Have a Beautiful, Terrible Lent!

Use this reading guide to follow along during Lent 2024 as we read Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day! together.

☐ **FEB 14 – DAY 1**
for Ash Wednesday
PG 98 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 15 – DAY 2**
to feel a little more grateful
PG 100 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 16 – DAY 3**
for living without control
PG 102 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 17 – DAY 4**
for that unsettled feeling
PG 104 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **SUNDAY, FEB 18**
no readings

☐ **FEB 19 – DAY 5**
to feel more love
PG 108 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 20– DAY 6**
when your family disappoints you
PG 110 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 21 – DAY 7**
finding god's presence
PG 112 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 22 – DAY 8**
to keep moving
PG 114 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 23 – DAY 9**
for deep tiredness
PG 116 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 24 – DAY 10**
God, lead me
PG 118 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **SUNDAY, FEB 25**
no readings

☐ **FEB 26 – DAY 11**
love, love, love
PG 122 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 27 – DAY 12**
waiting for anything good to happen
PG 124 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 28 – DAY 13**
seeing God everywhere
PG 126 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **FEB 29 – DAY 14**
well, I'm not all that great sometimes
PG 128 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 1 – DAY 15**
for making all things beautiful
PG 130 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 2 – DAY 16**
overwhelmed, stressed
PG 132 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **SUNDAY, MARCH 3**
no readings

☐ **MAR 4 – DAY 17**
letting yourself be known
PG 136 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 5 – DAY 18**
letting go is painful
PG 138 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 6 – DAY 19**
regret
PG 140 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 7 – DAY 20**
not knowing the next step
PG 142 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 8 – DAY 21**
for trusting your own intuition
PG 144 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 9 – DAY 22**
to see clearly
PG 146 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **SUNDAY, MARCH 10**
no readings

☐ **MAR 11 – DAY 23**
feeling anxious and criticized
PG 150 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 12 – DAY 24**
feeling meh
PG 152 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 13 – DAY 25**
for a very busy day
PG 154 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 14 – DAY 26**
feeling God's love
PG 156 IN *HABTD!*

Have a Beautiful, Terrible Lent!

Use this reading guide to follow along during Lent 2024 as we read Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day! together.

☐ **MAR 15 – DAY 27**
for the pain that lingers
PG 158 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 16 – DAY 28**
feeling too much, be back later
PG 160 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **SUNDAY, MARCH 17**
No Readings*

☐ **MAR 18 – DAY 29**
being so close to pain, too close
PG 82 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 19 – DAY 30**
when you're awake in the night
PG 84 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 20 – DAY 31**
when anxiety rises
PG 86 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 21 – DAY 32**
honest faith
PG 88 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 22 – DAY 33**
for a funeral
PG 90 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 23 – DAY 34**
noticing beauty
PG 92 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **SUNDAY, MARCH 24**
for Palm Sunday (beginning of Holy Week)
PG 162 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 25 – DAY 35**
compassion, suffering alongside
PG 164 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 26 – DAY 36**
you need help in real time
PG 166 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 27 – DAY 37**
good news is hard to find
PG 168 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 28 – DAY 38**
when we say no to God
PG 170 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 29 – DAY 39**
for Good Friday
PG 172 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **MAR 30 – DAY 40**
for Holy Saturday
PG 174 IN *HABTD!*

☐ **SUNDAY, MARCH 31**
Easter Sunday
PG 176 IN *HABTD!*

* This week's readings are from earlier in the book. We've attached the readings to this PDF for ease.

Fifth Sunday of Lent



You’re doing it! But simmer down and rest today.

68 MONDAY OF LENT, WEEK SIX

being so close to pain, too close

Praise be to the . . . God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

—2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 (NIV)

If you are forever close to someone else's pain (or your own), first of all, I'm so sorry. You have suffered, and the aftermath of all suffering is a particular kind of grief and loneliness. When we draw near to pain (or pain draws near to us), we might begin to feel like we are losing any other way of being. Our personalities become less obvious to us. Our normal ways of operating seem strangely distant. Remember small talk? Barely. Remember feeling relaxed when someone said, "How are things?"

