

2021
Lent
DEVOTIONALS

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE DURING LENT

The Presbyterian
OUTLOOK

As a Lenten devotional discipline this year, you are invited to pray with Scripture as a way of discerning what God is calling you to be and to do during this season.

John Calvin spoke of the Bible as the “lens of faith,” likening it to a pair of eyeglasses that enables us to see the world with clearer vision as God’s creation. As theologian Serene Jones notes in “Inhabiting Scripture, Dreaming Bible” (a chapter in “Engaging Biblical Authority”), this was Calvin’s way of saying that Scripture “brings clarity and focus to all aspects of our lives” and “lets us see what we otherwise would not.” In short, once we have these eyeglasses on, “there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that escapes their vision-framing power.”

PRACTICES:



- **Scripture as prayer:** One of the ways we can “put on” Scripture is by praying or meditating contemplatively on a biblical text — slowly and contemplatively reading it as a prayer to God. Indeed, this is an ancient and robust practice of prayer. When we pray with Scripture, we ponder deeply the words and images of the text. Using our imaginations, we can even enter into the world of the text in order to discern God’s wisdom.



- **Movement of God:** Praying with Scripture in this way can be an aid – a focusing lens – to help us discern the movement of God in our personal lives and in the life of the world around us. Throughout the season of Lent, you will be invited to pray with one passage from Scripture each day and prompted to reflect on what it is disclosing to you about *movement toward God* and *movement away from God* in your life.



- **Prayer journal:** You may find it helpful to keep a journal in which you briefly note what surfaces in your prayer time, so that over the course of the Lenten journey you can track the movements of God’s Spirit in your midst. Also, consider the *prayer focus* of the week as you journal and pray.



- **Bringing the Bible and hymns to life:** Each week, a *hymn* will be suggested for worship and reflection. During your devotional time each day, read the words (or sing or play the hymn!) and reflect on the truths the text reveals to you. (If you don’t have a hymnal, you can Google the hymn or visit hymnary.org.) Likewise, consider the *action* prompt each day and note how the Spirit nudges you to fulfill it.

Praying Scripture

FEBRUARY 17 – 20, 2021

Forgiveness leads to life

by Roger Gench



HYMN OF THE WEEK: "Be Thou My Vision"

PRAYER FOCUS: Daily examen — reflect on the events of the day and discern God's presence in them.

ACTION: Connect with a friend or family member each day. Via phone, text, email or social media, say: "I don't say it often enough, but I love you" or "I'm grateful to you."

