

WALKING as CHILDREN of LIGHT

A Bread for the World Lenten Devotional



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About Us

At Bread for the World, our mission is to educate and equip people to advocate for policies and programs that can help end hunger. Our faith in Christ is the foundation of our efforts and compels us to love our neighbors near and far.

More than 700 million people worldwide experience hunger every day.

Not only are people in need of food, but there's a global hunger for justice, equity, and security. This is why our work is grounded in the hope of Christ's salvation in our lives and in the world.



Join Us

Lent invites us to intentional practices of our faith in preparation for the remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection. This annual preparation and leaning into these practices prepare us for the times of uncertainty in which we live. To honor this, we chose the theme "Walking as Children of Light." We invite you and your community to reflect on how our practices of the faith can bring the light of Christ to this world. As we journey toward the cross, we keep the light of Christ shining through us to bear witness to God's love and justice, to ground us in times of darkness and uncertainty, and to connect us as we raise our voices in advocacy.

The devotional has one entry for each week of Lent. In each entry, you will find a scripture, a reflection, a prayer, and a practice to take through the week. You might work through the guide on your own or with a gathered community. The scriptures assigned follow the Revised Common Lectionary in the event you want to connect this with worship.

A special word about Bread for the World's **Offering of Letters**, an annual campaign that engages churches, campuses, and other faith communities in writing personalized letters to Congress on issues related to hunger in the U.S. and around the world. We have written this devotional to both follow the lectionary text and create practices that support the church in participating in writing letters to their members of Congress through the Offering of Letters.

We hope that you will consider participating in an Offering of Letters this year, either by **coordinating a group** to write letters together, or by **writing a letter** yourself as part of this greater movement. Letter writing would be especially appropriate for the third week of Lent, though the practice works well for other weeks. To learn more about how to write a letter individually, please visit **bread.org/act**. To lead an Offering of Letters in your church or community, visit **bread.org/ol**.

On behalf of Bread for the World staff, we wish you a thoughtful and meaningful Lent.



– Rev. Nancy Neal

Rev. Nancy Neal is the Minister for Spiritual Formation and Wellness at Bread for the World, where she works to create a culture grounded in Christian practice. She is an ordained PC(USA) pastor and has spent her career working to alleviate social inequalities. See her detailed biography at <https://www.bread.org/bio/nancy-neal/>.

ASH WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 18, 2026

We Re-Commit to a Vision of Justice and Freedom

SCRIPTURE

"Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"

—Isaiah 58:3a (NRSVUE)

Ash Wednesday

PRAYER

Holy God, you call us to deeper commitment and communion with you. As we focus on you during this season of Lent, may we do so with the ability to see the needs of the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, and the brokenhearted. Allow us to live your love as advocates for justice and change in the world. Grant us the courage to act on behalf of those in need, ensuring the hungry have food and the thirsty have drink. May our desire to draw closer to you deepen our love and care for our neighbors. Let the light of your love shine from us into the world. We give you thanks in the name of the one who taught us to love unconditionally, Jesus Christ,

Amen.

REFLECTION

Ash Wednesday is a special day in the church's liturgical calendar that marks the start of the Lenten season, a time to focus on penitence, fasting, the journey to the cross, and the joy of the resurrection. The 40 days of Lent and their focus on fasting is not a time for personal indulgence. Instead, the prophet Isaiah pushes beyond the personal to the communal, emphasizing the ability to see and respond to the needs of the community. Social responsibility must accompany fasting if one is to accomplish moving closer to God through this spiritual practice.

The caution of the prophet echoes across eons, reminding us that as fasting is undertaken during these 40 days of Lent, the practice should be accompanied by attending to the need of the poor. Bread is to be shared with the hungry. The unhoused should be housed in our homes. The naked should be clothed and covered. The bonds of injustice should be loosened.

Fasting should not be taken lightly. It is a practice that connects us with God and motivates our commitments to care for our communities. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he said it was to love God, and the second greatest was to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). This is the call of the Lenten season, the outcome of fasting.

