



grow. pray. study. | daily devotional readings

November 1, 2020 "Looking Back and Finding Hope"

It's a Wonderful Life!

Jeremiah 29:4-7, 10-11

⁴The Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims to all the exiles I have carried off from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and settle down; cultivate gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Get married and have children; then help your sons find wives and your daughters find husbands in order that they too may have children. Increase in number there so that you don't dwindle away. ⁷Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because your future depends on its welfare.

¹⁰The Lord proclaims: When Babylon's seventy years are up, I will come and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope.

Quote from "It's a Wonderful Life"

God: "There's a man down on earth that needs our help."

Clarence, the Angel: "Is he sick?"

God: "No, worse, he's discouraged."

Family Activity: Visit our [children's ministry](#) page to find links to Family devotions and children's activity pages.

MONDAY 11.02.2020 | Hope – after a long exile

Read: Jeremiah 29:1-14

Reflect: Babylon first took Hebrew exiles away in 597 B.C. while leaving the puppet King Zedekiah in Jerusalem. Jeremiah sent a letter to those exiles urging them to settle down for a lengthy stay in Babylon. That message was not popular. Self-proclaimed prophets like Hananiah and Shemaiah thought the exile would end quickly. Shemaiah wrote from Babylon asking the high priest in Jerusalem to imprison Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 28:1-3, 29:24-32).

- Jeremiah told the exiles God had "plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope." But first he said, "When Babylon's seventy years * are up." "Jeremiah's words presuppose that there's no quick fix for the community's situation. This doesn't mean the situation is hopeless. It does mean people need to be prepared to take the long view." ** Could anything requiring "the long view" actually give you hope? What makes trusting patience essential as you walk with God?
- Verse 13 summed up Jeremiah's message of judgment and hope: "When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me." How do you understand the meaning of

searching for God “with all your heart”? What times or events in your life have driven you to seek God with all your heart? What steps helped you do that?

Pray: Loving God, with all my heart I want to be a part of your hope-filled future. It’s often hard for me to wait, so keep teaching me to trust your timing more than my restless demands. Amen.

* “seventy years, i.e., a long time or a lifetime; see Jeremiah 25:11.” Louis Stulman, study note on Jeremiah 29:4-14 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1255OT.

** John Goldingay, *Jeremiah for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 146.

TUESDAY 11.03.2020 | Hope on Election Day

Today brings a myriad of emotions – anxiety, excitement or maybe exhaustion. Wherever you are and however you are feeling, today you are invited to participate in a day of prayer. There will be five prayer stations for you to “attend” wherever you are at these times throughout the day. Each station offers scripture to read, thoughts to reflect on, and words of prayer to begin your own conversation with God.

PRAYER STATION #1: 6:00 AM (or early morning) | Breathe

Read: John 20:19-23

Reflect: Breathe deeply, focusing on your breath. As you inhale, imagine Christ coming close to you. As you exhale, imagine yourself going toward Christ. (Repeat as you like) Now, on your inhale, name a place – in our community, in our nation, or in our world – that needs to know and experience God’s hope and peace. With your exhale, repeat Jesus’ words: “Peace be with you.” (Repeat as you like)

Pray: Prince of Peace, draw near to us. Calm our fears and anxieties. Help us to share your peace with others. Amen.

PRAYER STATION #2: 9:00 AM (or mid-morning) | Prickly Prayer

Read: Matthew 5:43-48

Reflect: Throughout this election season, surely there have been folks who have pricked your nerves. Perhaps it was a particular candidate or party... or an opinionated friend or family member... or someone who wouldn’t speak up at all. Take a moment to name who our what has been a thorn in your side. Acknowledge the pain. And then lift them up to God.

Pray: God of us all, we praise you for your creative work in the world. We give thanks that each human bears your image. We confess that it’s difficult for us to recognize you among prickly personalities. Remove our blind spots and help us love one another better, even when it is hard.

