

THURSDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK

Day 16 • *Begin with Prayer of Illumination*

BARREN BUSHES

Jeremiah 17:5-8, 10

Thus says the LORD:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals, and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit...

I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

IN WHOM DO WE TRUST?

To trust is a dangerous and scary action. To trust means to believe something is true. To trust means having faith in something. To trust also means to have confidence in someone, to be able to rely on them.

James M. Efrid, in *Jeremiah Prophet Under Siege*,¹¹ says that Jeremiah prophesied in a time “when no one could trust anyone else.” He goes on to say that “There can never be a possibility for a good life for anyone unless people can basically trust other people. But in the land of Judah at that moment in history no one could trust anyone.”

I wonder how far we have advanced as a society when, 2500 years after Jeremiah spoke, we still (or once again) live in a society where *no one trusts anyone*. So much of our media is slanted one way or the other that no one seems to know what the truth is anymore. We don’t trust politicians, we don’t trust religious leaders, we don’t trust family members. Yet, our text says, *Blessed are those who trust in the LORD*.

So what can we do to gain back our ability to trust? I believe it begins with prayer. And prayer begins by developing an *inner life*. And developing the inner life begins in *solitude*.

According to Charles de Foucauld,¹¹¹ “the soul will bring forth fruit exactly in the measure in which the inner life is developed in it.” Jeremiah claims that those who trust in the LORD are blessed, that even in a year of drought they do not fail to bear fruit, and that the LORD tests the mind and searches the heart according to the fruit produced. So, pray to be blessed, bear good fruit, and trust in the LORD our God.

PRAYER

Lord God, help me to develop the kind of life where I can trust in your guidance. And send me a faithful witness that I can trust to lead me in your way everlasting. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Name something you have done to bear fruit for the kingdom.

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Lent 2022, Day 16

A Guide for Reflection and Prayer

From: freepik.com

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An Initiative Of
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1570 Buffalo Ave
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Begin each day with the Prayer of Illumination to help, prepare your heart to hear God's word for you. Read "to be formed and transformed rather than to gather information...Read with a vulnerable heart. Expect to be blessed...Read as one awake, one waiting for the beloved. Read with reverence."ttt

Let us Pray a *Prayer of Illumination*:

All-Seeing One, above me, around me, within me —
guide my vision as I engage with your sacred words.
Look down upon me, look out from within me, look all around me.
See through my eyes, hear through my ears, feel through my heart.
God of Wisdom, touch me where I need to be touched;
and when my heart is touched, give me the grace to lay
down this Holy Book and ask significant questions:

Why has my heart been touched by you?

How am I to be changed through your touch?

All-Seeing One, I need to change, I need to look a little more like You.

May these sacred words change and transform me.

Then I can meet You face to face...when I shall be healed forever.

Your Word and the touch of your Spirit bring healing...
a healing that will last.

**O Eye of God, look not away.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me. Amen.**

Adapted from *A Tree Full of Angels* by Macrina Wiederkehr [As quoted in *A Guide To Prayer For All God's People*, Job & Shawchuck, The Upper Room]

FRIDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK
Day 17 • *Begin with Prayer of Illumination*

THE SECRET TO GIVING AND PRAYING
Matthew 6:1-8

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

PRAYER AND

Jesus says *beware of practicing your piety before others... Piety is a devotion to religious observance, but prayer is entering the heart of God.*ⁱ Richard Foster, in his book *Prayer*, says prayer “is about a love relationship:

an enduring, continuing, growing love relationship with the great God of the universe, and overwhelming love invites a response.” Our response to God’s *overwhelming love* for us is to love well in return. So, “to be effective pray-ers, we need to be effective lovers...real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love”—falling in love with God. Prayer and giving alms is an outgrowth of that love.

Foster says the key to the heart of God is prayer, and that Jesus is the door. Jesus teaches us the way to God’s heart; and reveals the God’s love for us through his (Jesus’s) healing ministry, powerful witness, and inclusive love for all people. Prayer and giving alms is our humble and grateful response.

PRAYER

Help us, O God our Creator, to be always loving. Help those who observe us to see only the humility and love we have for you, and no selfish motive for recognition and praise. Thank you for your overwhelming love for your people. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

What are your thoughts about praying and giving in secret?