The spiritual practice of fasting is a commitment to live out these commandments. The Lenten season offers the opportunity to live these two great commandments as we consider the purpose of our spiritual practices and the ways in which we can love God and neighbor more. To do so, we should see with compassion and act with care. We must humble ourselves in penitence and choose to act on behalf of those in need. This is the fast God chooses for us during this season of penitence. In so doing, our light shines in the world.

LENTEN PRACTICE

Our practice for Ash Wednesday is to re-commit ourselves to the vision of a world without hunger, a world where there is freedom for those who are oppressed, a world where justice prevails. We imagine our commitment to this vision as a bright light that shines out in the dreariness of this time.



Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson is a member of Bread for the World's board of directors and the first woman to serve as the general minister and president of the United Church of Christ.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT | FEBRUARY 22, 2026

We Stand Strong in Tests of Our Faith

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 4:1-11

The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

- Matthew 4:3-4 (NRSVUE)

First Sunday of Lent

PRAYER

Our gracious and loving God, as we enter into this season of Lent,

May we come to You with clean hearts and a hunger and thirst for a greater desire to love You and our fellow human beings with a greater intensity so that as others see us, they may desire to be drawn

Even closer to You.

May we, by the power of your Holy Spirit, be prepared for the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; and may our hearts be enlarged to love You in Spirit and truth; and that in our service to others in Your name, we may be pleasing in Your sight.

With gratitude, we trust that the work you have started in us will be fulfilled.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray,

Amen.

REFLECTION

After his baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus was immediately led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Satan tempted Jesus by encouraging him to turn stones into bread. At that moment, Jesus had been fasting for a significant period of time. However, despite his hunger, Jesus rejected his suggestion and responded to Satan, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

As I prepare this reflection, the federal government has been shut down for more than 30 days. Because of the shutdown, a major feeding program for children, seniors, and disabled persons who cannot work has been unable to provide for them. Inflation and tariffs imposed globally are driving the cost of goods higher, and food banks have seen an increase in the number of working poor whose paychecks are unable to keep up with the rising costs. These food banks are already overrun, and there are instances where they have had to turn people away. I am reminded daily of the hunger plaguing many citizens of the United States, the richest country in the world. (Yes, there are *American* children who go to bed hungry!)

There is something fundamentally important in what Jesus says regarding the limits of what literal food and drink can provide for human beings. However, for quite a while, Jesus' response to Satan, "Humans do not live by bread alone..." has haunted me. My visceral response has been, "But humans cannot live *without* bread." We can be tempted to turn a blind eye to the pain our siblings experience when they go without food and drink, comforting ourselves with Jesus' response. In my most recent look at this scripture, I notice in the exchange between Jesus and Satan that Jesus does not deny our need to eat. The challenge for us is this: How do we keep our eyes open and respond to the suffering around us?

LENTEN PRACTICE

Our practice this first week of Lent is to pay attention to the times when our faith is tested—tested by hunger around us that exposes our fears, our cynicism, our anger, our grief, and our lament. And we respond with gentleness and with grace for our hearts, knowing that we are not alone in our testing. Jesus has gone before us and stays with us like the angels who attended to him after his own tests. We might respond to this grace with a fierceness with and for our neighbors who face hunger in these dark times by sharing our time and our food with a nearby food pantry.



Dr. Beverly Mitchell is a Bread for the World board member and Douglas R. Chandler Church History Chair and professor of Systematic Theology and Church History at Wesley Theological Seminary.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT | MARCH 1, 2026

We Open Our Hearts to Being Born Again

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 3:3-8

Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

—John 3:3-8 (NRSVUE)

Second Sunday of Lent

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help us to feel and hear your Spirit blowing among us.

Give us a bit more of your imagination. Help us see that with you the impossible is possible. Your prophet had a vision of justice rolling down like an ever-flowing stream; may we be reborn in those waters.

Lord, we need more of your Kingdom here on earth. We long for all brothers and sisters created in your image to be respected, and all physical needs to be met. Help us recommit the work of our hands and the strength of our voices to help make it so. Strengthen our feeble human efforts to renew this world. Help us remember the water of our baptism and be united with your Spirit of justice.

