekly giving requires \$4,354 per week to meet the total budgeted amount for 2025.

Don't Settle

For most of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.

—John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*

A Note from Pastor Leanne

The season of Lent is upon us, and many Christians couldn't be more confused. We *want* to observe this significant period for Christians...but have no idea where to start. I totally understand and am here to help!

Below is a list of Lenten activities that's been compiled with the family in mind.

In the midst of the activities, you'll notice the Lenten Kindness Calendar. I encourage you to check out a large version online, or you can contact me and I'll get you a size that is refrigerator-ready!

So, what do you say? Want to experience Lent in a new way this year?

I'd encourage you to enhance this Lenten season with these practices:

1. Make a Prayer Chain

Gather your loved ones and choose a selection of different prayers to write down on slips of multicolored paper. Then, interlock each strip and join your prayers together in what becomes a paper chain. Feel free to hang your chain in your home during the Lenten period!



| | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| 1 Donate food | 2 Pick up litter | 3 Give someone a compliment | 4 Let someone go ahead of you in line | 5 Hold the door open for someone |
| 6 Support a local small business | 7 Leave out water and food for the birds | 8 Call and check a friend or family member | 9 Write a thank you note to someone | 10 Spend quality time with someone |
| 11 Buy or make small thoughtful gifts for your siblings/friends | 12 Give hugs and kisses to your family | 13 Donate books | 14 Take homemade cookies to a neighbor | 15 Help a neighbor with a small task. |
| 16 Smile at every person you meet | 17 Offer to help your friend | 18 Invite a new friend to play | 19 Play a game with your family | 20 Be extra kind, no matter what happens today |
| 21 Teach someone something new | 22 Feed an animal or take supplies to an animal shelter | 23 Leave a happy note for someone to find | 24 Give a treat to a community helper | 25 Make someone laugh |

2. 40 Bags in 40 Days

Learn to limit your connection to material possessions while clearing your house of clutter by trying out the “40 bags in 40 days” challenge. You get to decide the size of the bag and what you want to ditch, but the purpose is to push you to your decluttering limits. It's also an opportunity to discuss “emptying” ourselves with your family. What are some icky things within us that we can rid ourselves of?

3. Fast from Technology

This isn't just for kids! Talk with your loved ones and agree upon a time of fasting from your phone/tablet/computer. I would encourage you to be intentional about your fasting and to use that time growing closer to God in a way that interests you.

4. Volunteer as a family at our Grace Food Pantry

Our Food Pantry can accommodate a variety of volunteers, ages, and abilities. Talk to our Director Jennifer Szopinski for more info!

Faithfully,

Pastor Leanne

Stepping Forward in Faith

By Zach Davis, Associate Minister of Youth & Families

Leaving a church is never easy, especially when it has been a place of meaningful relationships, memories, and growth. Laura, Elias, and I have been blessed by the kindness of so many who have walked with us in this season of life, and for that, we are deeply grateful.

As I prepare to step into this next chapter, I find myself asking: Have I loved as Christ loves? Have I been faithful in the small things? Have I pointed people to Jesus in all that I have done? These questions are not just about my time here but about the path ahead.

For me, faithfulness has never been about comfort or certainty but about following where God leads—even when the next steps are unclear. Scripture reminds us that our steps are directed by the Lord:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” — Proverbs 3:5-6

Jesus himself calls us to faithfulness, not certainty:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” — Luke 9:23



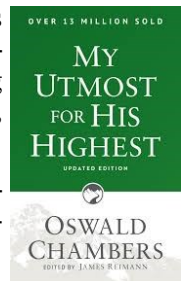
Faithfulness means trusting that God’s ways are higher than our own (Isaiah 55:8-9) and being willing to step forward when He calls, even when the road is uncertain. It is about surrender, not control; obedience, not convenience. This is the essence of discipleship.

Oswald Chambers, a Scottish minister, evangelist, and teacher, understood this deeply. Born in 1874, he was influenced by the Holiness movement, which emphasized personal sanctification and a life fully surrendered to God. This movement played a key role in shaping modern evangelical

thought, stressing that faith must be lived out in obedience to Christ.

Chambers trained at Dunoon College in Scotland and dedicated his life to equipping others for ministry. He later served as a chaplain to soldiers in Egypt during World War I, offering spiritual guidance in the midst of suffering and war. His passion for discipleship was evident in his work with the Bible Training College in London, where he mentored young believers.

Though he never published a book during his lifetime, his wife, Bidy Chambers, faithfully compiled his sermons and teachings into the devotional, My Utmost for His Highest. Since its publication, it has become one of the most influential Christian books of all time, selling over 13 million copies and being translated into more than 39 languages. It continues to inspire believers worldwide to live fully for Christ, even in the face of uncertainty.



