

A LENT-TO-EASTER DEVOTIONAL FROM CHRISTIANITY TODAY

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in the

EVERYDAY

JOURNEYING FROM DEATH TO RESURRECTION



EASTER IN THE EVERYDAY: A Lent to Easter Devotional from Christianity Today

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The
HUMILITY
of
HUMANNESS

LENT
ASH WEDNESDAY



Life as a Fading Flower

ASH WEDNESDAY BREAKS DOWN
OUR ILLUSION OF INVINCIBILITY.

BY AMANDA HELD OPELT

POPPIES & DOGWOOD BY ELIZABETH BOWMAN. OIL ON CANVAS. 2023

Every year around Ash Wednesday, a hillside near our home in the mountains of Western North Carolina erupts with the yellow of budding daffodils. These are the first of the spring flowers to bloom, and their golden hue stands in stark contrast to the grays and browns of the surrounding winter.

Brilliant as the blossoms are, they are short-lived. In the days after their arrival, the daffodils are windswept by the harsh mountain cold that always lingers longer than we hope. A late frost or snowfall will inevitably cling to the quivering petals, sometimes cutting their display of beauty short. After a few weeks, the flowers that remain shrivel and brown, eventually falling to the ice-hardened earth, frustrating our optimism that warmer days are near.

It is no wonder that Job—a man whose suffering looms large in the biblical narrative—compared the fragility of his fleeting life to that of a delicate flower. Even though he possessed extraordinary wealth, even though he numbered among the righteous, he was vulnerable. He was upright, prudent, and just as susceptible to calamity as anyone else. His possessions were destroyed by fire and warlords, his children were killed in a natural disaster, and his good health was lost to a painful disease. In the wake of these catastrophes, Job fully realized what is excruciatingly true for all of us: our days are windswept, ephemeral, lived in the aftermath of the fall.

It is easy for privileged Americans to feel a sense of control: Our generation has unprecedented access to food, water, shelter, and medical care. Our ability to make choices around what we'll do for work, who we'll marry, which communities we'll join is historically unprecedented.

Meanwhile, the self-help and wellness industry has infused in us the notion that we can circumvent any uncomfortable feeling or experience. Exhaustion can be mitigated by the right green

smoothie recipe or essential oil, chaos can be controlled by the perfect time-management app, sadness can be soothed through mindfulness or meditation, and boredom can be alleviated by a streaming service or social media platform.

Moreover, as Christians, we can believe that solid theology and steadfast commitment to the spiritual disciplines can serve as a bulwark against the buffeting of life. Perhaps Job's friends assumed the same thing about their righteous companion.