Amen.

REFLECTION

We must be born of water and Spirit. We must be born from above. The Spirit, like the wind, blows where it will. These images from Jesus stretch our imagination and summon us to a deeper way of seeing. They speak of a reality beyond what is tangible—a rebirth that transcends the limits of flesh and blood.

Like Nicodemus, we often struggle to see beyond what is visible, measurable, and secure. We look for proof when Jesus calls us to faith. Yet in times of uncertainty—when injustice feels overwhelming and hope grows dim—it is precisely this spiritual rebirth that renews our vision. To be born from above is to allow the Spirit to awaken in us a holy imagination for what can be, even when the world insists that change is impossible.

Paul reminds us in Ephesians that our struggle is *not* against blood and flesh, but rather, it is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Social justice work can sometimes feel like a fight against visible systems and structures, but our deeper struggle is spiritual. The forces that divide, dehumanize, and oppress are sustained by fear and hopelessness. To be reborn in the Spirit is to refuse despair, to keep the light of Christ burning when the world around us grows cold.

Lent reminds us that we are of dust—mortal, limited, vulnerable. We are also of Spirit—breathed into by God, animated by grace, and capable of renewal. To see the Kingdom of God, we must open our hearts to the unpredictable movement of the Spirit, listening for that sacred wind that stirs new life in old places.

For all who labor for justice, this is the invitation: let the Spirit renew courage, reshape our hearts, and restore hope. Though we are born into struggle, we are reborn into a reality where Christ's light shines through mercy, truth, and love. And that light cannot be blown out, even in the fiercest storm.

LENTEN PRACTICE

Our practice this second week of Lent is to open our hearts to imagine the new life that God is inviting us to in our own rebirth and the rebirth of the world. We move from sitting with the discomfort of our tests, to a space of release and reimagining ourselves and the world anew.



Stephen Reeves is a Bread for the World board member and Executive Director of Fellowship Southwest, an ecumenical network of Christians and churches practicing compassion, pursuing justice, and foraging new connections in the Southwest United States.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT | MARCH 8, 2026

We Imagine a World Made New

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 4:39-42

Many Samaritans from that city believed in [Jesus] because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."

—John 4:39 (NRSVUE)

Third Sunday of Lent

PRAYER

God who see us, El Roi-

We thank you for being
a God that pursues
us and meets us in
our need.

Give us eyes to see
the needs around us.

Give us the desire and
strength to enter into
broken spaces and to
be people that repair.

Give us patience for
those who do not share
our vision for the world.
Help us to keep showing
hospitality even for
those we disagree
with, so that we might
model your mercy
and kindness.

Give us persistence
in these troubling
times, and may we
keep raising our voices
for your peace and
justice even when
it's unpopular.

Amen.

REFLECTION

Many of us are familiar with the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well found in the book of John. This story is a picture of a God who pursues us, a God who sees our deepest need and invites us into renewal and deeper relationship with the divine. We know that after the conversation with Jesus at the well, the Samaritan woman left amazed, changed by the encounter and inspired by the vision of a God who makes all things new. She told everyone, and many believed because of her testimony. Jesus understood her need and her longing for a world where all things would be redeemed. A world where even she could be made new.

If I am honest, I, too, am longing for a world made new. We all are. We see the groanings of creation all around us (Romans 8:22). We are a people longing for a time when the suffering of creation will cease and all will be redeemed. As we anticipate this vision for the future and pray in deep anticipation for renewal, how might we model this in the here and now? How might we work towards a world that is kinder and more hospitable, especially for those among us who are vulnerable? One way that I share this hope for the future is at the table, pursuing deep conversations with people who do not always agree with me. It might be over a meal with a neighbor, or it might be at a table with a member of Congress. It's important that we show up as people of peace in both spaces. Transformation almost always happens through relationships, and Jesus models this so well for us.

Might we be willing to sit at tables with people with whom we find deep disagreement, proclaiming a hope and hospitality that are countercultural in these troubling times? Could we be a people that resists the rage our political system thrives on and point to a better way? Let's continue to show up and speak up for a better world.