Oswald Chambers, reflecting on 1 Peter 4:13 in My Utmost for His Highest, speaks to the reality that following Christ often means stepping into the unknown, trusting Him even when the way forward is unclear:

“If you are going to be used by God, He will take you through a number of experiences that are not meant for you personally at all. They are designed to make you useful in His hands and to enable you to understand what takes place in the lives of others... When it comes to suffering, it is part of our Christian culture to want to know God’s purpose beforehand. In the history of the Christian church, the tendency has been to avoid being identified with the sufferings of Jesus Christ... God’s way is always the way of suffering—the way of the ‘long road home.’ Are we partakers of Christ’s sufferings? Are we prepared for God to stamp out our personal ambitions? Are we prepared for God to destroy our individual decisions by supernaturally transforming them? It will mean not knowing why God is taking us that way, because knowing would make us spiritually proud. We never realize at the time what God is putting us through—we go through it more or less without understanding. Then suddenly we come to a place of enlightenment and realize—‘God has strengthened me, and I didn’t even know it!’”



Chambers’ words resonate deeply with my own journey. The challenges and decisions we face are not obstacles but part of God’s refining process. Leaving Grace UMC is not about hardship but about obedience. It is not easy to step away from a place filled with people I love, but faithfulness often requires movement.

This decision has not been made lightly, yet I trust that God is using every moment we have shared. My time here was not without purpose, just as Christ’s sufferings were not without purpose. Now, I step forward in obedience. This church has been a place of deep connection, learning, and faith, and I am grateful for every relationship and lesson along the way. My hope is that I have left something meaningful—that in some way, I have encouraged and strengthened

some of you as well. (continued on page 5)

(continued from page 4, "Stepping Forward in Faith")

Chambers' challenge within this quote is one that all of us must consider: Are you willing to follow God wherever He leads? Even when it means stepping out of what is familiar?

God's calling is always a process of refining and trusting Him. This realization has given me peace. My decision to leave is not about seeking comfort or control but about trusting in the work God is doing, even when I do not yet see the full picture.

This is my encouragement to you all—trust the refining work of God in your own life. You may not understand every challenge or decision in the moment, but He is strengthening you in ways you cannot yet see. The world needs disciples who embrace faithfulness over certainty, obedience over ease, and surrender over self-direction. God does not call us to stay where we are comfortable but to follow Him boldly. The Christian life is not about staying still but about moving forward in trust, even when we cannot see the full path ahead. Leaving does not mean abandoning, and change does not mean loss—it means stepping into what God has prepared next. As I step into the unknown, I do so not with certainty but with trust. I hope that this same trust continues to guide each of you in your own journeys of faith. Whether you are staying or going, continue to embrace the call to be His hands and feet—to go, to serve, and to trust wherever He leads.

Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:13-14:

"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."

I am grateful for your presence and the time we have spent together. My prayer is that this church continues to grow in faith, love, and boldness for the Kingdom.

May we all, in the end, seek to hear only one thing:

"Well done, good and faithful servant." — Matthew 25:23

Resting in Jesus

An old hymn declares:

I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto me and rest.
Lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn and sad.
I found in him a resting-place, and he has made me glad. (Horatius Bonar, 1846)



Many people these days feel exhausted by division, the news, hatred that seems louder than love. More than ever, we who are "weary, worn, and sad" need to hear Jesus say, "Come unto me and rest."

Jesus wants to be our resting place — but not so we can hide forever from reality. Instead, he offers a place of refreshment where we can relax long enough to remember that not everything is bad; there is gospel to share. Not everything is hatred; God's love is stronger.

Resting in Jesus, we focus on God's goodness. We are reminded of love shown by kind people to those in trouble, bold voices speaking for justice, warm friendships that brighten our days. Gladdened by rest, we rise again. Jesus walks with us, as always. We can lean on him every step of the way.

—Heidi Hyland Mann

Fasting and Feasting

During Lent, consider this practical — and biblical — advice from Arthur Lichtenberger, a former presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church:

Fast from criticism, and feast on praise. Fast from self-pity, and feast on joy. Fast from ill-temper, and feast on peace. Fast from resentment, and feast on contentment. Fast from jealousy, and feast on love. Fast from pride, and feast on humility. Fast from selfishness, and feast on service. Fast from fear, and feast on faith.



FROM WORD TO WORLD

Words are important! God spoke and created all things.
What does the psalmist declare about creation?

Directions: Using the word clues, unscramble the letters to complete Psalm 102:25, NIV.

