

Week 2

FEBRUARY 28 – MARCH 6, 2021

From lost to found

by Roger Gench



HYMN OF THE WEEK: "Amazing Grace"

PRAYER FOCUS: Confession — In what ways have I done those things that I ought not to have done, and left undone those things I ought to have done?

ACTION: Each day, pray "God, send someone into my life whom I can encourage." Pay attention to how God responds, and how you are called to encourage that person.

Sunday, FEBRUARY 28, 2021

LUKE 15:1-8

The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin are powerful stories in and of themselves, but the context in which they appear is also important. Jesus tells these parables in response to grumbling about his hospitality to sinners! How might these parables prompt reflection on our own perception and reception of sinners? How might they bring to our awareness that within each of us that is lost?



Practice: Read one or both of the parables slowly, and using your imagination, place yourself in the story. Where are you in these scenes? How do you feel about what is happening? Are there questions you would like to ask of the shepherd or the woman?



Journal: Record in your journal what happened during this prayer time. Describe movements toward God or away from God that came into view.

**REJOICE WITH
ME, FOR
I HAVE
FOUND
MY
SHEEP
THAT
WAS
LOST.**



Monday, MARCH 1, 2021

LUKE 15:11-24

The parable of the prodigal son – or, better, the parable of two lost sons – is likely the most familiar and beloved parable in the Gospels, and it is a moving framework for prayer. Using your imagination, enter into this story, noting where you are in this scene. Focus on each of the three main figures, noting what each evokes for you. (Feel free to mix up the genders in the story: you may wish to imagine two lost daughters or sisters, or a compassionate mother.)



Practice: Read the story slowly and prayerfully three times, each time focusing on a different character in the story. Take a few moments after each reading to reflect on what surfaced in your awareness.



Journal: Note in your journal what occurred in your three prayers — be as specific as you can. Write also of any movements toward God or away from God you discerned.

Tuesday, MARCH 2, 2021

PSALM 139:1-12

Psalm 139 is a comforting or disquieting text, depending on one's situation. It can bring peace to one who is in turmoil ("the darkness is not dark to you"); it can also unsettle us as we recall unguarded or unkind remarks ("Even before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely"). God permeates every facet of our lives. The psalm assures us that we are never cut off from the presence of God; but neither can we get away from God.



Practice: Read the psalm slowly and prayerfully several times, mulling over its images and letting them sink into your innermost being. Stay with the images that resonate with you most and ponder their significance for you. Reflect on God's comforting and disquieting presence that is always with you.



Journal: Note in your journal any movements toward God and away from God you discern.

Wednesday, MARCH 3, 2021

GENESIS 1:1-5, 26-31

Genesis 1 invites us to a cosmic perspective on creation and our place within it. As we have already noted with respect to Psalm 8, the word "dominion" does not mean domination, but rather refers to our role as caretakers of God's creation, who tend to it as God does. Most important, God beholds the creation and declares it "very good."



Practice: If possible, prayerfully read this Scripture outdoors (or at least in proximity to a window) so that you too can behold creation. Read it three times, contemplating the images that speak to you the most, aware of God's sustaining presence in all creation and in your life.



Journal: Note in your journal any movements away from God and toward God that you discern.

Thursday, MARCH 4, 2021

JOHN 1:1-14

John's prologue corresponds to Genesis 1: both transport us to the beginning of creation. The Word (or *Logos*) in John 1 evokes the cosmic reason giving order and structure to the universe in Greek thought. It also evokes the "Word of God" that came to Israel's prophets as well as the concept of Wisdom, the female personification of God in later Jewish thought (see Proverbs 8-9). All of these rich and varied associations together convey the light that came into the world that darkness cannot overcome. The climax to the prologue in 1:14 affirms that "the Word became flesh" — not just human, but "flesh" (*sarx* in Greek), signifying God's solidarity with all living flesh and the biological life of all creation.



Practice: Read John's prologue slowly and prayerfully, pondering the utterly profound imagery in this ancient hymnic text.



Journal: Note in your journal any movement toward God or away from God that surfaced during your prayerful reflection.

Friday, MARCH 5, 2021

ROMANS 8:19-25

At this critical juncture in Paul's letter to the Romans, the remarkable image of childbirth is used to convey God's work of restoration and recreation in the world. The whole creation, and we ourselves, says Paul, are groaning with labor pains to realize the fullness of our created nature, to be set free from bondage and be fully known as children of God. These words are especially poignant amid the ecological crisis that we currently face, as we ponder not only the groaning in our own hearts, but in all of creation.



Practice: Pray Romans 8:19-25 several times, with special attention to the images of creation it projects and our relationship to it.



Journal: Write in your journal of the movements of your spirit while praying with this Scripture.

Saturday, MARCH 6, 2021

ISAIAH 61:1-4

Isaiah 61 provides an inspiring vision for profoundly disorienting, destabilizing times, such as the one we currently face as a nation. In our here and now, a pandemic surges and racial reckoning and political polarization demand attention and action — realities that have impacted the life and ministries of all congregations. Like those who returned to Judah after Babylonian captivity, we too face harsh circumstances and are in need of the prophet's proclamation of God's renewal of a devastated country.



Practice: Pray Isaiah 61:1-4 several times, dwelling on the images in this text that speak powerfully to you in this moment of your life.



Journal: Write in your journal of movement you discern toward God or away from God, with special attention to the times in which we are living.

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.