LENTEN PRACTICE

Our practice this third week of Lent is to share our faith and our vision for the world. We do so through conversation, through sharing on social media, or through writing letters to our elected leaders (which you can do at Bread.org/WriteNow). We communicate our longing for a world without hunger, a world where the oppressed are free, and a world where justice prevails. In doing so, we share our light with the world.



Nicole Schmidt is the senior regional organizer for the Midwest at Bread for the World.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT | MARCH 15, 2026

We Shine Our Light in the Darkness

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 5:8-10

... for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.

-Ephesians 5:8-10 (NRSVUE)

Fourth Sunday of Lent

PRAYER

God of light, in whom there is no darkness at all, forgive me for the times when I have ignored or downplayed the darkness in my own life. Forgive me for the times I have neglected to shine your light to the people around me, and especially to those who are walking in darkness.

Thank you for your love and mercy. Thank you for calling me out of darkness and into your marvelous light. Fill me again with the light of your presence and give me courage and boldness to follow in the way of Jesus, shining your light in the darkness and standing against the evil and injustice in our world. Show me where you are calling me to embody what is good and right and true and show me how I can share the light you have given me with those who are in need.

Through my example and witness, may I always point to you, the source of light and love. In the name of Jesus, the light of the world, I pray.

Amen

REFLECTION

There's something about the darkness that breeds fear and uncertainty. My children, and even my 15-year-old daughter, drag their feet if I ask them to get something from our car at night. It's only thirty feet from our house, and I promise to watch them from the window, but still they refuse to go. But if I give them a flashlight, everything changes.

"Let there be light," God said in Genesis. The darkness and chaos were driven back, and holy space was created—a world of order and beauty and justice. In the darkness, our imaginations see scary things that could harm us. In the light, we see what is really there—the goodness and love of God and the myriad blessings all around us.

Before coming to faith in Christ, the apostle Paul says bluntly to the believers at Ephesus, "You were darkness," unaware of the injustice within and around them, and thus unable to do anything about it. But because of what Christ did for them, and for us, "Now you are light in the Lord." The God who is light (1 John 1:5) fills us with illuminating presence, a radiant treasure in jars of clay.

Now that we have the light of Christ within us, we must walk as children of light. In other words, we must live like Jesus, the light of the world. Where are the dark places in your life? In your community? Places of deprivation and disorder, of violence and oppression. Places of hiding. The darkness in the world is powerless against the light and love of God, and one day the darkness will be no more.

Where is God calling you to shine the light of goodness, righteousness, and truth? What good work—in your neighborhood, across town, or on the other side of the world—can you contribute to this week?

LENTEN PRACTICE

Our practice this fourth week of Lent is to shine our light on the world around us, to shed light on injustice, to shed light on hunger, to shed light on violence, to shed light on captivity. We might do this by sharing our financial resources with hunger ministries, in our denominations, with international development organizations, or with Bread for the World at Bread.org/LentenGift.



Zach Schmidt is the deputy director for Organizing and Faith Engagement at Bread for the World

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT | MARCH 22, 2026

We Let our Hearts Be Broken

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 11:33-36

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

- John 11:33-36 (NRSVUE)

Fifth Sunday of Lent

PRAYER

Jesus, may our hearts be broken by what breaks Your heart. When we are tempted to look away from suffering, compel us through Your Spirit to draw nearer to places of pain. Teach us to grieve as You grieve, not with despair, but in love. Help us to not hurry past the grief we see and hear, but to be fully present, as You are with us. Reveal where self-protection and numbness have become obstacles to Your compassion flowing through us. When we feel helpless before injustice and hunger, remind us that tears are our prayers crying out for Your justice, mercy, and healing. We love because you first loved us, and we learn to be broken because you gave your body to be broken for us. Thank you for demonstrating your love through the grief of the cross so that the world could have hope that brokenness leads to eternal wholeness.

Amen.