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------|
| A preposition | NI | -- |
| An article | HTE | --- |
| Genesis means this | NINBGEIGN | ----- |
| A second-person pronoun | OUY | --- |
| Past tense of <i>to lay</i> | IDAL | --- |
| An article | HET | --- |
| A plural noun meaning <i>base</i> | SODTAINFONU | ----- |
| A preposition showing possession | FO | -- |
| An article | TEH | --- |
| A concrete noun meaning <i>world</i> | HRTEA | ----- |

Psalm 102:25, NIV

Answer: In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth. (Psalm 102:25, NIV)

God's Wonders

*People travel to wonder
at the height of the mountains,
at the huge waves of the seas,
at the long course of the rivers,
at the vast compass of the ocean,
at the circular motion of the stars,
and yet they pass by themselves without
wondering.*

?St. Augustine

A Lenten History Lesson

Though the date of Easter varies, the majority of the Lenten season occurs during March. In fact, the word *Lent* comes from the Anglo-Saxon words *lenctentid* (meaning "March") and *lencten* (meaning "spring").

The first reference to Lent dates back to 325 AD, in one of the 20 canons decreed at the council of Nicaea. By the eighth century, Christians started observing Lent, and a 10th-century monk named Aelfric connected the use of ashes and "the Lenten fast" to the pre-Easter period.

Lent lasts 40 days to represent Jesus' time in the wilderness, when he was tempted by the devil. The six Sundays that occur between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday aren't counted as part of Lent; instead, as the traditional day of worship, they're considered "mini-Easters."

"Teach Us to Love"

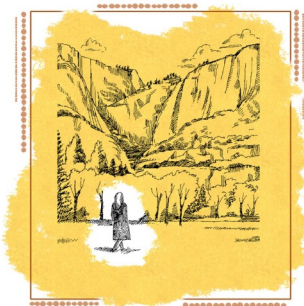
*O God, perfect us in love,
That we may conquer all selfishness
and hatred of others;
Fill our hearts with thy joy,
And shed abroad in them thy peace
which passeth understanding;
That so those murmurings and disputings
To which we are too prone may be overcome.
Make us long-suffering and gentle,
And thus subdue our hastiness
and angry tempers,
And grant that we may bring forth
the blessed fruits of the Spirit,
To thy praise and glory,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Rev. Henry Alford (1810-1871)

Bible Quiz

Complete this sentence which introduces a well-known Bible story:
"The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of ____."

- A. flowers
- B. sheep
- C. rocks
- D. bones



Answer: D (See Ezekiel 37:1, NIV.)

March 2025



| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|---|---|---|--|--|---|-----------|
| <p>Church office hours: M—Th 9 am-12 pm; 1 pm-3 pm 327-8407</p> | | | | | | 1 |
| <p>2 Small Groups-9:15 am Worship-10:30 am</p> | <p>3 Worship-10:00 am</p> | <p>4 Women’s Bible Study-11:30 am “The Chosen” Bible study-6:00 pm</p> | <p>5 Ash Wednesday No handbell choir Chancel Choir-6:00 p.m. Ash Wednesday Service at Grace UMC-7:00 pm</p> | <p>6 Finance-6:30 pm Church Council-7:00 pm</p> | <p>7 Church Office closed every Friday Pastor’s Sabbath Day</p> | 8 |
| <p>9 Small Groups-9:15 am Worship-10:30 am</p> | <p>10 Happy Days Board-6:00 pm</p> | <p>11 Grace’s Food Pantry Distribution in Nashville-6:00 pm “The Chosen” Bible study-6:30 pm N.O.W. Committee -7:00 pm</p> | <p>12 Handbells-5:45 pm Chancel Choir-6:30 pm</p> | 13 | <p>14 Church Office closed every Friday Pastor’s Sabbath Day</p> | 15 |
| <p>16 Small Groups-9:15 am Worship-10:30 am</p> | 17 | <p>18 Women’s Bible Study in the church library-11:30 am “The Chosen” Bible study-6:00 pm</p> | <p>19 Handbells-5:45 pm Chancel Choir-6:30 pm</p> | 20 | <p>21 Church Office closed every Friday Pastor’s Sabbath Day</p> | 22 |
| <p>23 Preschool Sunday Small Groups -9:15 am Worship-10:30 am Small Groups-9:15 am Worship-10:30 am</p> | <p>24 Trustees-6:30 pm</p> | <p>25 Grace’s Food Pantry Distribution in Nashville-6:00 pm “The Chosen” Bible study-6:30 pm</p> | <p>26 Handbells-5:45 pm Chancel Choir-6:30 pm</p> | 27 | <p>28 Church Office closed every Friday Pastor’s Sabbath Day</p> | 29 |
| <p>30</p> | <p>31</p> | | | | | |



Grace United Methodist Church
250 North Mill Street
Nashville, IL 62263

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

We're on the Web
Nashvillegrace.net

Dated Material Do Not Delay