what r u up 2?

Get "up" to something instead of giving something up this Lent.

A Daily Journal for Lent

This journal is an accompaniment to the
Worship Design Studio Lenten series,
"what r u up 2?"
www.worshipdesignstudio.com/up2

This journal can also be used independently
from the worship series or any church gathering.
It can be used privately or shared with a friend
or in a small group setting.
May you get up to something good,
for the sake of a deeply meaningful life,
and for the sake of good in the world.

For additional content and connection to others using this journal,
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Table of Contents

Introduction page 4

Store Up page 7

Come Up page 11

Take Up page 16

Raise Up page 21

Light Up page 26

Lift Up page 31

Sit Up page 36

Look Up page 41

Introduction

Welcome to a new take on Lent. Instead of the idea of "giving up something" you love (such as chocolate or sugar or carbs), I'd like for you to consider "getting up to something" for the sake of something you love (like people, the planet, even our selves).

Being "up to something" doesn't have to be anything big, or life-changing, or unnecessarily piled onto an already-busy schedule. Finding "practices" that elevate our spirit can sometimes simply be a more intentional minute of reflection about something that shows up already in our lives. To be "up to something" may be simply raising up our awareness of what is important, what is precious, what is necessary for a life that feels gratifying. It can also mean raising our awareness of those things that don't feel life-giving and giving them up "for good."

We ask our friends, "what are you up to these days?" It is a playful question when we ask it this way. "Up to" sounds a little sneaky. "They are up to something!" Like orchestrating a surprise or creating something wonderful without making it a big deal. It is like having a project that only you know about. Lent is a little like that. It is a time when we go inward to assess "what's up" in there so that the outward-facing life we lead is fueled and supported by a deep inner spiritual well. And sometimes what we are up to out in the world has positive or negative effects on that inner world. Being up to assessing those dynamics is also a key component to a Lenten journey.

Of course, the snarky response to the question “what are you up to” is “oh, about 5’5”!” We are a measuring kind of species. How tall? How accomplished? How important? How popular? But in this Lent season, being “up to something” isn’t about “measuring up.” It is quite the opposite. It is important that we ourselves define what is worth our heightened attention — not try to reach some height that someone else set for us.

This journal is full of word-plays on the word “UP” in order to prompt short stream-of-consciousness bursts of journaling. There is no way to do it wrong. There is no end-goal other than seeing what comes out and how that gets us thinking about life and what we’re up to in it.

One such “up” phrase is “Are you up to it?” There are times when we just don’t feel up to much. Life’s circumstances can take a toll. Here is another distinction about our Lenten journey. Sometimes what we are “up for” is saying “no” as the best answer for us in this time. A trend in the healthcare sector is for doctors to run “micropractices” in which they reduce their overhead and staff and patient load so that they can have more quality and quantity of time with each patient. What if we think about “micro-practicing” our lives? What would you prune in your life to spend more quality and quantity of time with the most important people and activities?

I hope this journal will be the micro-practice version of daily devotions for you. Many blessings on your Lenten journey!

Peace & Passion,
Dr. Marcia McFee

worshipdesignstudio.com/upjournal

Music links:

Each week of this journal has a link and a QR code to listen to a song. It all started when I heard Joy Oladokun's "Look Up" (which is the title of the Easter devotion). Then I started listening to all of her music and I was so moved by her honesty. If we can have half the self-examination, grace, and depth of reflection that these songs inspire, we'll be doing good... for ourselves, for our relationships, for our existence in this world. She tells it like it is (life is hard and we are anxious) and she also offers inspiration to cherish all of it,
hanging in there and getting up to something good.
She is a poet and prophet.
So as you consider what you are up to
in this world, I invite you to let
Joy Oladokun be your Lenten soundtrack.
https://www.joyoladokun.com

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store up

“Storing up treasures” is a classic scripture that often kicks off the Christian season called Lent. We are invited to store up the kind of treasures that last beyond the quick consumer fix... experiences, memories, gratitude, expressions of love, helping a neighbor — generally bringing more good into our time and place.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...” — Matthew 6: 16-21

Treasures in my life:

Merciful God, I come before you knowing
that change must happen in my life.
But at times facing those changes feels overwhelming.
I feel the external expectations that distract and
draw me into less important pursuits.
In this moment of quiet,
I listen carefully for what's up.

