



## ***Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Seven Wonders of the Word***

These worship helps are provided to congregations shaping their Lenten Wednesday worship services around *Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Seven Wonders of the Word*. The book's weekly themes explore what God's Word does in our lives, congregations, and world. Be sure to read the six readings for each week from *Seven Wonders of the Word* before you begin planning the midweek worship. Then pick and choose from the ideas and suggestions in these worship helps—and add your own, if you wish—to build worship experiences that speak to your congregation's context and relate to congregational members who are working through *Seven Wonders of the Word* as a personal or small-group Lenten discipline.

The following items are available in each set of worship helps.

### Introduction to the Day

Introduction to the book's weekly theme and its connection to the worship experience and Scripture readings for the day.

### Prayer of the Day

A Prayer of the Day connected to the day's theme.

### Readings and Psalm

Scripture readings that connect to the worship theme and help set the direction for the worship service.

### Prayer Prompts

Suggested thematic prayer petitions to guide the prayers of the community in worship.

### Hymns for Worship

Hymn suggestions from multiple hymn sources to use in building the worship experience.

### Ideas and Images

Suggestions for interactive sources of art, media, and content to use in creative ways to enhance or expand the worship experience.



## Worship Helps for Ash Wednesday *The Word Creates*

### ■ Introduction to the Day

*To be used as a sermon starter and springboard into the worship service.*

The season of Lent is full of visual and experiential opportunities to enhance worship. The breadth and depth of the Lenten tradition also provides a prime time to encourage the worshiping community to allow the themes of the season to accompany them into their weekday lives. As you enter into planning for Wednesday Lenten worship, take time to envision the ways in which worship experiences and daily practice intersect, so that worshipers might be equipped and empowered by these connections all week long.

In *Seven Wonders of the Word*, the theme for Ash Wednesday and the ensuing week is “The Word Creates.” As it launches us into the Lenten season, Ash Wednesday worship moves us to recall that, as humans, we are only one part of God’s created order. Yet our calling is to love and serve God’s creation, a creation groaning from the pain of our separation from God. Those who preach on Ash Wednesday will want to dive into the deep waters of the daily reflections found in the first week of *Seven Wonders of the Word*, in order to rediscover God’s living word, Jesus the Christ. It is Christ who sets us free and carries us into our daily lives as baptized children of God.

Preaching might focus on one of the following ideas:

- What is it in our lives that God has made new? How has that newness been shared for the benefit of creation and other human beings?
- Our Lenten journey calls us to repent. Repentance is not just something we think about, but actions that we do—turning around toward God.
- What might our lives look like when we share the daily conversation and consolation of the saints?
- What does the joy of embracing God as Creator look like? How is this kind of joy related to our acceptance of the fact that we are mortal beings whose time limitations call us daily to do and love that which is most important?
- The darkness and light of creation, like the rising and setting of the sun and the moon, might become a theme for the entire Lenten season. Just as daytime and nighttime include sunrise, sunset, dusk, dawn, and all the shades of day and night, so our life as God’s people includes all of those shades of reality and times of faith and doubt.

### ■ Prayer of the Day

Gracious God, you have created us and all that exists and have done so out of your steadfast, faithful love. Make us ever mindful that we live every single day in your grace, even that last day when we return with all creation to dust. Breathe into us Christ’s new life, that we might rise each morning to love and serve you and our neighbors near and far. We pray this in the name of Jesus, without whom not one thing came into being. Amen.

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## Readings and Psalm

*Use the introductions provided below each text reference.*

### GENESIS 1:1-3

God's creative Word, "Let there be light," not only gave us sun and moon and stars but opens our eyes and hearts to all that we are as humans, the good and the not-so-good. As we begin to trust in God as author of all life, we begin to trust that God in Christ can create for us new life each day.

### PSALM 8

Ash Wednesday puts us in our place as human beings. Deep in our hearts we realize that God has no reason to pay attention to us and yet has made humans a little lower than God. God knows us full well and yet has given us dominion over the works of God's hands.

### COLOSSIANS 1:13-17

God's forgiveness in Christ Jesus moves us daily into God's rule of light, light that searches us out and clarifies our witness to God's goodness in our daily actions. In Christ all things will hold together. So our lives are held in Christ's care and held out as examples of God's good work.

### JOHN 1:1-3

On Ash Wednesday we are reminded that God in Christ came to live among us and for us. From beginning to end, from the dust of earth to the far reaches of space, Jesus Christ has shared our lives and our deaths, our every beginning and our final ending. In all this we belong to God's love and care.