PRAYER STATION #3: 12:00 PM (noon) | Love Wins

Read: Romans 8:38

Reflect: Consider this quote by Archbishop William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-1944): “*If we choose wisely, God reigns. If we fail to choose wisely, God reigns.*” What fears do you have regarding our nation’s future? What hopes do you have regarding our nation’s future? Do these have a place in the Kingdom of God?

Pray: Sovereign God, help us to remember that regardless of the election results, you are the one who rules our lives. Our primary identity is as a citizen of your Kingdom and our allegiance belongs to you. In you, there are no winners and losers. All belong. Your love reigns. Always. Thank you, God.

PRAYER STATION #4: 3:00 PM (or mid-afternoon) | Unity

Read: Ephesians 4:1-6

Reflect: Read these instructions from John Wesley, founder of Methodism: *"I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election and advised them 1) To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy; 2) To speak no evil of the person they voted against; and 3) To take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side.* (John Wesley, October 6, 1774) Which of these is the easiest to follow? Which is the hardest? What is one practical step you can take to be intentional about living in unity with those who vote differently than you?

Pray: Jesus, we pray for the fruit of your Holy Spirit to be evident in our lives – in the words we speak, in the things we do, and even in the posts we make on social media. Help us to put relationships with people over our opinions, the policies we support, and our disagreements. May we seek unity in Christ above all.

PRAYER STATION #5: 6:00 PM (or early evening) | Sound of Silence

Read: Psalm 62:5

Reflect: Our world has been so LOUD – political ads, debates, news stories, yard signs, memes, etc. So, take a moment to sit in silence and settle the voices within. Savor being in the presence of God. *"Silence is not absence, but presence. It is a 'something,' not a nothing. It has substantiality, heft, force. You can lean into it, and it leans back. It meets you; it holds you up."* (Cynthia Bourgeault)

Pray: I'm here, God. I am yours.

WEDNESDAY 11.04.2020 | Hope from a vision of God's life-giving breath

Read: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Reflect: Babylon exiled the prophet Ezekiel along with many other Israelites in 597 BC. Twelve years later a survivor from Jerusalem's destruction in 586 gave Ezekiel the news that the city had fallen, with even the Temple destroyed. That news must have deepened the exiles' sense of hopelessness. But Ezekiel had a series of visions of hope. The most vivid of those visions is today's reading—the famous vision of God bringing a valley of dried out bones back to life.

- Genesis showed two steps in creating life: "the LORD God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils" (Genesis 2:7). And in vision Ezekiel saw the bones covered with skin but not yet alive. "When the breath entered them, they came to life" (verse 10). "*rûah* in the Hebrew original, has three meanings in English... They are 'breath,' 'wind,' and 'spirit.'" * Verse 14 told the hopeless Hebrew exiles that God's spirit would bring them back alive as a people. How central is God's spirit in giving you, and our entire congregation, true spiritual life?
- Ezekiel's dramatic, visionary image delivered the message that God offers hope even when we can see none. When have you seen God take a "dry bones" person, relationship or situation that seemed beyond hope and bring new life to it? With whom can you share the good news of God's life-giving hope?

Pray: "Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew." ** I need your Spirit filling me each day, Lord Jesus, and I open myself to it again today. Amen.

* Douglas Stuart, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 20: Ezekiel*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1989, p. 335.

** Edwin Hatch wrote this hymn in 1878, and it is now printed in 295 different hymnals, according to https://hymnary.org/text/breathe_on_me_breath_of_god

THURSDAY 11.05.2020 | Wait, wait – hope!

Read: Lamentations 3:18-26

Reflect: The writer of today's passage lived through a great tragedy when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. It was as though on September 11, 2001, a huge army of enemies had leveled and burned not just some buildings, but all of Washington, D.C. and New York. It was as though a tiny, highly contagious virus had killed thousands and sent unemployment skyrocketing and stock prices plunging. Amid the bodies and the rubble, the writer of Lamentations did not deny or hide the pain of the experience (verse 19). Yet he still voiced a gritty trust in God: "I have hope... great is your faithfulness... It's good to wait in silence for the LORD's deliverance."