Listen to "Somebody Like Me"

Ash Wednesday: store up

Today is Ash Wednesday, a day we remember that our lives are not limitless and our time on this earth is precious. What will you be “up to” with your one “wild and precious life” (thank you, Mary Oliver) that will feel like you got to store up true treasures?

Thursday: choked up

We all get “choked up” about something. This is our body-mind-spirits letting us know that we’re connected and caring. Researchers have shown that empathy is an essential part of living out a vital humanity. What moves you in this world?

Friday: bottoms up

Yep, at one time or another, we tilt up the glass and take a big drink. This “up” phrase reminds us that a vital life includes metaphorically drinking deeply of the elixir of life. What activities quench your thirst for life? How could your passion be shared or benefit others?

Saturday: wrapped up

To get “wrapped up” in something is to allow ourselves to be consumed, to follow a dream or a passion to its completion (or at least until something else calls our name). Is there something that you are yearning to get wrapped up in but keep putting off?

come up

We are called to come up out of the depths of whatever seeks to keep us under and to know that we are beloved of God. Come up, for now is the time to be fully who you are created to be for the sake of the world. The world needs what you have to give, needs what you are "up to" as a fully alive and passionate human.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. . . . "You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." — Mark 1: 9-11

Say this to yourself and to someone else today.

"You, [name here]_____,
are a beloved Child of the Holy One,
who is already pleased just because you're alive."

Loving God, I come before you needing to feel lighter.
I am weighed down with expectations and difficult news.
Sometimes it is my own doing that weighs me down.
In this moment of quiet,
I listen carefully for what's up.

Listen to "Changes"

Monday: back me up

Ever feel like you need to “call for backup?” We all do at one time or other in our lives because we are not made to do this life on our own. You’ve likely heard the idea that we have to put on our own mask before helping others. What do you need to do for *you* in order to be able to be there for others?

Tuesday: up against

We are often “up against” some pretty sizable obstacles as we seek to make the world a better place for all people. It can feel “nigh impossible” to make any difference. But even small raindrops wear down mountains eventually. What small thing are you up to that can wear down negativity?

Wednesday: work your way up

Ladder-climbing can take a lot of effort. We are told that the best thing we can do in life is to “work our way up” to the top. But being first or best is not a guarantee for a fulfilling life. What if we thought about working our way up on the ladder of love? What can you be up to today that moves you up those rungs?

Thursday: caught up

How many times have you said to yourself, “when will I ever be caught up on everything I have to do?” Life can feel like a never-ending to-do list. Can you be up to about 30 minutes today that has absolutely nothing to do with the to-do’s? What will you do that feels yummy and life-giving?

Friday: stand up

Have you ever been called a “stand up” kind of person? Sometimes we need to stand up (which also means a stand-up spirit, not just for those who are actually able to stand) for those who need an advocate. What could you be up to that is a “stand up” thing to do to advocate for someone else, today or any day?

Saturday: up and coming

To be “up and coming” is to be on the rise, to be getting attention and becoming known for something. This up phrase invites us to see the potential of each person we meet as “up and coming” in their own unique way. Who in your life is up to something good that you want to celebrate?

take up

Jesus' disciples tried to do a little damage-control PR, but Jesus wasn't having any of it. Life is hard, not fair for so many, and the message is clear for the followers of Jesus... we have the power to take up the cause of justice and help make the world a better place. It might not be easy, but it creates bonds that last.

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." — Mark 8:34

One cause I feel called to take up:

Motivating and Invigorating God,
you challenge me to walk a difficult path.
Show me, as Jesus did,
that letting go of my own security and comfort
is the only way to create space
for your justice to move over the earth.
In this moment of quiet,
I listen carefully for what's up.