We are changed by the suffering we have known. But that doesn't mean that we have to be permanently altered for the worse. Yes, dear heart, you are different. Perhaps, though, we can practice looking at our transformation with so much compassion as we say, *God, I still want every possible good thing. Even now. Especially now.*

Blessed are you who find yourself
near to trauma,
perhaps even the one closest
to the one who has suffered so much.

For you too nothing is the same anymore.

The air has changed
the furniture of your life rearranged
and the cables that once anchored you
to what you knew
have come undone.

Yes, you are doing all you can,
embracing the gift of offering comfort.
Yes, you are doing all the things
you know to do
as the aftermath unfolds.

But, dear one,
let me gently take you aside to say,
this trauma has happened to you too
though you may not feel free to say it.

You too have pain
that may feel too raw and too deep
to excavate and examine just now.
There is so much else to do.

Yet it is there,
telling you in many ways
it will need attention too.
Perhaps even now.

Blessed are you,
gently beginning to name
your own felt needs
and look to the comforts
that will sustain you.

Blessed are you who have discovered
that in your humanity
you have been welcomed into the
community of the wounded.

May you feel all of your own woundedness,
and the tenderness of your own heart,
seen, loved, and held.

---

reflection prompt

What is the most comforting thing that you do for yourself? I have an overly elaborate face-washing bedtime routine that started when I was sick. I took a minute to say, "Oh, hey, the day was costly but here I am." Do you have a little habit that restores your soul? If you don't, see if you can invent one. (Beverages. Sitting in a certain place. Anything with water. Something can always do the trick.)

when you're awake in the night

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

—JOHN 14:27A (NIV)

If you see columnist David Brooks around somewhere, please let him know that I have spent the last few nights in a semisleep fugue state thinking about an article he wrote. And then combining his argument with an apocalyptic vision of zombies taking over an airport while I am waiting for a flight. It was terrifying and absurd, and utterly normal for me. I waste my sleeping hours with an exciting combination of self-sabotage, annoyance, embarrassment, and fear. Isn't the untethered mind wonderful?

Most of the loveliest ancient prayers for such occasions center on the image of the watchtower. A watchtower is a high place from which a guard can see for miles while everyone else can, as the saying goes, "let down their guard." An ancient prayer from Augustine asks God to "keep watch . . . with those who work, or watch, or weep this night." Beautiful. These invocations say, again and again, some version of *God, will you be appropriately alert because I am supposed to be unconscious.* This is exactly what we need God to do. We have come to the limits of our vigilance, our abilities, our emotional self-management, and our physical energy. Now, God, please keep watch over our humanity.

Oh, God, I long for sleep,
and the natural restoration it brings,
for body, mind, and soul.

But here I am, feeling ridiculous.
Aren't other people supposed to be
asleep at this hour,
not scrambling for solutions?

But this is another kind of normal,
the regular interruption that I keep
thinking won't happen again,
but it does, and it has. Again.

So I do all the things I know to do.
Yet here I am, still awake.

God, this is endless.
And I know I won't be functional.
Let's do something about this.
Tomorrow, after a nap.
Let's leave the problem-solving until then.
Right now, return me to myself.

Let me be legs that sink heavily
into this mattress,
and arms that fall loosely by my sides.

Let me be eyes that stop itching
for my phone
and are (soon to be) heavy and closed.

Let my heart slow into that soft
and even beat
that says, there is nothing, nothing,
nothing to do
but be.

---

reflection prompt

Take out a notepad and put it beside your bed. (Don't use your phone. Your phone is a tar pit of entertainment.) When you wake up, or can't sleep, scribble down any to-dos or especially buzzy thoughts. No judgment. Can you imagine leaving those worries on the table for another day?