Ash Wednesday, FEBRUARY 17, 2021

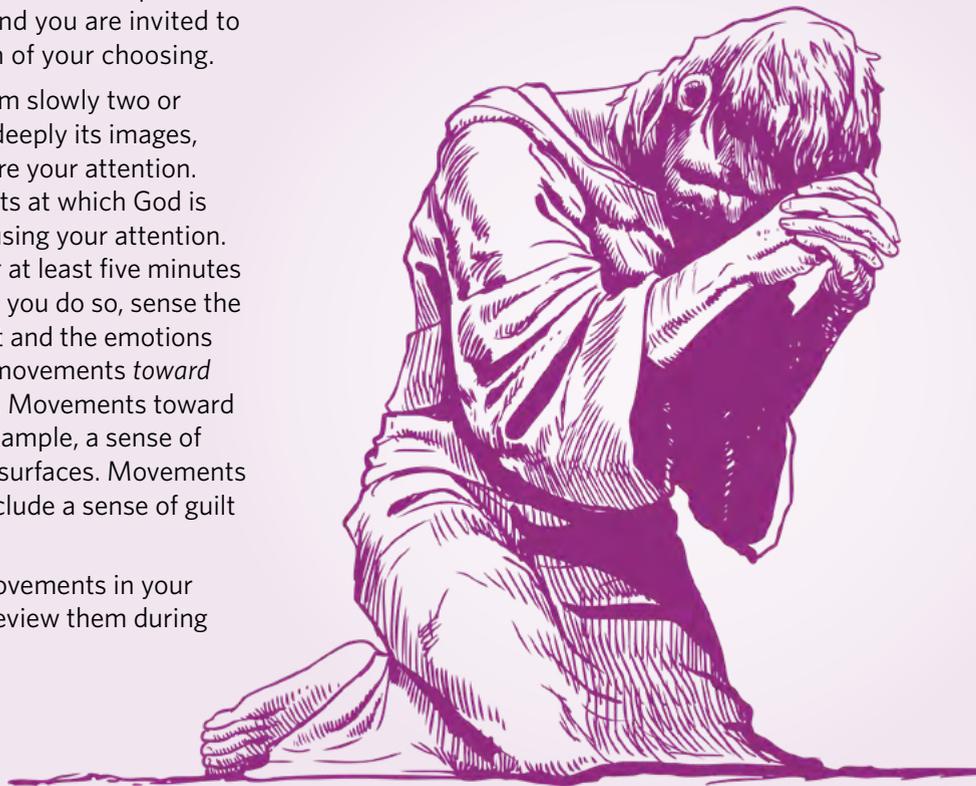
PSALM 51:1-10

The first biblical text for our Lenten journey is Psalm 51, which is traditionally read on Ash Wednesday. Psalm 51 is striking not only for its honesty about sin, but also for its confidence in God's merciful love amid the brokenness in our lives and in the world. The psalm is a prayer - a penitential prayer - and you are invited to pray Psalm 51:1-10 in a translation of your choosing.

 **Practice:** Read the psalm slowly two or three times and ponder deeply its images, noting which ones capture your attention. Such images can be points at which God is speaking to you and focusing your attention. Reflect on the images for at least five minutes (longer if you desire). As you do so, sense the movements of your spirit and the emotions that they evoke — both movements *toward* God and *away* from God. Movements toward God could include, for example, a sense of hope, peace or love that surfaces. Movements away from God might include a sense of guilt or despair.

 **Journal:** Note these movements in your journal so that you can review them during your Lenten journey.

HAVE MERCY ON ME, O GOD.



Thursday, FEBRUARY 18, 2021

ISAIAH 55:1-5

Isaiah 55 invites us to ponder the abundance of life in God, in marked contrast to the scarcity we experience in a world that so often seems short on resources. While in Babylonian captivity, exiled Israelites were faced with the scarcity of basic necessities of life, as are many people around the globe and in our own country, especially amid a pandemic.



Practice: You are invited to pray Isaiah 55:1-5. Ponder deeply the images in this text and sense the movements toward God and movements away from God in your life that your reflection evokes. Where is there scarcity in your life? Where is there abundance?



Journal: Take note in your journal of movements away from God and movements toward God that surface in your awareness.

Friday, FEBRUARY 19, 2021

JOHN 4:1-14

“Eternal life,” a key concept in John’s Gospel, refers not just to life after death but to a rich quality of life available *now* in relationship to God in Christ — life that partakes of the goodness and joy of Godlife that is full and enduring. Fullness of life, symbolized by the vivid imagery of living water, is God’s intent for us in the present, as well as the future. However, many realities can keep us from the fullness that God intends — realities such as fear, anxiety, self-hatred or social conditions of oppression on account of racism, classism or sexism, to name but a few.



Practice: You are invited to pray John 4:1-14 in light of your particular circumstances. Slowly read the story two or three times and ponder deeply its images. You might even imagine that you are present at the well in the story as Jesus converses with the Samaritan woman. What do you observe? What movements of your spirit and emotions emerge as you ponder this story? Are they movements toward God such as liberation, hope or joy? Or movements away from God such as anxiety or even despair?



Journal: Note what surfaces in your prayer with this passage in your journal.

Saturday, FEBRUARY 20, 2021

ISAIAH 43:1-5

Isaiah 43 is written to exiles in Babylon who long for homecoming, thus it is a potent word for exiles in our own time and place who long for the same. This passage is one of the most powerful expressions of God’s love for Israel – indeed, for all people – in Scripture: “You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.” Isaiah 43 is perhaps especially poignant in our present pandemic moment, when so many are feeling isolated and alone.



Practice: You are invited to read Isaiah 43:1-5 slowly, two or three times, taking time to meditate on images that most capture your attention. What do they disclose to you about movement toward God, and away from God, in your life at present?



Journal: Note what surfaces in your journal.