## Prayer Prompts

*Use these prompts to supplement the prayers of the community.*

- Like water in a dry and parched land you bring us refreshment and new life, O God.
- Speak your creative word once more today, that all of creation may find new life and that your people might seek life for the world.
- Stretch out our imaginations that we might see beyond the walls that divide us and reach out to all in need.
- Holy God, increase our faith and trust in your goodness, that we might recognize that it is you who holds our lives together.
- Walk with us this Lenten season that we might commit our lives to your work and care.

## Hymns for Worship

*These hymn suggestions complement the weekly theme and the readings.*

- The Day You Gave Us, Lord, Has Ended, *ELW* 569
- Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery, *ELW* 334
- God of the Sparrow, *ELW* 740
- Christ, Be Our Light, *ELW* 715
- The Wonderful Cross, Isaac Watts, arr. Jesse Reeves and Chris Tomlin, refrain by Chris Tomlin and J. D. Walt (worshiptogether.com Songs/sixsteps music, 2000)
- Wash Me Clean, Richard Bruxvoort Colligan, *Sharing the Road: Songs for Lent* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007)
- All Flesh Is Like the Grass, Fernando Ortega (Curb Records, 2006)

## ■ Ideas and Images

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### WORD AND ACTION

Consider incorporating the imposition of ashes, corporate and individual confession, and/or Holy Communion into your Ash Wednesday worship.

### IMAGES FOR PROJECTION

- Images, videos, ideas, and more can be found for all of the weeks in Lent at <http://workofthepeople.com>, <http://www.textweek.com>, and at <http://www.Utube.com>.
- Type in “galaxies” on an image search and you will find unlimited backgrounds that will be appropriate for projections before, during, or following worship.

### VISUALS IN THE WORSHIP AREA

- A creative team of people could design a large banner for the season that incorporates the *Seven Wonders of the Word* themes, perhaps adding a visual image for each week of Lent. A banner could also be hung in the narthex or fellowship room of the church to complement and expand the worship images.
- Keep a bowl of ashes and an empty cross at the center of the worship area all during Lent.

### CARRYING THE THEMES INTO DAILY LIFE

- Encourage people to create a “home altar” during Lent with a bowl of ashes and an empty cross, adding baptismal candles or other personal items that help them express the themes in their daily lives.
- Each Wednesday in Lent, use your congregation’s e-mail list to send out a weekly focus image with the theme and a prayer. This would draw the weekly themes into the lives of people who may not be able to gather for Wednesday services (those who work a variety of shifts, families with very young children, homebound people, and so forth).



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### Prayer Prompts

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### Hymns for Worship

Hymn suggestions from multiple hymn sources to use in building the worship experience.

### Ideas and Images

Suggestions for interactive sources of art, media, and content to use in creative ways to enhance or expand the worship experience.



## Worship Helps for the Second Wednesday in Lent *The Word Calls*

### Introduction to the Day

*To be used as a sermon starter and springboard into the worship service.*

God's Word creates, saves, and moves us forward into God's will and work each day. We are surrounded, in Holy Scripture and in our communities of faith, by a cloud of witnesses who God has gathered around us. We hear God's call through scripture, prayer, and worship. We also hear God's call through the voices of prophets, messengers, neighbors in need, and particularly those people who we might be least likely to heed—strangers, children, and those people closest to us who we often take for granted.

Preaching for this Second Wednesday in Lent might focus on one of these ideas:

- How do we hear God's call? Who bears God's word and call to us in our lives?
- What is the "cloud of witnesses"? Who is part of the cloud of witnesses?
- How is your faith community discerning God's call for its life right now?
- God is well-acquainted with all our ways and still chooses to love us and call us to serve.

### Prayer of the Day

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*LBW*, p. 153, Vespers)

### Readings and Psalm

*Use the introductions provided below each text reference.*

#### HAGGAI 1:1-6

Haggai's call from God is very specific. He is to bring a word of truth about the faithlessness of God's people.

#### PSALM 139:1-6, 13-14

Our God who knows us does not need to play hide-and-seek, for where we are, God has been before us. The psalmist recognizes and claims God's all-knowing nature as good. Like adolescent children, we may not be comfortable knowing that there is no place in God's reign where we will not be known for who we are.

#### HEBREWS 1:1-3A

We have no need to discern which prophet is true and which false in these days because God has spoken to us by a Son, Jesus Christ, our risen and living Savior and Lord. Through the power of Holy Baptism, we belong to this Savior, who will not let us go.