REFLECTION

Each day, the news confronts us with stories of suffering – families displaced by war, children crying from hunger, natural disasters destroying homes and lives, communities torn apart by violence and injustice. It is tempting to turn away, to guard our hearts from a sense of powerlessness and despair. Yet in John 11, when Jesus is invited to "come and see" the grief and pain, he does not look away. He enters in. "When Jesus saw her weeping...he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved." And then he wept.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "We grieve deeply because we love deeply." To love as Jesus loves means allowing our hearts to break as his did, gripped by his tears at the effects of a broken world on those he loved. Our typical response to pain is to try to solve the problem. But before we move to solutions, we see the example of Jesus whose first response was to weep and be brokenhearted. He vulnerably and openly cried tears, not in private, but publicly in a communal lament. In seeing his grief, the people exclaimed, "See how he loved him!"

Lent invites us to resist the impulse to turn away or suppress the pain and allow ourselves to "weep with those who weep." Opening our hearts to be moved by the stories, images, and testimonies of suffering is vulnerable work. To learn how to be broken is, in itself, a privilege and a choice available to those not daily living under the weight of injustice. Like Jesus, may we be willing to feel sorrow because of his love and a longing for the world to experience God's shalom. May Jesus' example shape in us tender and courageous hearts, broken with and on behalf of the vulnerable and suffering.

LENTEN PRACTICE

Our practice this fifth week of Lent is to let our hearts be broken by the hunger, the injustice, the captivity, and the violence that we have born witness to. We let our hearts ache so that we might be moved by that grief to respond in prayer and action. We might invite our neighbors to pray together, to organize a prayer vigil, or mobilize our community in support of our neighbors.



Grace Shim is a Bread for the World board member and Executive Minister of Serve Globally, overseeing mission efforts for Covenant World Relief and Development.

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY | MARCH 29, 2026

We Remember Christ's Sacrifice

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 26:18, 26-30

He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'"

—Matthew 26:18 (NRSVUE)

Palm/Passion Sunday

PRAYER

Lord Jesus,

When we think of your final meal with your disciples, we are humbled by your love that knows no limits. You chose the path of suffering to bring us life. You took bread and broke it, you took the cup and blessed it, and through them, you offered yourself completely for our redemption.

During this Lenten season, teach us to receive your gift with thankful hearts. Help us remember that every time we share in your body and blood, we proclaim your death and resurrection until you come again. Forgive us for the ways we betray or deny you in our daily lives and renew in us the desire to follow you faithfully.

Fill our hearts with gratitude and our lives with praise. Strengthen us to love as you have loved us—to serve, to forgive, and to bear witness to your grace. May our lives become a living hymn of thanksgiving to you, our Savior and Redeemer.

Amen.

REFLECTION

In this passage of the Gospel of Matthew, we find Jesus sharing the Passover meal with His disciples—the meal that becomes the foundation of the Lord's Supper that we celebrate today.

This sacred moment reveals Jesus' profound love for his people and the purpose of his mission in this world. As he breaks the bread and gives the cup, he declares that his body and blood will be given "for the forgiveness of sins." What was once a remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egypt now becomes a sign of humanity's deliverance from sin and death.

During Lent, this passage calls us to enter deeply into the mystery of Christ's sacrifice. Jesus prepares for his suffering with intentional love. He invites his disciples into communion—an intimate fellowship that transcends betrayal, denial, and weakness. In sharing this meal, Jesus offers not only forgiveness but participation in his life.

