

WEEK OF JANUARY 4, 2026

**5-Day Devotional  
based on Sunday's message:**



**JOHN PREPARES THE WAY**

*Luke 3:1-18*

Provided by



**AKRON GRACE CHURCH**  
101 N. 7th Street, Akron PA  
[www.akrongrace.com](http://www.akrongrace.com)

**Listen to the full message on our YouTube channel:**  
[www.youtube.com/@akrongracechurch6363](https://www.youtube.com/@akrongracechurch6363)

## Luke 3:1-18

It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. Isaiah had spoken of John when he said, “He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming! Clear the road for him! The valleys will be filled and the mountains and hills made level. The curves will be straightened, and the rough places made smooth. And then all people will see the salvation sent from God.’” When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, “You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.” The crowds asked, “What should we do?” John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.” Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?” He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.” “What should we do?” asked some soldiers. John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.” Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. John answered their questions by saying, “I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.” John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.

# Day 1: The Wilderness Voice

## Devotional

Have you ever noticed how God often works through the most unexpected people? When we think about influential leaders, we picture those with power, wealth, or prestigious positions. Yet in Luke 3, we find God choosing to work through John the Baptist, a man living in the wilderness, away from society's centers of power. While Rome controlled the political landscape and religious leaders held sway in the temples, God's voice came through someone who had stepped away from it all. John had no earthly credentials, no impressive resume, and no political connections. What he had was obedience and a willingness to be used by God. This should encourage us tremendously. God doesn't need our achievements or our status to work through us. He doesn't require us to have everything figured out or to be the most qualified person in the room. What He desires is a heart that's willing to say yes to His calling, even when it doesn't make sense by worldly standards. Perhaps you've been feeling overlooked or unqualified for the work God has placed on your heart. Maybe you think you need more education, more experience, or more resources before God can use you. John's story reminds us that God works through people's obedience rather than their own achievements. The wilderness wasn't John's limitation, but his preparation ground. Sometimes God calls us away from the noise and distractions of the world to prepare us for the work He has ahead. Your current season, even if it feels isolated or insignificant, might be exactly where God is preparing you for something greater.

## Bible Verse

'It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness.' - Luke 3:1-2

## Reflection Question

In what ways might God be calling you to step away from worldly measures of success and trust in His ability to work through your simple obedience?

## Quote

God works through people's obedience rather than their own achievements.

## Prayer

Lord, help me to trust that You can work through me regardless of my qualifications or status. Give me the courage to say yes to Your calling, even when it doesn't align with the world's expectations. Prepare my heart to be used by You in whatever way You see fit. Amen.

# Day 2: More Than Good Intentions

## Devotional

Every January, millions of people make resolutions with genuine hope for change. We join gyms, start diets, and promise ourselves this will be the year we finally transform. Yet, statistics tell a different story. Only 8-9% of people actually keep their New Year's resolutions, with 80% failing by mid-February. Why do so many well-intentioned efforts fall short? The answer isn't lack of desire. Most people genuinely want to change. The problem is that desire alone doesn't produce transformation. We can want something deeply, plan for it carefully, and still find ourselves back where we started. This pattern reveals something profound about human nature that we need more than willpower to experience lasting change. We need a fundamental shift in how we think and what we value. This is where the concept of repentance becomes so crucial. Repentance isn't just feeling sorry about our mistakes or promising to do better. It's a complete reorientation of our hearts and minds. It's changing the way we think at the deepest level. When John the Baptist called people to repentance, he was calling them to something far more radical than behavior modification. He was calling them to a new way of seeing themselves, God, and their purpose. True transformation begins in the heart, not in our habits. When our hearts are aligned with God's heart, the changes we long for become possible. This doesn't mean change becomes easy, but it means we're working with God's power rather than relying solely on our own strength. The good news is that God doesn't leave us to figure this out on our own. He provides the grace and strength we need for genuine transformation.

## Bible Verse

'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.' - 2 Corinthians 3:16-18

## Reflection Question

What areas of your life have you been trying to change through willpower alone? How might God be inviting you to approach them differently through heart transformation?

## Quote

Most people don't fail because they don't want change. They fail because desire alone does not produce transformation.

## Prayer

Father, I confess that I've often relied on my own strength to create change in my life. Help me to understand that true transformation begins with a heart turned toward You. Change me from the inside out, and give me the grace to walk in the new life You offer. Amen.

# Day 3: The Heart of Repentance

## Devotional

When we hear the word "repentance," many of us immediately think of punishment or shame. We picture someone being scolded or forced to feel guilty about their mistakes. However, this understanding misses the beautiful truth of what repentance actually is. Repentance is not punishment, but preparation. It's not an end, but a beginning. It's not meant to crush us, but to clear the ground before us and make space for God's grace to work in our lives. Think of repentance like preparing soil for a garden. Before you can plant seeds, you need to remove the weeds, break up the hard ground, and create the right conditions for growth. The work isn't pleasant, but it's essential for the beautiful harvest that's coming. When John called people to repentance, he wasn't trying to make them feel terrible about themselves. He was preparing their hearts to receive the transformation that Jesus would bring. Without this preparation, they would miss the very thing they had been waiting for their entire lives. Repentance changes the way we think about ourselves, about God, and about what truly matters. It helps us recognize our need for a Savior and creates space in our hearts for His grace. It's like clearing clutter from a room so that something beautiful can be placed there instead. This is why repentance is actually good news. It means we don't have to stay stuck in patterns that hurt us. It means there's a way forward, a path to the life God has designed for us. Repentance is God's gift to us. It is His way of preparing our hearts for the transformation He wants to bring.