#### LUKE 9:23-25

It is clear in Luke that following Jesus Christ, God's living Word, is no virtual spiritual journey. Our confession of faith is not simply voiced but lived.

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## Prayer Prompts

Use these prompts to supplement the prayers of the community.

- Open our ears and hearts to hear your voice today.
- Give us humble hearts and actions.
- Make us ready and willing to speak your Word to others.
- Help us take time to listen well today to God, to our neighbor, and to our own lives.

## Hymns for Worship

These hymn suggestions complement the weekly theme and the readings.

- Here I Am, Lord, *ELW* 574
- Shine Like the Sun, John Ylvisaker, *Collected Works, vol. 21: Shine Like the Sun* (John Ylvisaker, 2002)
- All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night, *ELW* 565
- My Song Is Love Unknown, *ELW* 343
- Restore in Us, O God, *ELW* 328
- We Wait in Hope for Your Word, Richard Bruxvoort Colligan, *Sharing the Road: Songs for Lent* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007)

## Ideas and Images

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### WORD AND ACTION

- Provide time during the service for worshipers to reflect on how God is calling to them in their own lives, including a few moments for them to talk to and then pray with the person next to them.
- Encourage one or two people to share their own stories about a time when God spoke through circumstances or people to help them hear how God might use their faith in their daily lives.
- Give worshipers the opportunity during the prayers to speak out loud the first names of people who have been part of their “cloud of witnesses.”

### IMAGES FOR PROJECTION

- Use the following image as a more light-hearted support for the theme:  
[http://www.risenmagazine.com/files/imagecache/category\\_lg/Blogpost.jpg](http://www.risenmagazine.com/files/imagecache/category_lg/Blogpost.jpg).
- Go to your search engine and type in “God calling.” You will find a great variety of evocative responses. Consider using some of the more surprising ones.

### VISUALS IN THE WORSHIP AREA

- A creative team of people could design a large banner for the season that incorporates the *Seven Wonders of the Word* themes, perhaps adding a visual image for each week of Lent. A banner could also be hung in the narthex or fellowship room of the church to complement and expand the worship images.
- Keep a bowl of ashes and an empty cross at the center of the worship area all during Lent.

### CARRYING THE THEMES INTO DAILY LIFE

Invite worshipers to ask someone at home or work to tell them about a time when they heard God’s Word of calling.



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## Worship Helps for the Third Wednesday in Lent *The Word Commands*

### Introduction to the Day

*To be used as a sermon starter and springboard into the worship service.*

The teachings given to Moses are a gift to God's wandering people so that they might choose life instead of death. In a world of multiple worldviews and cultural options, it is essential that we trust the commandments to be gifts for life rather than a way to accuse others or ourselves. It is only then that we will find ourselves living with grace and humility towards others.

Preaching for this Third Wednesday in Lent might focus on one of these ideas:

- What might happen if we stopped responding to our sins with phrases like "I'm only human!" and started responding with "I was wrong, and I'm sorry"?
- We can tell that we are striving to choose life with God when we have more questions than answers.
- Martin Luther's explanations of the Commandments in the Small Catechism include both what we are *not* to do and what we *are* to do, giving us the opportunity for lifelong exploration of what it means for us to be faithful to God's command.
- The powerful images of Psalm 1 (trees, roots, water, and fruit) provide a creative entrance into a message about the gift of God's commands.

### Prayer of the Day

Good and gracious God, help us love what you command, trusting that you care for us and all your creation. Nurture in us the fruit of your mercy, that peace, justice, love, and hope might flourish for all people. You love us more than life. Help us to love with abandon. Amen.

### Readings and Psalm

*Use the introductions provided below each text reference.*

#### EXODUS 20:1-3, 4, 7-17

Before specifying how we are to live in relationship to God, God always starts with a reminder of the relationship that has been forged by God's own saving work.

#### PSALM 1

Wisdom comes from loving God's command rather than commanding God's love. Like a watered garden, we will thrive as we remain close to that which nourishes life.

#### ROMANS 13:8-10

The work of love is never-ending. If you ever start to believe that Christian love is a completed task, then identify your worst enemies and start loving them.

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## JOHN 15:8-17

The God who tells us how to live abundantly is the God who is willing to live and die for love of the world and for each of us.