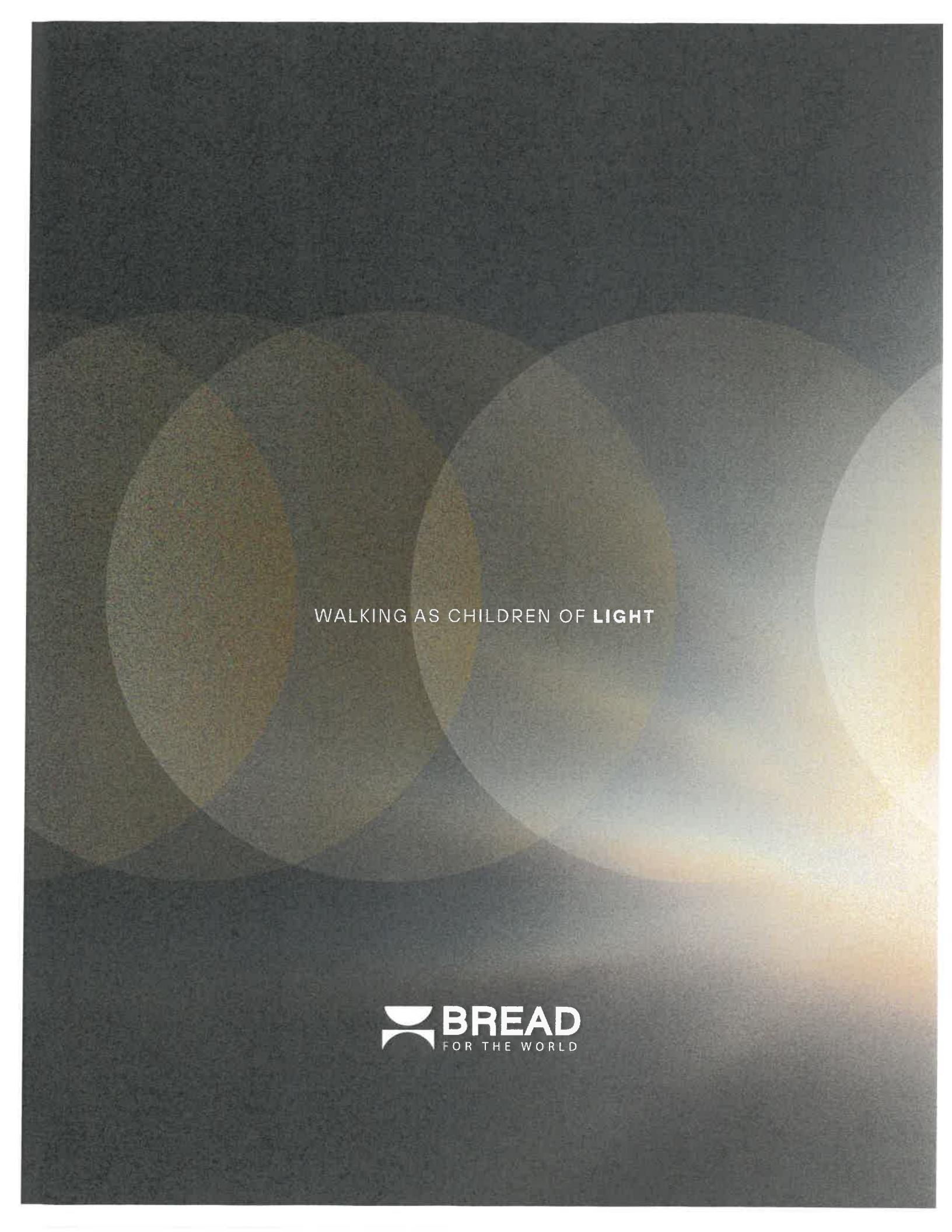
The disciples' singing of a hymn before going to the Mount of Olives reminds us that worship and obedience are our response to God's redeeming grace. Even as Jesus faces the cross, he does so with praise on his lips. Lent invites us to do the same—to approach the table with gratitude, to remember that the bread and the cup are not mere symbols but encounters with the living Christ. As we journey toward the cross, may we renew our commitment to live as people of the new covenant—broken and poured out in love for the world.

LENTEN PRACTICE

Our practice for this Holy Week is to gather as community to remember Jesus' gathering with his disciples at table for their last supper together, and to remember his journey through Gethsemane and to Golgotha, to his tomb, and to resurrection. And in this remembering, we carry this commitment to be Christ's light into the world. And in this, we might commit to continuing these practices through the rest of the year.



Rev. Eddy Alemán is general secretary of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), where he is responsible for casting a vision for the denomination and overseeing the implementation of its mission.



WALKING AS CHILDREN OF **LIGHT**