## Bible Verse

'Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. Isaiah had spoken of John when he said, "He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD's coming! Clear the road for him! The valleys will be filled, and the mountains and hills made level. The curves will be straightened, and the rough places made smooth. And then all people will see the salvation sent from God.'" When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' - Luke 3:3-8a

## Reflection Question

How might viewing repentance as preparation rather than punishment change your willingness to examine areas of your life that need God's transforming touch?

## Quote

Repentance is not punishment, it's preparation. It clears the ground before us. It levels what blocks us. It makes space for God's grace.

## Prayer

Lord, thank You that repentance is not punishment but preparation. Help me to see it as Your loving invitation to clear space in my heart for Your grace. Give me courage to examine my life honestly and to turn toward You in areas where I've been going my own way. Amen.

# Day 4: Practical Transformation

## Devotional

When people came to John the Baptist asking, "What should we do?" he didn't give them abstract theological concepts or complicated religious rituals. Instead, he gave them practical, everyday instructions that would demonstrate their changed hearts. To the crowds, he said share your extra coat with someone who has none. To tax collectors, he said collect only what you're supposed to collect. To soldiers, he said don't extort money and be content with your pay. These weren't religious activities, but were life changes that showed transformed hearts. John understood something crucial, that repentance isn't an abstract thought. It shows up in how we treat people, how we use authority, and how we handle our resources. Real heart change always produces real life change. This is both challenging and encouraging. It's challenging because it means our faith must impact our daily choices. For example, how we spend money, how we treat difficult people, how we respond when we have power over others. However, it's encouraging because it shows us that transformation is practical and achievable. You don't need to become a different person overnight. You just need to take one step of obedience in the direction God is leading you. Maybe it's being more generous with your resources, more patient with your family, or more honest in your work. Maybe it's choosing contentment over constantly wanting more. The beautiful truth is that when we take these practical steps of obedience, we create space for God to work in our lives. Each act of obedience prepares our hearts to receive more of what God wants to give us.

## Bible Verse

'John replied, "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.'" - Luke 3:11

## Reflection Question

What is one practical, specific step of obedience you could take this week that would demonstrate a heart turned toward God and create space for His transforming work in your life?

## Quote

John knows that repentance is not an abstract thought. It shows up in how we treat people, in how we use authority, in how we handle our resources.

## Prayer

God, help me to see that transformation happens in the everyday moments of life. Show me specific ways I can demonstrate a changed heart through my actions. Give me the courage to take practical steps of obedience, trusting that You will work through my willingness to follow You. Amen.

# Day 5: Prepared Hearts Recognize Him

## Devotional

There's something beautiful about being prepared. When you've done the work ahead of time, you're ready to receive what comes next. You recognize opportunities that others might miss. You're positioned to respond rather than react. This is the heart of John's ministry, preparation. He wasn't the destination. He was pointing beyond himself to the One who was coming. John prepared hearts so that when Jesus stepped forward, people would recognize Him. Too often, we want the transformation that Christ offers without the preparation. We want the blessing without the heart change, the breakthrough without the surrender. However, preparation is never optional if we want to receive what God has for us. Repentance isn't a one-time event, but a life posture, a heart posture. It's the ongoing willingness to let God examine our hearts and show us areas that need His touch. It's maintaining a readiness to receive whatever He wants to do in our lives. As we conclude this week of reflection, the question isn't whether God wants to transform your life, because He does. The question is whether your heart is prepared to receive what He wants to give you. Are you willing to let Him clear away what's blocking His work? Are you ready to take that one step of obedience that creates space for His grace? When Jesus steps forward in your life, and He will, a prepared heart will recognize Him. You'll be ready to receive the transformation He offers because you've done the work of preparation. You've created space for His grace to work. The journey of transformation begins with a prepared heart. And that preparation starts today, with your willingness to say yes to whatever God is asking of you.

## Bible Verse

'The crowds asked, "What should we do?" John replied, "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry." Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, "Teacher, what should we do?" He replied, "Collect no more taxes than the government requires." "What should we do?" asked some soldiers. John replied, "Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay." - Luke 3:10-14

## Reflection Question

As you look at your life right now, what might God be asking you to repent of so that your heart is prepared to recognize and receive His transforming work?

## Quote

When Jesus steps forward, prepared hearts will recognize him.

## Prayer

Lord, I want to have a heart that's prepared to recognize You and receive all that You have for me. Show me what needs to change in my life. Help me to maintain a posture of repentance and readiness. Prepare my heart to see You clearly and follow You faithfully. Amen.