### Prayer Prompts

*Use these prompts to supplement the prayers of the community.*

- Help us to love your commands, O God, with all of our hearts, souls, strength, and minds, and our neighbors as ourselves.
- Clear away all our excuses and help us choose the path to holy love.
- Thank you, Holy God, for saving us and freeing us to love and serve our neighbors, at home, at work, and at play.
- Give us thankful hearts and words, day in and day out, that practicing your holy love we might remember that you are good to all.

### Hymns for Worship

*These hymn suggestions complement the weekly theme and the readings.*

- Wash Me Clean, Richard Bruxvoort Colligan, *Sharing the Road: Songs for Lent* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007)
- Christ, Be Our Light, *ELW* 715
- Canticle of the Turning, *ELW* 723
- In the Cross of Christ I Glory, *ELW* 324
- He Comes to Us as One Unknown, *ELW* 737

### Ideas and Images

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## WORD AND ACTION

In place of the prayers, compose a litany in which each petition begins with “We have no other God before you.” Then use as the refrain: “Make us like trees planted by streams of living water.”

## IMAGES FOR PROJECTION

- Type “they are like trees planted by streams of living water” into your search engine and you will find some intriguing images for projection.
- For a nicely done video on loving one’s neighbor, go to <http://www.workofthepeople.com>, hit “films,” and then type in “Love Your Neighbor.”

## VISUALS IN THE WORSHIP AREA

- A creative team of people could design a large banner for the season that incorporates the *Seven Wonders of the Word* themes, perhaps adding a visual image for each week of Lent. A banner could also be hung in the narthex or fellowship room of the church to complement and expand the worship images.
- Keep a bowl of ashes and an empty cross at the center of the worship area all during Lent.

## CARRYING THE THEMES INTO DAILY LIFE

Invite worshipers to identify the commandment that is most challenging for them to live out in their daily lives and focus on it during the week.

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### Hymns for Worship

Hymn suggestions from multiple hymn sources to use in building the worship experience.

### Ideas and Images

Suggestions for interactive sources of art, media, and content to use in creative ways to enhance or expand the worship experience.



## Worship Helps for the Fourth Wednesday in Lent *The Word Saves*

### ■ Introduction to the Day

*To be used as a sermon starter and springboard into the worship service.*

We are now halfway through our forty-day Lenten journey. We recall once more this week that the Word of God is not simply words in a book or a word about God, but a living word, Jesus Christ. So it is that God's Word saves us now, today, from all that would keep us from God and faith. God came in Jesus for us in our present life and promises that in Jesus' saving arms we will be raised again on the last day, whenever that takes place.

Preaching for this Fourth Wednesday in Lent might focus on one of the following ideas:

- What symbols of God's saving work sustain the faithful in your Christian community?
- What kind of encouragement do we need in order to receive each day as wholly a gift from God in Christ?
- Daily service to others is an opportunity to both work alongside God and to speak of God's saving Word, Jesus, who has given us new life.
- Those who receive compassion come to more readily trust others. If people are to trust the God we worship, they will do so only as they receive compassion from us and hear of the compassionate God who has claimed us.

### ■ Prayer of the Day

Pour out your Holy Spirit, O God, that we who live in the baptismal waters of your grace may be given new life today. Increase in us the gifts of the spirit, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence. Amen. (adapted from Holy Baptism, *ELW*, pp. 227–231)

### ■ Readings and Psalm

*Use the introductions provided below each text reference.*

#### EXODUS 14:10-14

We are so enamored with our strength that we often despair when the truth of our weakness is revealed. God will not fail us or stop fighting for us.

#### PSALM 107:19-22

In the depths of doubt and disaster, we look to God for help and deliverance. Where else will our help come from than from the One who from beginning to end has come to save?

#### REVELATION 21:22-26

God's saving reign marches forward with us in tow. The promise is that "its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there."

#### JOHN 1:1-14

Christ lives and dies for love of the world, but those who might be expected to most readily receive him often refuse to trust God's intentions. Once more we hear the comforting news that God's claim comes without our choice.

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## Prayer Prompts

Use these prompts to supplement the prayers of the community.

- We are swayed to believe in many other things in this life. Give us discerning hearts and minds that we may trust in you alone, O God.
- Lamb of God, shine your light into our world that suffering and war might end.
- Clear away our hypocrisy and excuses. Turn us from death to life.
- With grateful thanks we offer our lives to your service, O God. Thank you for choosing us as your own.

## Hymns for Worship

These hymn suggestions complement the weekly theme and the readings.