- "[God's compassions] are renewed every morning" (verse 23). Pastor John Guest wrote that in that verse "the grieving mind was learning to live one day at a time. It is an art we all must learn, but it is a difficult one. We would much rather see the burden removed once and for all." * In grief, we often begin to doubt that things will ever get better. But the painful sense of loss we call grief is not a reason to abandon hope; it is why we desperately need hope. What losses are you feeling most sharply today? What experiences, relationships and words of Scripture can anchor you daily to God's loyal, never-ending love, and bring you the hope that waits for the LORD's deliverance even in the most desolate of times?

Pray: Lord God, your compassions are renewed this morning. I wish you'd have just removed all the burdens overnight. But I ask you to help me wait in hope for your deliverance. Amen.

* John Guest, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 19: Jeremiah / Lamentations*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988, p. 357.

FRIDAY 11.06.2020 | Hope for those returning from exile

Read: Isaiah 40:27-31

Reflect: Today's readings likely came from a time when the Israelites were returning to their ruined land (or about to return) after decades in exile. Words like "stumble" and "walk" reflected the only way most exiles got home. The walking exiles were weary and feared that God was too. But Isaiah said God "doesn't grow tired or weary." Israel (and we) could always trust in God, because God-given hope (not hope in our own power) renews our strength.

- Can you recall times when you have felt like the Israelites in Isaiah 40:27: "My way is hidden from the LORD, my God ignores my predicament"? Are there areas of your life that feel that way to you right now as we all deal with the conditions created by the Covid-19 outbreak? In what ways can you reconnect with the Creator who "doesn't grow tired or weary" of caring for you?
- Isaiah wrote, "His understanding is beyond human reach" (verse 28). Our need to control, our challenge with "letting go," inevitably runs into our inability to control time and disease. Even the best health and fitness programs cannot (honestly) promise to fully halt aging or infection. How can really trusting in a God who is vastly wiser than you renew your strength by setting you free from the need to try to control life's uncontrollable realities?

- **Pray:** Lord God, full of eternal energy, you remain the same creative, caring God you've always been. Help me learn more and more to trust your timeless love. Amen.

SATURDAY 11.07.2020 | The path from trouble to hope

Read: Romans 5:1-5

Reflect: The apostle Paul sketched the spiritual process through which every Christ-follower can have a character that meets life's dark twists and turns with hope and trust, not despair. Greek literature told stories in which humans grew more noble through terrible suffering. Paul, too, said that as we meet trouble with God's grace and hope, we grow. But Pastor John Ortberg noted, "At the end he added as a climax what would never have occurred to a noble pagan: 'and character produces hope.'" *

- Have you ever experienced the progression Paul described bringing you to a powerful sense of God's love being "poured out" in your heart? Later in Romans, Paul wrote, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). How close to "overflowing" is your inner supply of hope today in this crisis time? How can you open your heart and let God fill you to overflowing with hope?
- In Paul's day, a "realist" would have said the Christian message he preached wouldn't even alter the actions of the invincible Roman Empire, much less outlast it. 2000 years later we can see how "realistic" that was. Do you tend to lean more to the view that hope is a largely wishful mirage, or to Paul's view that hope (based on God's saving love) is a vital element of strong character? What role has hope played in keeping you going in tough times, including now?

Pray: Lord Jesus, I like the image of overflowing with hope—but, many days, my reservoir gets pretty low. Keep me attuned to your power. Shape me into a fountain of hope for myself and those around me. Amen.

* John Ortberg, *Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012, p. 195.

Prayers for our Community:

- Prayers for Justin Young's parents, both of whom have been diagnosed with cancer and have just finished their first round of treatments.
- Continued prayers for Diane Hammond's sister-in-law Lisa who has Stage IV breast cancer.
- Continued prayers for Christine Perry's stepfather who has been diagnosed with cancer.
- Continued prayers for Julie Caster's dad, Lyman Rule, whose is receiving cancer treatment.
- Continued prayers for Larry Conrad, former pastor of Polk City UMC, and father of David Conrad, who is receiving cancer treatment.