Slowly the lie creeps in: *I can control my outcomes. I can avoid suffering.*

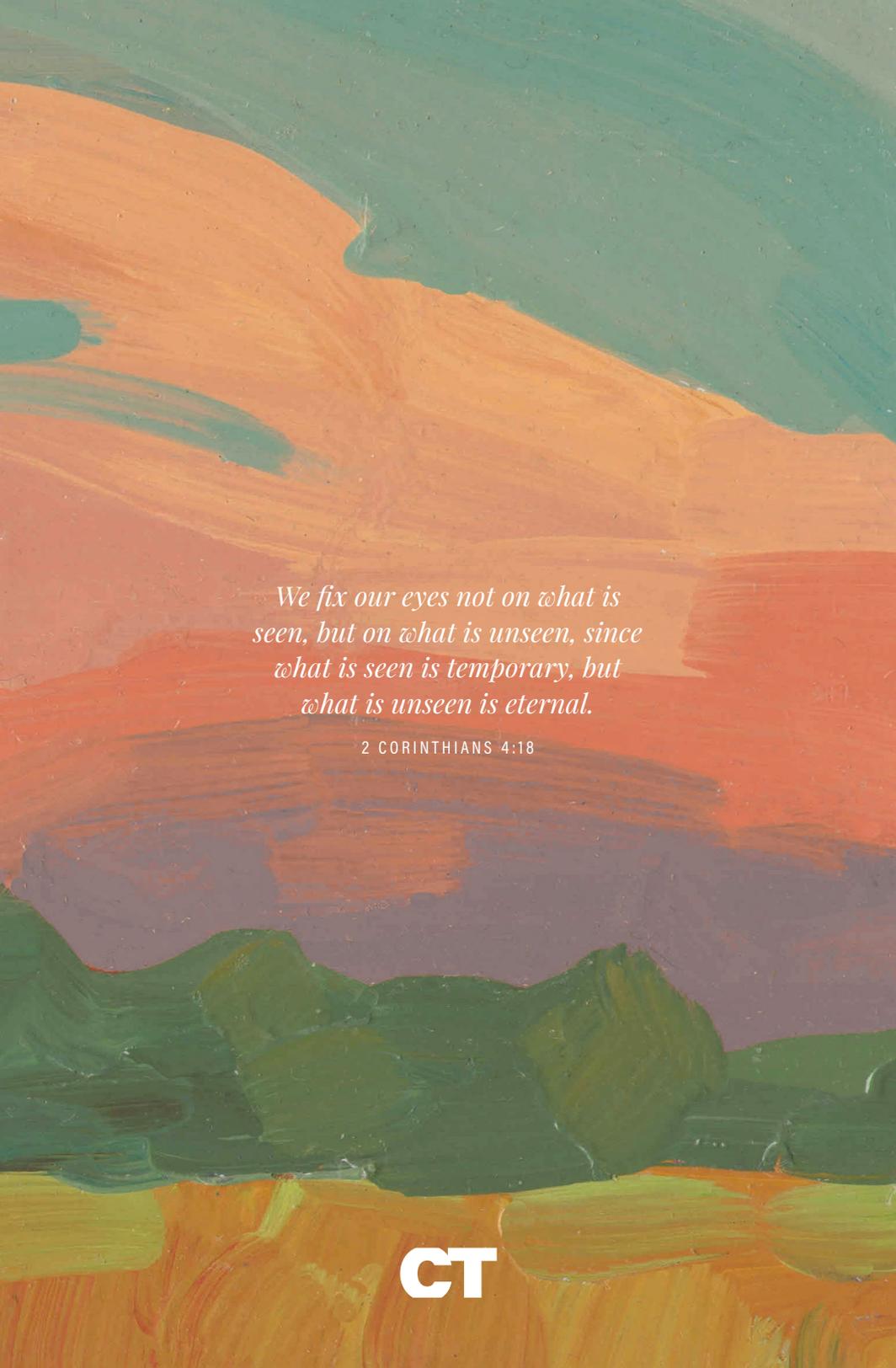
This illusion of invincibility explains why so many of us feel bewildered—offended even—when hardship inevitably comes. It's humbling to realize that suffering and death are part of being human, no matter our virtues, vigilance, or privilege. Our lives are less like well-constructed fortresses and more like fleeting flowers. We are all painfully exposed, as vulnerable as those daffodils bursting forth into the brutal cold.

Jesus reminds us of the potentially unsettling reality that God “sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45, NASB). But in the same sermon, Jesus tells us not to worry; to have no fear for what we will eat or drink or wear. “Notice how the lilies of the field grow,” he says (6:28).

The lilies are clothed in beauty by no effort of their own. They “do not labor nor do they spin” because God is the artist who oversees both their flowering and fading. And that same God knows what we need. The humiliation of helplessness can sometimes lead to an unexpected form of rest, a retreat from our efforts to control our outcomes, a respite from our own labors.

I make it my mission to notice how those daffodils grow, to admire their brilliance rather than bemoaning their brevity. Even though the lives of those flowers are brief, they are indeed a beacon of hope—a material reminder that seasons do change, that warmth always arrives, and that glory is possible even in the harshest of environments. God, and only God, makes it so.

There has never been a winter when that hillside has not been resurrected into beauty. Those daffodils feel like a miracle, a foretaste of a greater resurrection to come. And even the weakest of hopes, with God's caretaking, can blossom into eternal joy. **CT**

An abstract painting composed of broad, expressive brushstrokes. The top section is a vibrant teal color, transitioning into a large, warm orange section in the middle. Below the orange is a darker, muted purple or blue section. The bottom portion of the painting features dark green and yellow-green brushstrokes, suggesting a landscape or a textured surface. The overall style is gestural and textured, with visible brushwork throughout.

*We fix our eyes not on what is
seen, but on what is unseen, since
what is seen is temporary, but
what is unseen is eternal.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18

CT