- Lamb of God (Your Only Son), *ELW* 336
- God Is Holding Your Life, Richard Bruxvoort Colligan, *Sharing the Road: Songs for Lent* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007)
- I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say, *ELW* 611 (haunting and powerful with oboe and piano)
- In Christ Alone, Keith Getty and Stuart Townend (Thankyou Music, 2002)
- Oh, Love, How Deep, *ELW* 322
- O God of Light, *ELW* 507

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### WORD AND ACTION

- As worshipers enter or leave the worship area, invite them to dip their hands in the baptismal font and make the sign of the cross on their foreheads as a reminder of their baptisms and their mission in the world.
- Use the *Enter the Worship Circle* video with Katy Ireland for a time of reflection: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGJhxfzgNR0>.

### IMAGES FOR PROJECTION

- Type “Jesus saves” into your search engine. Project some competing and intriguing images to fuel worshipers’ imaginations and questions about what it means for us to make this confession of faith.

### VISUALS IN THE WORSHIP AREA

- If you are able to change the lighting in your worship space, use that lighting to emphasize that Christ the Lamb is the light of our world. Think about ways worshipers can experience the power of light and darkness in everyday ways.
- A creative team of people could design a large banner for the season that incorporates the *Seven Wonders of the Word* themes, perhaps adding a visual image for each week of Lent. A banner could also be hung in the narthex or fellowship room of the church to complement and expand the worship images.
- Keep a bowl of ashes and an empty cross at the center of the worship area all during Lent.

### CARRYING THE THEMES INTO DAILY LIFE

Invite worshipers to add a bowl of water to their “home altars” for the week. Encourage them to use the water to make the sign of the cross on their foreheads as they begin each day.

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## Worship Helps for the Fifth Wednesday in Lent *The Word Sustains*

### Introduction to the Day

*To be used as a sermon starter and springboard into the worship service.*

It is God's Word, creating, saving, and sustaining us throughout life and death, that teaches us how to live and die. In this Lenten season we are given the invitation and opportunity to reflect together about the unspeakable things of life—our struggles, fears, and dreams, all of which are held in God's care and keeping.

Preaching for this Fifth Wednesday in Lent might focus on one of the following ideas:

- What does it take to sustain a habit, activity, or value over a long period of time?
- What does it take for God to save and sustain the world and our trust?
- How can our prayer and action help to sustain people who are suffering or in need?
- Sustainability is a popular topic in our environmental conversations. For us as God's people the church, the effort to save and care for our environment is a spiritual matter.

### Prayer of the Day

Lord Jesus, Savior and Friend, we remember that your love is given to us freely but at great cost—your own holy and precious life's blood and your innocent suffering and death. May your sustaining love empower us to live with hope and grace as we love and care for your creation and serve our neighbors. Amen.

### Readings and Psalm

*Use the introductions provided below each text reference.*

#### HOSEA 11:1-4

God's sustaining work is as real as the hands and arms of loved ones who guide and accompany us through our lives. God's healing kindness brings us compassion and hope on our earthly journey.

#### PSALM 27

God is our sustainer, the stronghold of our lives. In the end, as we face every anxiety and threat to our lives and faith, fear holds no final power.

#### 1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

The details will continue to unfold but the beginning, middle, and end of our story is made of the same cloth, the mystery of God's love and constant care.

#### JOHN 11:17-27

We walk by faith, not by sight. Especially in the darkest places of our life, when we meet despair, deep struggle, overwhelming odds, accident or disaster, we must look at Christ Jesus to see God's will and good in our lives. Christ is our resurrection and life and will remain the last word in life and in death.

## Prayer Prompts

Use these prompts to supplement the prayers of the community.

- Incline our ears to your steadfast love, O God, that your Word might bear fruit.
- Save us from dead ends and make our paths straight.
- Your mysterious love and promise holds us in life's grasp, O God.
- Increase our trust in you, Lord Jesus, and give us courage to move ahead when we do not recognize the way.
- Holy Jesus, we live and die in your care. May we trust you with our lives—all that we are and all that we might become.

## Hymns for Worship

These hymn suggestions complement the weekly theme and the readings.

- Thy Strong Word, *ELW* 511
- Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil, *ELW* 512
- Drawn to the Light, *ELW* 593
- Great Is Thy Faithfulness, *ELW* 733 (numerous other arrangements are also available)
- In Christ Alone, Keith Getty and Stuart Townend (Thankyou Music, 2002)
- We Walk by Faith, *ELW* 635

## Ideas and Images

Clip art, photos, and videos could be projected for the congregation to view, printed in the bulletin, or incorporated in the sermon. Make sure you have the proper permission to reproduce or project any items you use.