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++ *Provided* Missions Inc., Ave., Niagara

by: Community
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SATURDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK

Day 18 • *Begin with Prayer of Illumination*

COMPASSIONATE LOYALTY

Micah 7:18-20

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over the transgression
of the remnant of your possession?

He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in showing clemency.

He will again have compassion upon us;
he will tread our iniquities under foot.

You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.

You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and unswerving loyalty to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our ancestors
from the days of old.

PARDONED AND FREE

Who is a God like you...? the prophet asks in awe and wonder, who indeed! Who is this God that allows God's people numerous millennia to get to know, and learn to love their God? Who is this God that obliges us to suffer the consequences of our sins, but only for a time; eventually having compassion and pity on God's people and lifting them out of their murky existence. Who is this God whose steadfast love is unsearchable and unconditional, even in the most trying of circumstances?! Who is this God who *casts all our sins into the depths of the sea* and remembers them no more?

Who is this God who does not break the covenant, even when people repeatedly break their covenant with God? Who is this merciful God that commands that we love our neighbor, bring justice to the oppressed, and take care of the orphan and widow?

Who is this God with unwavering loyalty to humanity, sends God's only Son as a sign of God's new covenant with them? Who is this God who gave this Son so that whosoever believes in him shall have eternal life? Who is this God that allows us to kill and destroy God's Son because we cannot bear the darkness of our own souls that his witness reveals? And who is this God that raises God's Son from the dead to prove to all who believe that he is indeed the Messiah, the one sent by God to show God's love and forgiveness to all, and to set all people free.

Indeed, it is the one true God who *swears faithfulness...and unswerving loyalty* even today, as *God swore to the ancestors in days of old!*

PRAYER

Almighty and compassionate God, thank you for loving and forgiving me. Help me to see my sins of which I still need to repent, and lead me in your way everlasting. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

How has God shown unwavering love and faithfulness to you?

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Lent 2022, Day 18

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SATURDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK - Day 18

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THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Day 19 • *Begin with Prayer of Illumination*

STAND FIRM

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 8-10, 12-13

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did... We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer... So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

WILDERNESS WARNING

The Apostle Paul reaches back into Israel's history to the event that defines them: their deliverance from Egypt and the 40 years of wilderness wandering that followed. Imagine being there and witnessing all of the plagues that God brought on Pharaoh, then the Passover, the parting of the sea, the water from the rock, manna, quails, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. All of it, and yet they grumbled against Moses and tested God.

And God got totally fed up and told Moses his plans to “disinherit them” (Numbers 14:12) Moses pleaded with God to forgive them, and “then the Lord said, ‘*I do forgive*, just as you have asked; nevertheless - as I live...none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have...not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of [them] shall see it.’” (Numbers 14:20-23) They wandered in the wilderness and died there because they tested God too many times.

It is the same with us, our life goes better when we trust God. Then when trouble comes our way, God strengthens and guides us so that we are able to endure it. Paul warns, *Do not do as some of them did*...don't spend your whole life in the wilderness, trust God and it will go well with you.

PRAYER

Help me Lord to trust in you, and when temptations come my way help me to lean on your wisdom and strength, and remember your faithfulness and love for me. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

When were you tested and God provided a way out?

Four horizontal lines for writing reflections.

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A Guide for Reflection and Prayer

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MONDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK
Day 20 • *Begin with Prayer of Illumination*

FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING

Luke 4:16-22

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

THE FULFILLMENT

Jesus has returned to the Galilee from the wilderness *filled with the power of the Spirit*. (Luke 4:14) Word is spreading throughout the region about him, and he comes to Nazareth, his hometown and enters the synagogue where he is handed the scroll from which to read.

We don't know anything from scripture about Jesus' life from the time he was twelve (Luke 2:41-52) until he begins his ministry at thirty. So there is a lot we don't know about Jesus' formative years.

When I think of my own formative years between the ages of twelve and thirty, there were periods that definitely were wilderness times: dangerous times, times when temptations overcame me, and times when I was able to resist. And so when I think about the people who knew me during those years it is not surprising that many of them did not understand my *conversion*. My outlook on life and my lifestyle changed drastically, but they still remembered that *other* person. Some could only talk about it this way: *She got religion*.