Listen to "If You've Got a Problem"

Monday: up for it

"Are you up for it?" There are many ways to be up for something... to be willing, to be called, to be convicted, to be compelled. Something inside of us says "I can't NOT do this." However, overwhelm at the enormity of causes can lead to numbing. If you stop looking at ALL the things, what one thing rises to the top as a starting point?

Tuesday: up in arms

This phrase is one we use to describe that which makes us angry. It originated in the 16th century about what people were willing to fight for. One of the most productive kinds of anger is that which serves as a motivating factor in working for change. What makes you angry and how can we respond with arms of love, not weapons?

Wednesday: follow up

Compassion fatigue is real. Especially in these years of pandemic and all kinds of tragedy in the world, it is easy to lack the kind of follow-up that is needed to sustain the work of good. Rather than be overwhelmed by all that needs to happen, what one thing can you do to follow up today with someone who needs ongoing help?

Thursday: build up

Constructing, or “building up,” can happen in many ways. Sometimes we need to build up trust in a relationship. Perhaps we need to build up skillsets to improve our situation. It could be that we need to build up the stockpile at the local food bank. What one thing can you focus on building up?

Friday: get up and go

"My get up and go just got up and went," so goes the saying. Inertia can drag us down until we feel like being a couch potato is all we can muster. When you feel this way, what's up? Does your body feel bad? Is your spirit heavy? Are you feeling too much pressure? What beliefs are in your way?

Saturday: show up

Showing up is one way to be up to something good. Whether that is showing up to support an organization or cause, or showing up for a friend who needs your presence, where we show up shows what, who, and how we love. Who has shown up for you? What and/or who do you want to show up for in a more consistent way?

raise up

Civilizations have raised up institutions and they almost always turn out to do some good and, unfortunately, some not-so-good. Jesus' anger at the sellers in the temple was directed at the way the institution had become unjust and unfair for the most vulnerable. The need for the resurrection of just systems of care for the "least of these" has never left us.

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. . . ." But he was speaking of the temple of his body.
— John 2: 19-21

What institutions do you raise up?

God of restoration and rebuilding,
I seek resurrection and renewal
for my tired and worn-out body
and the bodies of my communities.
In this moment of quiet,
I listen carefully for what's up.

Listen to "Trying"

Monday: up front

Honesty is the best policy. Being “up front” is usually about honesty and transparency. Not being up front with someone can cause all kinds of hiding and secrets and discomfort and ultimately, a lack of intimacy born of fear. Are there relationships that need to be restored in your life? How could you be up to being up front?

Tuesday: laid up

No one is immune from being laid up once in a while. Do you remember the first time you felt ill or got injured? What did you learn about yourself? How does it feel now when you are laid up? Too often we are impatient or even mad at being less productive. If your body needs restoration in some way, can you be up to some compassion for yourself?

Wednesday: own up

While some expressions of faith focus on the sinful nature of humanity, some focus more on God's grace which always meets our tendency to screw up. The truth probably lies in the middle — we need both. Owning up to what we do that gets in the way of our thriving can be liberating. What can you own up to today that would restore some freedom to you?

Thursday: dolled up

Getting "dolled up" or "dressed up" may be something we do for special occasions. But it is also what we do when we present only the "shiny" side of our lives to others, as if our lives are one special moment after another. Perhaps one thing we can be up to is offering the real version of our lives which probably matches more closely other's lives. So, how ARE you today, really?

Friday: shape up

If no one has ever said “shape up” to you, count yourself among the few. Expectations abound for what “shape” our lives should be. There are many shapes that life can be. Sometimes the shape is not “up” but rather “experimentation” or “ragged” or “working on it.” The important thing is that we are working on the shape *we* want our lives to be. What is that for you?