### WORD AND ACTION

- This might be a good week to offer a service of healing, with the opportunity for anointing with oil and the laying on of hands. This can be a powerful experience of God's grace, and it can be accomplished in a nonthreatening way that invites rather than dictates that people come forward. Make sure there is an explanation of these traditions that links them to the healing of heart, spirit, body, and relationships.
- Offer a number of "prayer stations" around the worship area where individuals can be prayed for and with.
- For either the opening or closing prayers, ask worshipers to join hands across the worship area. This physical, visible reminder of God holding our lives in arms of grace can be powerful. (If you are projecting words for one of the hymns, you could do this during the singing.)

### IMAGES FOR PROJECTION

Water is a source of powerful healing. Use sounds and pictures of water as a constant support and background for worship.

### VISUALS IN THE WORSHIP AREA

- A creative team of people could design a large banner for the season that incorporates the *Seven Wonders of the Word* themes, perhaps adding a visual image for each week of Lent. A banner could also be hung in the narthex or fellowship room of the church to complement and expand the worship images.
- Keep a bowl of ashes and an empty cross at the center of the worship area all during Lent.

### CARRYING THE THEMES INTO DAILY LIFE

Invite worshipers to pray each day this week for God's sustaining love and care in their lives and in the world.





## ***Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Seven Wonders of the Word***

These worship helps are provided to congregations shaping their Lenten Wednesday worship services around *Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Seven Wonders of the Word*. The book's weekly themes explore what God's Word does in our lives, congregations, and world. Be sure to read the six readings for each week from *Seven Wonders of the Word* before you begin planning the midweek worship. Then pick and choose from the ideas and suggestions in these worship helps—and add your own, if you wish—to build worship experiences that speak to your congregation's context and relate to congregational members who are working through *Seven Wonders of the Word* as a personal or small-group Lenten discipline.

The following items are available in each set of worship helps.

### Introduction to the Day

Introduction to the book's weekly theme and its connection to the worship experience and Scripture readings for the day.

### Prayer of the Day

A Prayer of the Day connected to the day's theme.

### Readings and Psalm

Scripture readings that connect to the worship theme and help set the direction for the worship service.

### Prayer Prompts

Suggested thematic prayer petitions to guide the prayers of the community in worship.

### Hymns for Worship

Hymn suggestions from multiple hymn sources to use in building the worship experience.

### Ideas and Images

Suggestions for interactive sources of art, media, and content to use in creative ways to enhance or expand the worship experience.



## Worship Helps for the Sixth Wednesday in Lent *The Word Shapes*

### Introduction to the Day

*To be used as a sermon starter and springboard into the worship service.*

As our world grows smaller, we become increasingly aware of the way our cultures shape us. Nationalities, climates, families, religious traditions, and “tribes” of all sorts contribute to who we are and how we interpret the world. So it is with God’s living Word. It shapes who we are and who we might be, so that now and in any future that meets us we may be known as children of God.

Preaching for this Sixth Wednesday in Lent might focus on one of these ideas:

- We spend a great deal of time worrying about our physical shapes, spending money, watching what we eat, working our hearts on exercise machines, and more. What could we do each day to be shaping our daily faithfulness to our Christian calling?
- The Word shapes us, but that shaping or formation takes place over time. God does not use a magic wand, but rather a love that will not let us go. What are the words and ways we have been shaped by God’s Word and our faith? How can we share that formation with those who come after us?
- How are we reaching out with God’s love to help shape the lives of children in our congregation and community? What can we do to extend this love and help to children outside our families?
- Help worshipers consider the places in their lives that need reshaping by God’s love and mercy in Jesus. Often these are places of insecurity, hopelessness, denial, or shame.

### Prayer of the Day

Holy God, you are very near to us, closer than our own thoughts, for you have made and formed us by your Word, Jesus Christ, who receives us as beloved ones. May your steadfast love shape our days and empower our deeds, until at the last we join our voices in praise with all your saints. Amen.

### Readings and Psalms

*Use the introductions provided below each text reference.*

#### DEUTERONOMY 30:11-14

Too often we excuse ourselves from hearing and heeding God’s Word by saying it is too hard for us. However, we are constantly being shaped by God’s Word, and God’s command to love is no farther away than our mouths and hearts.

#### PSALM 119:129-130

The gift of God’s Word is that it does what it commands. Its light doesn’t just help us see that it exists, but it passes on understanding.

#### 1 JOHN 3:1-3

In Christ we have become children of God. Though we cannot see it, in the end God’s promise is that we will look like God.

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## JOHN 8:31-36

Against all odds, Christ Jesus frees us for faithful life with God. We have a place in God's household forever.

### Prayer Prompts

*Use these prompts to supplement the prayers of the community.*

- Gracious God, you have shaped our lives with grace and by your Holy Spirit have united us in life and death with Christ Jesus.
- God, you who have claimed us as your children, shape us by your love.
- Help us to go where you go and love what you love.
- We pray for sisters and brothers who have no place to call home, for those children who are alone and without families, and for all refugees and peoples displaced because of flood, earthquake, or war.

### Hymns for Worship

*These hymn suggestions complement the weekly theme and the readings.*

- There in God's Garden, *ELW* 342
- Come to Me, All Pilgrims Thirsty, *ELW* 777
- Beneath the Cross of Jesus, *ELW* 338
- You Are Mine, *ELW* 581
- Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart, *ELW* 800

### Ideas and Images

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### WORD AND ACTION

- Begin worship by using the Taizé Community song, Come and Fill Our Hearts, *ELW* 528, as an extended call to worship. Equip a small group of two or three singers to lead this *a cappella*, making sure they allow the congregation to enter into this meditative song for as long a time as seems appropriate.
- This week's theme provides a wonderful opportunity to gather younger children to a central area in the worship space. Bring with you a basket of items that have varying geometric shapes and help them name the shapes. Use this as an entrée for helping them and the other worshipers to think about how God's Word shapes us.

### IMAGES FOR PROJECTION

Go to your favorite search engine and type in "holding hands." You will find a myriad of images that are useful to the week's theme and emphasize the truth that it is God's relationship of love that shapes our lives, just as it is our love of others that shapes a world of hope. If you have digital pictures from your congregation's life and ministry or from your city or town that fit, use those.

### VISUALS IN THE WORSHIP AREA

- A creative team of people could design a large banner for the season that incorporates the *Seven Wonders of the Word* themes, perhaps adding a visual image for each week of Lent. A banner could also be hung in the narthex or fellowship room of the church to complement and expand the worship images.
- Keep a bowl of ashes and an empty cross at the center of the worship area all during Lent.

### CARRYING THE THEMES INTO DAILY LIFE

Invite worshipers to look for examples during the week of God's love shaping us and our love of others shaping the world.



## ***Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Seven Wonders of the Word***

These worship helps are provided to congregations shaping their Lenten Wednesday worship services around *Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Seven Wonders of the Word*. The book's weekly themes explore what God's Word does in our lives, congregations, and world. Be sure to read the six readings for each week from *Seven Wonders of the Word* before you begin planning the midweek worship. Then pick and choose from the ideas and suggestions in these worship helps—and add your own, if you wish—to build worship experiences that speak to your congregation's context and relate to congregational members who are working through *Seven Wonders of the Word* as a personal or small-group Lenten discipline.

The following items are available in each set of worship helps.

### Introduction to the Day

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A Prayer of the Day connected to the day's theme.

### Readings and Psalm

Scripture readings that connect to the worship theme and help set the direction for the worship service.

### Prayer Prompts

Suggested thematic prayer petitions to guide the prayers of the community in worship.

### Hymns for Worship

Hymn suggestions from multiple hymn sources to use in building the worship experience.

### Ideas and Images

Suggestions for interactive sources of art, media, and content to use in creative ways to enhance or expand the worship experience.



## Worship Helps for the Seventh Wednesday in Lent *The Word Sends*

### Introduction to the Day

*To be used as a sermon starter and springboard into the worship service.*

The entire Lenten season draws us back to the heart of God's good news in Jesus Christ, his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. We cannot go where Jesus goes without going to the cross and remaining there with him. We cannot call ourselves Christians if we are not willing to be sent and remain with Christ as he comes to save and dwell with all who cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."

Preaching for this Seventh Wednesday in Lent might focus on one of the following ideas:

- Too often Lent becomes focused on individual sins and then Easter becomes focused on individual victory, rather than on our deep separation from God's will shown in our lives as God's people, and our call to serve the world in love. As a result, many of us adopt the attitude that being Christian is a tool for a successful life rather than a life of being claimed by God's call to walk with Christ.
- Jesus accompanies us in our struggles and pain. How does our personal despair equip us to accompany others in their struggles and pain?
- How does the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ allow us to commit ourselves to changing the way our world works? How does Christ's sacrifice, the giving of his life for us and the world, change the way we share our time, resources, and skills with others?
- Giving something up for Lent acts as a catalyst for seeing the pain and daily struggles of others with more clarity and compassion, and for deeper thinking about the purpose and meaning of our lives as God's people.

