

LENTEN DEVOTION – WEEK 2

BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK
EDITOR

Sunday | LUKE 5:15-16

More than ever, word spread about Jesus. As Jesus' notoriety and the crowds following him grows, he withdraws to deserted places to pray. These two verses offer great wisdom to Jesus' contemporary followers. The more demanding, chaotic and full Jesus' life became, the more Jesus understood the need to set aside places and times to communicate and be with God.

Deserted places seem nonexistent in our culture. Even when we are alone, most of us remain digitally connected to work, friends, family and all manner of internet distractions. Waiting in line, stopped at a traffic light or sitting in a coffee shop, everyone peers intently at their screens. Space void of the intrusion of rings, dings and buzzes must be sought out. Time to listen for God's voice, share with our Maker our deep feelings and simply be still and know that God is God must be prioritized and created. No less than Jesus withdrew to deserted places even as the needy crowds clamored for his attention.

In a culture that values efficiency, multitasking, consuming and capital, taking time to pray appears useless, indulgent and downright odd. Those of us who follow Jesus, however, take our instructions from the One who came to fulfill the greatest, most urgent calling possible: salvation of the world. And if Jesus, who is on a mission to save sinners, took time to withdraw and pray, how much more should we acknowledge our dependence on and need for God? This week, no matter who or what presses for your attention, no matter how important the call or text, no matter how long the to-do list, no matter how overwhelming the circumstances, put everything aside, turn off the phone, look away from the screen, find a deserted place, withdraw and pray. Jesus did, therefore so should we.



Monday | LUKE 6:12-16

Jesus prays before calling the twelve disciples. He shows us that spending time with God is critical if we are going to do God's work faithfully. Today, pray the simple, but challenging question: Lord, how can I serve you? Make note of any insights you receive.

God, we do not often have the ability to go to the mountaintop and spend hours in prayer. Nonetheless, we yearn to spend time with you, to listen and speak freely, to give thanks and ask questions. Throughout this day, we seek an awareness of your unfailing love and guidance. We ask with utter sincerity: How can we best serve you? Amen.

Tuesday | LUKE 9:18-20

Jesus, after praying alone, asks the disciples who people say that he is, and then, "Who do you say that I am?" Prayer brings to our consciousness deep questions and grants us the courage to voice them that we might grow in our sense of call and purpose. Read this passage and contemplate how you would answer Jesus' question, and then ponder who you are in light of who you say Jesus is.

Lord, I confess, often days go by when I do not think about who you are and therefore who I am called to be. I worry about how others perceive me and if I am measuring up, when all that truly matters is remembering that you are the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the one who forgives, grants mercy and gives grace, and as your follower I am to go and do likewise. Amen.



Jesus prays



Wednesday | LUKE 9:28-36

Today's reading describes a quintessential mountaintop experience. Jesus is transfigured before the eyes of his closest disciples. Moses and Elijah make an appearance. Have you ever had an unmistakable experience of the holy? What did that experience teach you about God? Yourself? Take time in prayer to give thanks to God for the gift of knowing God's presence.

Almighty God, your voice booming from heavens rarely resounds unmistakably in our lives, and yet, you gift us with unmistakable glimpses of the holy. During this time of prayer and fasting, we seek to hone our sensitivity to you in order to listen to the prophets, the Law and, mostly, your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday | LUKE 10:21-22

Jesus rejoices. Jesus' prayers, like ours, include an expression of every emotion: joy, fear, lament, anger. No feeling need be suppressed. Throughout the day, pay attention to your emotions and offer them to God. Make sure you find ways to rejoice.

Rejoice in the Lord always, you instruct. You give us countless reasons to rejoice, first among them the gift of Jesus Christ. We rejoice that we need hold nothing back from you. We rejoice in the freedom to voice our praise and our doubt, our joy and our anger. We rejoice in the gift of community. We rejoice knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 11:1-4

Jesus responds to the disciples' request and teaches them to pray. Jesus gives them this simple, expansive, beautiful prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. Consider how many times you have said these words. Consider how many times these words have been prayed since Jesus taught his first disciples. Rest in the knowledge that you are surrounded by that entire Communion of the Saints.

Gracious God, we cannot fathom the vast network of prayer happening throughout time and space. Considering the truth that the Spirit intercedes for us and that Christ prays for us is too wonderful for us. Knowing that when we pray we do not pray alone, and when we cannot pray the entire Communion of the Saints prays for us both humbles and heartens us. Amen.

Saturday | LUKE 22:39-46

The disciples fell asleep when Jesus needed them most to stay awake. Their failure pains us because we realize that we, too, fall asleep when Jesus tells us to keep awake. We understand that we fail Jesus, but we take heart knowing that God never fails. Today, offer to God the deepest longings of your heart, your most profound hurts, failings and regrets. Know that God readily hears and responds.

Lord Jesus, we lament our failings, we beg forgiveness for the times we have let you down, fallen asleep, turned our back, neglected our responsibility to you. Trusting your grace we boldly pray to the one who neither sleeps nor slumbers, putting down our burdens of regret and guilt and asking for the transformation only you can give. Amen.