Saturday: grow up

Our language of “up” is based in large part on the fact that growing is often a matter of defying gravity, working against the things that seek to pull us down so that we can reach for the heights. But down is not all bad. In order to “grow up” we also have to be growing roots down. What grounds you so that you can grow upwards?

light up

We all know someone that lights up the room when they walk in. We are drawn to them like a moth to a lamp. Jesus was a light in a time when the shadows of oppression lurked in the lives of those with no power or status. And he invites us to be that light — joining our small light with others so that collectively, we can make sure that evil is exposed.

"For those who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." — John 3: 20-21

What evil will you resist with your light?

Illuminating God, I come before you today
to be called in from the shadows
to bask in the light of your mercy
and work to light the corners where evil lurks.
In this moment of quiet,
I listen carefully for what's up.

Listen to "Keeping the Light On"

Monday: jazz it up

Life is an improvisation and jazz musicians know that best. But they will also tell you that there is no improvisation without good structure. When we are preparing to “jazz up” our little corner of the world, we must be sure that we’ve done the work of creating a structure where all are invited to play. What tune will you share?

Tuesday: cheer up

Joy, play, rest, creativity, curiosity… these are all things that are essential to human thriving — that offer an elevated, “cheered up” existence. And yet, these things are lost when basic needs are not fulfilled or when we pray at the altar of productivity and getting ahead at the cost of delight. What will you do to cheer and be cheered up?

Wednesday: free up

A sense of relief can come with the discovery of some unexpected free time, right? We feel like a gift has been given of precious time to do with what we choose. This is freedom. So many have lives that are not free and choices are too few. Chains can be institutional, familial, economic, political, and more. What small thing can you do to speak up for a freed up world for all?

Thursday: strike up a conversation

When was the last time you struck up a conversation with a stranger? A fascinating phenomenon backed up by research is how deep we tend to go with strangers in a short amount of time. Being vulnerable and open about our lives is a good thing to be up to, not only deepening bonds, but widening them. Up for it?

Friday: things are looking up

Hope. It is an audacious thing to have these days and it is necessary for our thriving. To have hope is to have faith that things will, eventually, be looking up. In fact, we humans have the ability to see hopeful things in the midst of really bad stuff. What is one thing that you can say is looking up these days?

Saturday: sunny side up

“Look on the sunny side of life!” Whether or not you believe in the power of positive thinking, the big yellow ball of the sun, the yellow yolk of the egg, and the yellow circle of a happy face has come to represent an indominable joy that refuses to die. Sunrise is new light, egg is new life, and a happy face... well... new grins? Are you up for trying on the positive?

lift up

To be lifted up is to be drawn into the love of God. Jesus drew all kinds of people to him during his short tenure on earth, drawing no boundaries for who was invited into that love. As his hour to die drew nearer, he spread the message that all things would be enveloped in his love even after he was gone.

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." — John 12: 32-33

What uplifting message will you leave?

Radically inclusive God, you offer each one of us
a life-changing love that leaves no one out.
Sometimes I wonder about acceptance so much
that I struggle to rise up and claim your love for me.
In this moment of quiet,
I listen carefully for what's up.

Listen to "Somehow"

Monday: uplifting

"Your love keeps lifting me higher and higher…" The 1967 hit song continues to be a toe-tapping favorite, and for good reason. How does it feel to be loved? Lighter. No matter what is going down, to know that you are not alone in the midst of it just makes it bearable. What uplifting gesture of love could you be up to today?

Tuesday: up and about

After a time of laying low, we often say we are "up and about" once again. Times of laying low are OK — indeed sometimes necessary for our mental health. Yet knowing when it is time to be up and about is equally important. This is a healthy paying attention to our life rhythms. Where are you right now?

Wednesday: chalk it up

Our brains detest ambiguity. They are always working to attribute reason or blame in order to make sense of things. Sometimes we CAN "chalk it up" and know why life events happen — what lies behind bad, frustrating, hurtful, or unfair circumstances. And sometimes we just can't understand. Are you struggling to chalk something up? Is it possible to let it be, let it rest for today?