### Prayer of the Day

Oh Lord, do not be far away. Our Helper, come to us quickly. Deliver us and save us from all that would cause us to take the road that seems easy. Send us with your steadfast, faithful love to all who look for hope and help. Amen.

### Readings and Psalm

*Use the introductions provided below each text reference.*

#### ISAIAH 42:6-9

Isaiah reminds us that God's gifts of deliverance and life are given so that we might live in thanks and praise to God. We offer God's mercy and forgiveness to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

#### PSALM 22:1-11

The opening words of this psalm, which Jesus speaks from the cross, keep us from imagining that our faith and trust in God protects us from all things that cause pain and grief. When we speak these words, we speak them with Jesus, knowing that he shares our lives fully.

#### ROMANS 10:14-17

We are sent away, not like children sent out of the room because they are too noisy or intrusive, but as God's children who are full of good news that cannot be contained.

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## MATTHEW 27:32-44

King and Crucified One, how do those two fit together? We live in a competitive society that focuses on power and dominion over others. It is difficult for us to grasp God's story of love in Jesus. This kind of love shows us that to be God means to reign as one who lives with and for us, not over and against us.

### Prayer Prompts

*Use these prompts to supplement the prayers of the community.*

- Keep watch over all your children, Holy Jesus. Give us strength, that we might keep watch with you.
- Send us home to share your forgiveness and love tonight.
- Your strong word sends us into life with hope.
- Give us patience to wait for your guidance and direction.
- Keep us near your cross, Loving Friend, and help us to remain with and for others.

### Hymns for Worship

*These hymn suggestions complement the weekly theme and the readings.*

- Were You There, *ELW* 353
- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross, *ELW* 335
- Love Consecrates the Humblest Act, *ELW* 360
- Oh, Love, How Deep, *ELW* 322
- Jesus, Remember Me, *ELW* 616
- As You Go on Your Way, John Ylvisaker, *Collected Works*, vol. 1: *Borning Cry* (John Ylvisaker, 1982)

### Ideas and Images

*The Web sites listed here are sources for clip art, photos, and videos for use in worship. The images could be projected for the congregation to view, printed in the bulletin, or incorporated in the sermon. Make sure you have the proper permission to reproduce or project any items you use.*

## WORD AND ACTION

At the close of the service and in place of the prayers, play or sing together Richard Bruxvoort Colligan's song, "My God, Oh My God" (*Sharing the Road: Songs for Lent*, Augsburg Fortress, 2007). You could continue the singing of the refrain as personal prayer petitions are spoken from around the sanctuary.

The story of Jesus' passion is a vivid one that easily draws people into the mystery of God's love and will. As we see in God's story with our ancestors of faith, it takes time and constancy for God to work holy grace in our world. In the same way, it takes time and constancy for us to live into God's story with us. It would be useful to build that sense of "time" into the worship service, leading with a slower pace and leaving pauses or spaces of time between elements of the service. This could be explained verbally so as to invite worshipers into that shared space.

## IMAGES FOR PROJECTION

The obvious image for this Wednesday in Holy Week is a crucifix. Go to your favorite search engine and find images from across the world's cultures, then put them on a loop that plays before worship, during the prayers, and after worship. You could provide time for people to meditate silently before they leave. Some examples can be

found at <http://mworthington.co.uk/jalbum/Mark/Malta/Pics/slides/Tree%20Crucifix.html> and <http://yeyeolade.wordpress.com/2008/07/26/the-blackness-of-jesus-christ-again-found-on-a-white-sitegarvin6942livejournalcom/>.

#### VISUALS IN THE WORSHIP AREA

- A creative team of people could design a large banner for the season that incorporates the *Seven Wonders of the Word* themes, perhaps adding a visual image for each week of Lent. A banner could also be hung in the narthex or fellowship room of the church to complement and expand the worship images.
- Keep a bowl of ashes and an empty cross at the center of the worship area all during Lent.

#### CARRYING THE THEMES INTO DAILY LIFE

Encourage worshipers to imagine how they will carry one of the Lenten themes or practices into the new life of Easter. Give them time to reflect on how they might do that in a way that keeps the focus on God's grace and mercy in Christ Jesus.