70 WEDNESDAY OF LENT, WEEK SIX

when anxiety rises

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:6 (NIV)

I hold my thoughts on a leash, dragging them around. Didn't I do something really stupid this morning? Probably. What did I say again? Oh, let me pull that around too. I revise and revise, stew and replay. I am fairly certain that somewhere out there people are probably pretty annoyed at me, at the very least.

Does your mind churn too? What category of thoughts take up too much space? Family, work, dating, love, kids? Or are your worries more diffuse, fogging up a clear mind for no particular reason? When I am trying to release these worries to God, I imagine that, instead of a leash, I am holding a series of helium balloons. Each carrying its own weight. And, oh look, I just let go. Now they can float around the ceiling at will. If I need one later, I can fish for it, but, truly, who needs another worry?

Let's bless our anxious hearts with a peace that God is particularly good at giving.

God, it doesn't seem possible
to align my anxious self to your word
that says to me:
"Don't be anxious about anything."
Because I'm already stewing.
I'm a worrier, and you already know that.
So here we are.
And here I am, being what I am.

God, open your heart to mine
and pour in your peace.
Let your mind flow into these
scattered thoughts
that seem to want to cling to worries
And coalesce like metal filings to a magnet.
I need your spirit to bless me
with a calm that isn't mine to create.

Bless all my stubbornness and
allow me to, wonderfully,
just give up for a moment.
To stop fighting my own needs
and concerns.

And if I can barely do it,
bless even the trying to try
(for that's roughly all I'm able to do,
and I smile to think that even this
pleases you).

Bless my will to will that anxiety
be lifted away,
that when worries arise,
I can say to them, "Go on,
keep rising all the way to God
who can handle this."
I'll pray them up, up, up, and away.

---

reflection prompt

Sit somewhere comfortable and let your body soften. Let the air comfortably expand the spaces that are easily fillable. Breathe out and mix the air with the thought that worries you, giving it to God to take for a minute. Let yourself pause and rest, with nothing to do. And in your own time, continue until you feel yourself sighhhhh. You'll hear it. That's when you're done, love.

honest faith

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

—PROVERBS 3:5 (NIV)

Nowadays, with the triumph of gentle, therapeutic ways of speaking about prayer, we might entirely forget that our blessings and prayers can be completely offensive in the best way. I have a colleague here at my university with a reputation for being joyfully outrageous, and he makes me laugh so hard because I honestly cannot believe what he can get away with. His name is Stanley Hauerwas and, for instance, when he was asked to pray a nice, vague, feel-good prayer at a serious university luncheon to people in suits and ties, he prayed something like this instead: "God . . . we do not fear you, since we prefer to fear one another. . . . You have, of course, tried to scare the hell out of some of us through the creation of your people Israel and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But we are subtle, crafty, and stiff-necked people who prefer to be damned into vagueness." Oh, I read the transcript of this later and *wept*. Hysterical. And, word has it, Stanley ruined public prayer for everyone else. Now the university holds a moment of silence instead.

That's always the trickiest part of speaking spiritually: when do we call people out? And when do we change people with grace? Here's a blessing for the need for that kind of honest faith and the right amount of love to accompany it.

God, I am disappointed and embarrassed
at what people get up to
in the name of religion.

My heart is thirsty for a faith I can trust.
And I mean that.
I don't trust the cultural scripts
that turn religion into any game
where somebody wins
and somebody loses,
and there is the strong scent
of the entrepreneur.
Somebody is selling something.

And from the recesses of my mind
from some very early encounter,
I think I must have met the real you, God.
That somehow I met goodness so pure
it settled my heart to understand
trustworthiness of a majesty and stature
that thereafter I could accept
no counterfeits.

God, come and show yourself again.
Show me faith that cannot be faked.

Let me see you in the loveliness of others
living out their faith so genuinely,
so honestly,
that you shine through.

And if I can't get all the theology right,
let me not worry too long.
I suspect you'd rather I live honestly
by the light of what I know to do
that looks most like you,
and keep quiet about the rest.

reflection prompt

Think of a person you know who is incredibly gracious about disagreement. What are some of their methods for cultivating grace?