Thursday: ease up

Like a dog with a bone, sometimes we tend to get super-focused on something almost to obsession. This can get directed at a project or a person. In these cases, it can be good to give yourself a time-out and ease up just a little bit. What we know about problem-solving is that taking a step back can finally open the floodgates. Can you ease up on something or someone today?

Friday: take you up on it

Our life of relationships is based on invitations. We invite each other to interactions, shared experiences, shared intimacies. Isolation can be a side effect of feeling down and feeling afraid to share that with anyone. Offering, or taking someone up on, an invitation can be a lifeline. What can you be up to today that creates a connection?

Saturday: fess up

“Confession is good for the soul.” In fact, the phrase “fess up” is a shortened version of “confess,” originating in the early 20th century. Somehow, to “fess up” seems a bit more lighthearted, acknowledging that we all end up doing things that need to be lifted up into the light of day. Without a regular fessing up, shame can take hold. What can you be up to today to let go of a mistake?

sit up

The motley crew parade of palm-waving followers at the entrance into Jerusalem was a non-violent action featuring a man sitting on a donkey — an action that has offered hope throughout the ages. Will we sit up and take notice of the injustice of this world and work to eradicate it?

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" - John 12: 14-15

What is getting your attention these days?

Peace-loving God, our first instinct in fighting oppression
is often to take up weapons,
utter fighting words, and lash out with vitriol.
But Jesus demonstrated humility and patience,
even against his mortal enemies.
In this moment of quiet,
I listen carefully for what's up.

Listen to "I See America"

Monday: fed up

There is no better week than Holy Week to take notice of what we are “fed up” about. This phrase originated in the 18th century about rich people having overindulgent appetites — food and everything else. Now we think of this phrase as having had it “up to here.” What in your life (or the world) is it time to call out as just way too much?

Tuesday: up for grabs

Uncertainty is a part of life. When something is “up for grabs” it means that it is so uncertain as to hang within the grasp of any outcome. Jesus’ disciples felt the fear of having their fate determined by any number of factions. What feels up for grabs in your life right now? What reassurance can you be up to today?

Wednesday: step right up

Can you hear the circus cryer exclaiming “step right up, ladies and gentleman, to see the greatest show on earth!”? To step right up or to step it up is to meet a challenge — to take a risk, to move forward with a sense of curiosity or bravery. What would be the “greatest show on earth” right now? Let your imagination create a world you’d like to step into and step right up for.

Thursday: up to no good

Just before the Last Supper, there was one disciple “up to no good.” Maybe Judas acted to betray Jesus to ignite a fire of revolution that he wished Jesus would get up to. Whatever the reason, Jesus invited Judas to break bread, even though he knew he was up to no good. Can we give that kind of grace as well?

Friday: throw up my hands

Defeat doesn't feel good. Having to give up on something you cared about is heartbreaking. Can you imagine how Jesus' friends felt on that Good Friday? Throwing up our hands is a phrase that describes the moment we get so exasperated and discouraged that we stop working for that which we had tried so hard to do. What disappointments might you name and lament?

Saturday: time is up

They had forgotten to count days. Jesus had told them that there would be three days for death and then life would win. But likely as the Sabbath progressed without their beloved one, they felt like all time was up and it was over. We all go through the end of a loved one's life... when the time we have with them is up. Who do you remember today? And can you be up to believing it's not the end?

look up

The women approached the tomb with heads lowered in defeat and grief. But then they looked up and it changed their lives. The barrier that they thought would be there was gone and what they discovered instead was life. Will we look up? Will we look up from our complacency, apathy, fear, and depression about "the way things are" and be filled with the promise of new life and hope yet again?

When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. - Mark 16:4

Two small things I will continue to be up to after Easter:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Ever-Living God,
I come with my head bent down sometimes,
overwhelmed with Good Friday news.
Raise me up, lift up my eyes,
so that I might look up and see
the tenacity of life in the midst of death.

Listen to “Look Up”

My Easter message: