



Lent +  
DEVOTIONALS

# D EXODUS 16.1-12

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we will explore the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Jacob Parton and our reading is Exodus 1, verses 1 to 12. We pick up the Bible's story with the people of Israel travelling in the desert, after God has just parted the sea for them to escape the Egyptians. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*1 The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. 2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.'*

*4 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.'*

*6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?' 8 Moses also said, 'You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.'*

*9 Then Moses told Aaron, 'Say to the entire Israelite community, "Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling."'*

*10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked towards the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.*

*11 The LORD said to Moses, 12 'I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, "At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God."'*

## **THOUGHT**

God is leading the people of Israel on a journey to Mount Sinai where He will make a covenant with them there. Afterwards, he will take them to the Promised Land. Yet, on the way the people begin grumbling against Moses and Aaron: there's no food.

God had removed Israel from Egypt, but, as the saying goes, Egypt still needed to be removed from Israel. In other words, Israel needed to transition from slaves to Pharaoh to servants of the Lord. This was a mindset issue and a real struggle for the people. Even their memories of Egypt became clouded. They claim: we "ate all the food we wanted" in Egypt and lament the fact they ever left. Yet, in Egypt, they'd been brutally oppressed as slaves! They're clearly in denial, and need to turn around in their thinking, or to use a Bible word, to repent. God begins to bring this change and freedom in their lives. How? He tests them through providing bread, accompanied with specific instructions of when to gather it. Why? Well, before Israel can enter the Promised Land they must learn to rely and trust in God as their provider and deliverer.

It's remarkable how bad mindsets can infiltrate our thinking. As part of our weekly Sabbath, my wife and I always enjoy dipping into a theology book or two. Recently, Lauren shared with me one insight that a theologian had made and which she found interesting. In response, I found myself trying to pick holes in what the theologian had said. The ironic thing was, I agreed with the insight and was basically playing devil's advocate! In that moment, my mindset had become argumentative, betraying the devotional heart behind our love for theology.

Lent is a special time of opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit, so that He can identify issues in our mindsets and call us to turn around in our thinking: to repent. For Israel, God prepared them for the Promised Land by taking them through the wilderness, which involved a lot of mindset challenges and required repeated repentance. During the season of Lent, God wants to prepare His church for Easter, before we come to contemplate Christ crucified. In this season let's commit to self-examination and whole-hearted trust in God.

## **WELCOME PRAYER**

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who both led Israel through the wilderness, and leads us through this season of Lent.

*(15 second silence)*

## **LED PRAYER**

Reflect on your current mindset and hear what the Holy Spirit might be saying to you. Are there any areas where you might be going in a different direction to God? Do you trust that God is good, your provider and deliverer? Do you have any grumblings that you need to bring to God, to maybe experience a mindset change, or to receive His faithful provision?

Spend some time reflecting with Jesus now.

*(60 second silence)*

# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# 2) EXODUS 17.1-7

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we are exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Cedric Kelly and our reading is Exodus 17, verses 1 to 7. We pick up the Bible's story with the people of Israel travelling in the desert, towards Mount Sinai, where God had promised to meet them. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*1 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, travelling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 So they quarrelled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.'*

*Moses replied, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?'*

*3 But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?'*

*4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, 'What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.'*

*5 The LORD answered Moses, 'Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.' So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'*

# THOUGHT

From God's great deliverance of His people in Egypt, to crossing the Red Sea where God defeated Pharaoh once and for all, Israel has grumbled and murmured anytime they encountered hardship.

God is not only leading Israel to the Promised Land; He's also leading them out of a mindset and thinking that gets in the way of His plans for them. The Israelites might be wanting things to be easy and they express that God has forsaken them, yet He leads them with a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. Moses, being their leader, bears the brunt of their criticism. God has demonstrated many miracles to Israel. Now, there is no water where they have camped in Rephidim. They have a choice to make: believe that God will make a way, and remain in faith after all He's delivered them from, or display their discontentment at the situation they find themselves in. They choose the latter and take it out on Moses. They chose strife. But God still met their needs with another miraculous demonstration.

I have shown disappointment when something has not worked out the way I expected. I have sometimes built up a picture of how something should happen or play out. When it doesn't go that way, I've shown my disappointment, especially if I think someone else is responsible. I believe this is unfair to others and can lead to strife.

We can also be disappointed when God doesn't answer a problem the way we imagined but so often to trust God is to surrender our view to Him

Isaiah 55, verse 8 says:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither your ways my ways,"

declares the Lord.

As we journey through Lent, let us recognize these areas in ourselves that we need to confess and turn over to God our Father. He knows our every thought and has given His Holy Spirit to teach and counsel us. Let's thank Him beforehand that He knows the road ahead and be reassured that He can make our path straight as we learn to trust Him at every turn.

## **WELCOME PRAYER**

Holy Spirit, I thank You that You love me enough to show me areas of my thinking I need to surrender to Your will. I say yes to Your direction for my life. I welcome Your presence now.

*(15 second silence)*

## **LED PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, I thank You that You know the future. Help me by Your spirit to recognize when I am getting ahead of You. This is my prayer to You:

“To trust in the Lord my God with all my heart and not lean on my own understanding;

To submit my ways to You, and You Lord will make my path straight.” (Proverbs 3:5,6)

Spend time in silence and allow God to minister the truth of this scripture to you now.

*(60 second silence)*



# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and forever.

Amen.

# 3) EXODUS 32.1-8

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we are exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Caroline Riley and our reading is Exodus 32, verses 1 to 8. We pick up the Bible's story with Moses speaking to God on top of Mount Sinai for forty days, after he has received the tablets representing God's covenant with the people of Israel. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*1 When the people [of Israel] saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered round Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'*

*2 Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.' 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'*

*5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, 'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.' 6 So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterwards they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.*

*7 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."*

# THOUGHT

The Israelites are anxious and complaining. In their eyes, Moses had taken too long to come down from the mountain, so they ask Aaron to make them gods. Aaron doesn't challenge the people, but instead does his best to please them.

Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to receive the covenant law, called the Torah, which formalized Israel's relationship with God. The elders had been told to refer to Aaron if there was a dispute. Moses was clear that all were to wait for him to return. But, Moses' delay caused the people anxiety. They had placed all their hope and expectation in Moses. They believed that it was Moses who liberated them from the Egyptians and not God, therefore, if he did not return they needed something else to replace him.

Aaron did not challenge the people or remind them of Moses' instruction to wait. Instead he compromised: he gives them the golden calf and declared a festival to it, calling it: God! Aaron clearly showed that his leadership style was that of a people pleaser!

It is easy to be critical of the Israelites and Aaron. But, if I am honest, I am aware of idols in my life: my job, finances, opinions of others - those areas in my life where my trust and hope are based; areas that I believe make me secure. The Israelites saw Moses as their security and liberator, not God, and therefore moved their allegiance to something else.

Like Aaron, I have also found myself compromising my faith and who I am in Christ: doing things to gain the approval of others, or even the times when I have joined in with the gossip rather than end it. Like the golden calf, this is also an idol.

Fortunately for us, God knows our ways and offers us limitless opportunities to reflect, repent and turn back to Him.

This Lent, let us continue to prepare our hearts and allow God to show us where we have placed our hope in other things or people, and pray for the faith to place our hope and trust in Him.

## **WELCOME PRAYER**

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who both led Israel through the wilderness, and leads us through this season of Lent.

*(15 second silence)*

## **LED PRAYER**

In the stillness and silence, ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you may be reliant on your own idols: is our security and hope placed in your job? Family? Opinions and acceptance of others?

Spend some time in His presence, listening to Him, now.

*(60 second silence)*

# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# 4) EXODUS 34.1-10

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we are exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Ollie Ryan and our reading is Exodus 34, verses 1 to 10. We pick up the Bible's story with Moses being called up the mountain again by God, where he'll ask for God's forgiveness for the golden calf rebellion. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*1 The LORD said to Moses, 'Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. 2 Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. 3 No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain.'*

*4 So Moses chiselled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. 5 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'*

*8 Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshipped. 9 'Lord,' he said, 'if I have found favour in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.'*

*10 Then the LORD said: 'I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you.'*

## THOUGHT

In the last episode, we found the Israelites rebelling against God in their most dramatic way so far: by making and worshipping the golden calf. Moses responds to the Israelites in anger. He destroys the stone tablets that God had just written on, symbolising how Israel had already broken it's covenant with God. Now, just two chapters later, we find God once again offering Moses and the Israelites yet another second chance. So back on the mountain, God invites Moses to remake the stone tablets, and then God actually comes down and has this profound and personal encounter with him.

And in that moment, God reminds Moses of who He is: compassionate; gracious; abounding in love; slow to anger, and quick to forgive. In Him we find all those things. But God says there are also consequences to choosing life without Him. The words in the next sentence, 'to the third and fourth' are actually an odd Hebrew expression meaning, 'however many'. Meaning essentially, there will continue to be consequences for however many generations choose to turn from God. But the emphasis of the whole passage is clear: as soon as they turn back, He is compassionate, gracious, and quick to forgive.

And so the response of Moses tells us a lot. He's already seen God forgive the Israelites countless times, and he knows that when we come to God in repentance, the response will always be forgiveness.

I know in my own life, it's always so easy when I find myself feeling far from God, to allow those feelings of insecurity and unworthiness to actually push me even further from Him. Like the people of Israel, I so often turn to other things. Yet here we have God, who having just forgiven Israel, promises to do so again, and the response of Moses is to cling to that forgiveness.

In this season of Lent, as we prepare ourselves for Easter, we have an opportunity to examine our own hearts, and come to God in repentance, knowing that whatever we bring, big or small, He is gracious, and compassionate, and faithful to forgive.

## **WELCOME PRAYER**

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who both led Israel through the wilderness, and leads us through this season of Lent.

*(15 second silence)*

## **LED PRAYER**

Think back now, to moments before when you have known God's love and forgiveness. Remember those for a second. And then now take a moment to look at your own heart, at moments and interactions over the last few days, words spoken, attitudes held. Is there anything you might need to repent of? Bring that now and give it over, to the God of compassion and forgiveness.

*(60 second silence)*



# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# 5) NUMBERS 13 & 14

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we are exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Caroline Seal and our reading is from Numbers 13 and 14. We pick up the Bible's story with the people of Israel waiting on the border of the Promised Land, after they've sent twelve spies to investigate what the land is like. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*25 At the end of forty days [Israel's spies] returned from exploring the [promised] land... 30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'*

*31 But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.' 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size...*

*26 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: 27 'How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. 28 So tell them, "As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: 29 in this wilderness your bodies will fall – every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. 30 Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. 31 As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. 32 But you – your bodies will fall in this wilderness. 33 Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. 34 For forty years – one year for each of the forty days you explored the land – you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you." 35 I,*

*the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this wilderness; here they will die.'*

## THOUGHT

This is not a comfortable passage, but it does teach us about how we need to trust God even when there are giants in the land.

The people of Israel left Egypt about two years before and through all that time they've grumbled against God. They've seen miracles of manna and water in the desert, of fire and smoke leading them, but still they complain. God called them to be His people, to live by His laws and truths, but they need to learn to trust Him and they still have too much of Egypt in them. By deciding they can't enter the land, they are saying they don't trust God to overcome the giants. So, when God says they won't now enter the Promised Land for 40 years, He is giving the people, specifically, the younger generations, the time and experience to learn that He will provide in all situations, so when they enter the land they know beyond a doubt that He will lead them. He is a God who is true to His word and whom they can trust.

I was in the Royal Naval Reserves at University. Although I took part in some exciting adventures, most of our training sessions were doing the same things over and over. We needed to learn to trust those in charge of us and to learn to trust our own abilities in various situations, so that if and when those situations really occurred we knew we would be okay.

Lent is a time when we can focus on spiritual training, so that we learn to trust God in all circumstances. We learn to do without something, so that we can spend time with Someone: Jesus. During Lent this year, I am doing some knitting each day and spending that time praying. At the end, I'll have a prayer shawl to give to someone who needs comfort at this time.

What could you do that would help you to focus more on Jesus during this season, to learn to trust Him with whatever is going on in your life?

## **WELCOME PRAYER**

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who both led Israel through the wilderness, and leads us through this season of Lent.

(15 second silence)

## **LED PRAYER**

Lord, help us to choose to spend time with You, as we give something up to create that space and time. Help us to choose to trust You as we spend time in Your presence. Help us to know that You are true to Your word and that You are bigger than any giants we are facing.

Spend some time now in God's presence, listening to Him.

(60 second silence)

# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# 6) LUKE 1-13

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we are exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Dave Miller and our reading is Luke 4, verses 1 to 13. We pick up the Bible's story with Jesus, fifteen hundred years after the people of Israel were in the desert. Jesus is now about to travel into the desert Himself. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*

*3 The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.' 4 Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone."'*

*5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 If you worship me, it will all be yours.'*

*8 Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."'*

*9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down from here.*

*10 For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." 12 Jesus answered, 'It is said: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

# THOUGHT

Jesus goes into the wilderness and is tempted by the devil for 40 days. This passage comes straight after His baptism, right before He starts His public ministry.

One of the most intriguing elements here is the parallel with Israel in the wilderness centuries earlier. Both go through the “waters” before entering the desert; 40 days parallels 40 years; both are tested with remarkably similar temptations; and Jesus draws on scripture specifically from the wilderness period in Israel’s history. It’s a hyperlink between what Jesus is doing and the story of Israel. The parallel is unmistakable, as is the point at which the similarity dissolves: where Israel failed to remain faithful to God, Jesus succeeds; where they gave into temptation, He doesn’t.

The passage isn’t primarily “tips to fight temptation.” It is Jesus saying God’s desire to bless, heal and restore the world, the mantle carried by the people of Israel, is now coming through Him. And, so it does, as Jesus proves faithful where Israel weren’t, obedient “even to the point of death.”

Today, we live downstream of this: we know and experience the benefit of Jesus’ faithfulness; His life, forgiveness, presence. Lent is an opportunity to reflect again on the perfect obedience of Jesus and allow the light of it to reveal the shadows in our own lives, where our obedience is somewhat less; a time for self-examination.

Whenever my wife and I are busy, conversations and frustrations get put on hold. Eventually, we don’t need a 5-minute chat, we need time: extended, focused, to talk and listen. Lent can be that for us and the Lord. A time to talk and listen, to examine ourselves, attitudes and habits which in busier times go unchecked.

Am I following Jesus whole heartedly? Are there areas in my life where I am not? Where am I struggling to resist temptation? May such self-examination lead us to repentance and a renewed commitment, in the power of the Holy Spirit, towards wholehearted faithfulness; the sort that we see so beautifully in Jesus, who was tempted and tried just like us yet was without sin. He is both the example for us to follow but more, the one who was faithful on our behalf, in whom all our unfaithfulness is covered and accounted for, with the brightness of His.

# WELCOME PRAYER

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who both led Jesus through the wilderness, and leads us through this season of Lent.

*(15 second silence)*

# LED PRAYER

With your attention on Jesus, the one who was perfectly faithful on our behalf, who was without sin, though tempted and tried in every way, allow your heart to be stirred with words of worship.

And now begin to ask Him to reveal areas in your own life where the temptation towards other things has taken root, where you have been distracted from the wholehearted pursuit of Him. Allow Him to gently bring these to mind, and as He does ask for his help in bringing correction and wholeness.

*(60 second silence)*



# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# 7) LUKE 9:52-62

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we are exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Paul McDonald and our reading is from Luke 9, verses 51 to 62. We pick up the Bible's story with Jesus, who has by now ministered to thousands of people and taught numerous crowds. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56 Then he and his disciples went to another village.*

*57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."*

*58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

*59 He said to another man, "Follow me."*

*But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

# THOUGHT

We are told that “Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem”. His disciples and would-be disciples are not so resolute, not so focused.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus told His disciples of the suffering and death He must face. Then He took Peter, James and John up a mountain and Moses and Elijah appeared. Jesus talked about His coming suffering and death with them, too. Moses had led the Israelites from physical slavery to freedom in the Exodus; Jesus is leading us from spiritual slavery to freedom in this new Exodus. Now, He “resolutely set out for Jerusalem”.

As Jesus and His first disciples experienced, there will be distractions and opposition on the way. James and John respond to the rejection of the Samaritan village by wanting to call down fire. They had been on the mountain and seen Elijah, who had called down fire on his opponents hundreds of years before. But, Jesus rebukes them: this is not the way of the cross! Some other potential followers hesitate before changing the direction of their lives to follow Jesus. Jesus explains that discipleship means being prepared to prioritise following Him over property and family or the expectations of their culture.

I have been fortunate to have been born in the mid-twentieth century in a wealthy, liberal, democratic country. Since I began to follow Jesus, the most I’ve had to endure was ridicule. From the outset, I had to change my path and realign with His (the meaning of repentance). After I “put my hand to the plough” the most I have had to wrestle with are my own distractions.

But it is Lent – and now, again, alongside millions of other Jesus followers in the world I am trying to correct my course, by following Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross.

I listen and hear my “spiritual satellite navigation” telling me that it is “recalculating”. I have a choice to follow the corrected course. I should resist the desire to “call down fire” on those who oppose me. I am not to give up when it becomes uncomfortable, clashes with my culture or alters my priorities.

## **WELCOME PRAYER**

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who both led Jesus to Jerusalem, and leads us through this season of Lent.

*(15 second silence)*

## **LED PRAYER**

The Lord Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He resolutely set out for Jerusalem and his departure, His "exodus".

As you stand with Him now, ask Him to reveal your wilderness wanderings...

Ask Him, by His Spirit, to help you see His path for you...

Then pledge to resolutely follow His Way into His Truth and His Kingdom life.

*(60 second silence)*

# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# 8) LUKE 13:1-9

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we are exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Lauren Parton and our reading is from Luke 13, verses 1 to 9. We pick up the Bible's story with Jesus intently travelling to Jerusalem, where the cross awaits Him. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.'*

*6 Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig-tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, "For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig-tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"*

*8 "Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig round it and fertilise it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."*

# THOUGHT

At the beginning of this passage, Jesus is told that Pilate has killed many Galileans. This is most likely due to a political uprising, or fear of one, against the Romans. As it happened in the Temple, where they would have given sacrifices to God, their blood mixed with their sacrifices amidst the violence.

Jesus then goes on to rebuke the common idea that suffering was a punishment for their sin. However, confusingly, Jesus then says: "But unless you repent, you too will perish." Why is that?

Well, the Jewish people had expected a Messianic King who would lead them into a violent battle against the Roman Empire; much like the violent kings of the Old Testament. But instead, Jesus preaches a message of peace; something Jerusalem was yet to grasp.

So here, Jesus prophesies: if you continue to pursue violence, you will experience the natural consequences of that violence, perishing at the swords of the Romans. Unfortunately, Israel didn't listen and Jesus' warning proved true around 40 years later in 70AD; people died at Roman swords and buildings crumbling. Violence can only lead to more violence.

This exchange helps us to understand the confusing parable of the fig tree that follows.

We can understand the fig tree as Jerusalem. Though it has been fertilised, hearing Jesus' teaching, it refuses to repent and accept the message of peace. But if it continues to not bear fruit and to be a place of violence, it will be cut down, as we know Jerusalem was four decades later.

Recently, we have been reminded of how our black brothers and sisters experience violence in unparalleled ways. Perhaps we need to repent of when we have been complacent in ignoring or even endorsing this racist violence. In these verses, Jesus is calling us to be a peaceable people who speak against violence as he did. Over the last year, I have been journeying with what it means to use my voice in this way and it has led me to a place of self-examination.

As we journey through Lent, may this be a time where we can examine our attitude towards violence and be transformed as we seek to be a citizen of God's peaceable kingdom.

## **WELCOME PRAYER**

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who walks with us through this time of self-examination and repentance.

*(15 second silence)*

## **LED PRAYER**

Examine your heart and be aware of what Jesus might be saying to you. Do you need to repent of times when you have ignored or even endorsed violence? Take the time to do that now. Know that you are completely forgiven and loved by Jesus. Ask Him to form you into a more peaceable person and take a few minutes to consider what that means for you.

*(60 second silence)*



# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# 9) LUKE 13:22-35

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. Over these ten episodes, we are exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Jacob Parton and our reading is from Luke 13, verses 22 to 35. We pick up the Bible's story with Jesus intently travelling to Jerusalem, where the cross awaits him. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*22 Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, 'Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?' He said to them, 24 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, "Sir, open the door for us."*

*'But he will answer, "I don't know you or where you come from." 26 'Then you will say, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets."*

*27 'But he will reply, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!" 28 'There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. 29 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.'*

*31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.' 32 He replied, 'Go and tell that fox, "I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." 33 In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!'*

*34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 35 Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."*

## THOUGHT

In today's reading, Jesus continues his critique of Israel's leaders and foresees their ultimate rejection of Him.

In contrast to our twenty-first century western ideas, "salvation" isn't an exclusively spiritual concept in the Bible. For Jesus' contemporaries, "salvation" meant freedom from foreign oppressors; similar to how Israel was saved from the Egyptians through the exodus. Israel thought salvation would come through violent revolution against Rome. But, Jesus offered a different way. His kingdom looked like delivering the oppressed and healing the sick. Jesus wanted to protect Israel, like a hen protecting her chicks, but His efforts were rejected and Israel's revolution came crashing down along with Jerusalem's Temple. The door was indeed narrow as most of that generation refused to enter Jesus' peaceable kingdom. Others would enter instead, Jesus says, those from different countries and backgrounds: the first will be last and the last, first.

I am a recipient of this inclusive kingdom vision. I am not someone with Jewish heritage, I'm a Gentile, but Jesus has accepted me into God's family. Jesus' inclusive vision is also a challenge. Growing up in Britain's education system, I remember being taught a very positive view of British history, and thinking that the near-global spread of English culture was a triumph. However, as recent events have highlighted to my generation anew, Britain was involved in the slave trade and colonisation perhaps more than any other country. It's hit home for me that racism is not at all a past problem for a different place; racism is a current evil within our country's own borders. Our black and brown neighbours still face discrimination and exclusion today. To use Jesus' language, they've often been made to be last.

During Lent, let's allow part of our self-examination to be focused on how we have failed to make "first" those that our culture calls "the last." We, myself very much included, need to repent of all those moments. And, in seeking to truly turn around from that former direction, which is the meaning of repentance, we need to exert energy in opening doors for our black and brown neighbours. Jesus, help us to make those who are last, first.

## **WELCOME PRAYER**

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who both led Jesus to Jerusalem, and leads us through this season of Lent.

*(15 second silence)*

## **LED PRAYER**

Spend some moments in self-examination, allowing memories to come to mind of when you might have missed an opportunity to make someone "last" become "first." Ask for Jesus' forgiveness for those moments and receive His forgiveness as a gift. Ask the Spirit to change your heart to include those that our society and even the church has excluded.

*(60 second silence)*

# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# 10) LUKE 20:9-19

## WELCOME

Welcome to our Lent devotional. We've come to the final episode of our series, where we have been exploring the Lenten themes of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and Jesus' crucifixion.

Today's Lent episode was written by Ali Courtney and our reading is from Luke 20, verses 9 to 19. We pick up the Bible's story with Jesus, who has finally arrived in Jerusalem. The cross is now close on the horizon. So, settle comfortably, try to imagine yourself in the story, and hear what God might be saying to you now.

## READING

*9 He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 10 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.*

*13 "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'*

*14 "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.*

*"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "God forbid!"*

*17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written:*

*“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?”*

*18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” 19 The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.*

## THOUGHT

Jesus tells a parable in response to His authority being challenged by the Jewish leaders. They were looking to trip Jesus up and give them an excuse to report Him to the Roman governor, so that He would be arrested.

Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the final time, knowing He will be killed on the cross there. After entering as a king on a donkey, He went on to weep over Jerusalem and her people’s unwillingness and inability to recognise that God himself had come to them in the person of His Son. He grieves over the future destruction of the city and the temple – that will come from Rome. After this, we pick up our story as Jesus’s authority is challenged by the Jewish elders, priests and teachers of the law. Rather than give them a direct answer, He tells them this rather blunt parable designed to covertly turn the listeners’ own judgement against themselves. They recognise that they are cast as the wicked tenant farmers and in response plot just like Jesus anticipated: orchestrating His arrest and eventual execution.

For many, this has been a hard, long season. It hasn’t looked anything like I expected it to. I take comfort in author Paula D’Arcy’s words, that “God comes to us disguised as our life.” He comes to me in the good, the bad and the mundane of my everyday life. When I’m expecting Him and when I’m not. It’s my job to recognise Him and make room for His life in mine.

Like the leading Jewish priests and teachers who first listened to Jesus’s parable of the tenant farmers, do we recognise God when He visits us? Are we too focused on being right, or on our circumstances being right, to see what’s in front of us? Are we listening, are we watching? Life is usually far from ideal but, even so, we must pause and remember how God comes to us in the person of His beloved Son, Jesus.

As we approach Easter, will we still and quiet ourselves often enough to recognise Jesus when He comes to us, through good times and bad?

# WELCOME PRAYER

Let's welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, who both led Jesus to Jerusalem, and leads us through this season of Lent.

*(15 second silence)*

# LED PRAYER

Jesus, reveal to us now how You come to us in the ordinariness of our lives. In the times of joy and celebration, the times of loss and grief and the mundanity of our daily routine. We pray that we would not lose sight of You.

Spend some time reflecting in His presence.

*(60 second silence)*



# LORD'S PRAYER

Let's finish with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

*Amen.*



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