Those who knew me well could see the *real* me beginning to blossom, but for many it was, and still is, a mystery. So it not surprising that when Jesus returns to his hometown, *filled with the power of the Holy Spirit*, and identifies himself as one *anointed to bring good news to the poor...sent to proclaim release to the captives...to restore sight to the blind, and to bring justice to the oppressed*, the townspeople just have a hard time wrapping their minds around that...but this is *Joseph's son*...

PRAYER

Almighty God, you can transform each and every one of us into who you want us to be. Allow your Spirit to change us in ways that reveal your power and glory, and make us faithful servants for your purpose. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

When have you emerged *from the wilderness* a different person?

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to you at this time. May you be blessed and transformed through the Holy Spirit as you ponder God's word during this most holy of seasons. ++ *Provided by:* Community Missions Inc., 1570 Buffalo Ave., Niagara Falls, NY 14303, Phone: (716) 285-3403, www.communitymissions.org

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Adapted from *A Tree Full of Angels* by Macrina Wiederkehr [As quoted in *A Guide To Prayer For All God's People*, Job & Shawchuck, The Upper Room]

TUESDAY • THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT
Day 21 • *Begin with Prayer of Illumination - Pg. 2*

DOING, DOING, DOING

Matthew 7:21-27

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?" Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers."

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell - and great was its fall!"

LISTEN AND HEAR

There is more to following Jesus than being a perpetual motion machine. Henri Nouwenⁱⁱ talks frequently about being in communion with God. Nouwen says that "A lot of people are asking for the spiritual life and what they really want is to feel good about themselves." What some fail to realize is that doing God's will comes from being in relationship and communion with God. We cannot know God's will for us unless we spend time getting to know God.

Jesus uses the illustration of a man who builds his house on a rock. Nouwen sees how Jesus chooses his twelve disciples (Luke 6:12-19) as an apt illustration of the rock:

"At night he went up to the mountain to pray. In the morning...he called his disciples together. In the afternoon he went out with them...preached the word of God and healed the sick... Communion with God, community, ministry. That is the order of things...pray...form community, and then with community to minister." But we reverse it: we want to do things and then when they don't work, we ask the community, and then when that doesn't work we pray about it.

If we want to *do the will* of God, as Jesus did, then we must foster a relationship with God, as Jesus did. Nouwen suggests we use the order that he sees Jesus using in order to seek God's guidance for ac-

tion. Nouwen's whole premise is that *we are God's beloved*, and God wants to spend time with those whom he loves. That is the rock on which we stand. When we spend time with loved ones, then we can most effectively serve and minister on their behalf.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, lead my heart to pursue your presence. Help me to "claim my beloved-ness" in you and seek to do your will from that place in your heart. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

In what ways do you *claim your belovedness* in God?

Visit www.HopeForNiagara.org for more spiritual resources.

Lent 2022, Day 21

A Guide for Reflection and Prayer



From: freepik.com

TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT - Day 21 *DOING, DOING, DOING*



This week's devotional resource was written by Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow, President of the American Baptist Churches of New York State Board of Missions, and edited by Rev. Mark H. Breese of Community Missions. The content was created specifically keeping in mind the populations served by Community Missions.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Scripture Verses are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), HarpurCollins Publishers, 1989.

The choice of Daily Scripture texts are taken from Lent & Easter, Wisdom from Thomas Merton, Linguori Publications.

ⁱ Paula Ripple, Growing Strong at Broken Places, as quoted in A Guide to Prayer for All God's People, Job & Shawchuck, The Upper Room, p. 255-6.

ⁱⁱ James M. Efird, in Jeremiah Prophet Under Siege, Judson Press, Valley Forge, 1979, p. 100.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles de Foucauld, Meditations of a Hermit, as quoted in A Guide to Prayer for All God's People, Job & Shawchuck, The Upper Room, p. 111.

ⁱ Richard J. Foster, Prayer, HarperCollins Publishers, 1992., p. 2-3

ⁱⁱ Henri J. M. Nouwen, Beloved: Henri Nouwen in Conversation, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007. p. 46,48,18.

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