72 FRIDAY OF LENT, WEEK SIX

for a funeral

For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

—ECCLESIASTES 1:18 (NIV)

When someone dies, we are thrown into emptiness and unreality. Those we love have grown like vines around our hearts. So when death comes, there is a wrenching, a tearing away at the root. People will try to say comforting things about our loved one's advanced age perhaps, or their having lived long or meaningful lives. Or maybe they can't say much at all because our person died early, suddenly, or with an incompleteness that looms over us.

But the truth is that we are not simply in mourning, we are lovesick. Death is an affront to love itself. I find this to be one of the greatest and worst of all of God's mysteries: how the more we do what God commanded—love and love and love—the worse this pain becomes. The more we love, the more we cannot imagine an end to it. There is a poem by Emily Dickinson that imagines God "in the fair schoolroom of the sky" explaining each separate anguish. But in the meantime, we are here. We are left with the weight of wondering why—why our love feels like a gift and a curse.

You know I don't believe that faith is a solution to the problem of pain. But I do believe that God guarantees us God's actual presence. So let's see where that takes us. And in the meantime, I am so sorry this has happened to you, to them, and to us all.

If there ever was such a thing
as normal life,
it has slowed to a stop now.
Lord, I have loved and lost.
The world is empty.

I am swimming in the unreality of this end,
this impossible ending,
for we are trying to live in both
the before and the after.

Carry me. Carry us.
Carry every stage of this moment
when we can shout and cry,
prepare food and file our paperwork,
and feel weary and sad and joyful
and numbness because
the totality of death will never, ever
feel final.

In our conversations there is a raw feeling
we are holding back,
drawing a gauzy veil over all the unease.
Will people feel honored, valued, needed?
Will there be awkwardness
among friends and family?
God, give us room to breathe and to mourn,
and perhaps even to laugh together.
Help us be our best selves.

Blessed are we, trying to manage
the unmanageable,
the fact that this is a final parting.
No, this is the *second last* parting.
But we will see them again, you promised.
One has gone from us down a path
we cannot see.
And we must stand and mourn,
at a distance.

God, make this a good funeral, somehow.
Let love live here.
Let it fill us, even in our loss,
that we might receive comfort
beyond the measure that we ourselves
can hold,
that there might be some—dear God,
let there be some—to share.

---

reflection prompt

Jesus says that blessed are those who mourn, which is precisely when we feel exiled from any sense of blessing. But I believe in those words is a promise: God draws near to the suffering. So that's it. Nothing to do except say, "God, you said you would be there. Be here now."

73 SATURDAY OF LENT, WEEK SIX

noticing beauty

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither labor nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

—LUKE 12:27 (NASB)

Are you a noticer? Litter on the side of the road. Dust on the windowsill. The placement of napkins on a well-laid table. Some people have an incredible eye for detail. They know where things go and if they should be there at all. I have a noticing mother-in-law who *delights* in highway landscaping. She will see pansies or a cluster of tall bushes and audibly gasp. She has found the ability to experience the world as a sensory buffet.

I, on the other hand, would probably have to be struck by lightning to notice these things. In fact, I worked in a restaurant that was struck by lightning and burned to the ground twice, so you'd think I would be more observant. But I have to remind myself not simply to look, but to *behold*. So let's bless the gift of cultivated attention. May it bring us endless *ooooh*s and *aahhhhh*s.

It's not every day that you see it,
but sometimes beauty sneaks up on you
with a tenderness, a sweetness, so lovely
it hurts.

It sings to the heart
and makes it glad
that ever a baby laughed
or a parent smiled
at the hilarious solemnity of play.

Beauty brings a kind of grief.
Because its perfection rings so true
it calls out everything else
that has ever fallen short.
In me. In us. In everything.

But that's the thing.
It's just the way of it:
that beauty will always be
crushingly lovely.
We are grass. We are fireflies.
We are the day that the Lord has made.

---

reflection prompt

Today or tomorrow I want you to go find something you are delighted by: birds, macaroni and cheese, whatever. It's out there somewhere.