

DAY 1 • DEVOTION

READ JOHN 3:1-21.

In John's third chapter, we find ourselves eavesdropping on what is probably the most famous face-to-face conversation in history, which passed between Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus. It may help to understand Nicodemus' worldview. I once heard Eugene Peterson describe Pharisees, lamenting that they often get a bad rap in Scripture. Imagine a man who designed and built his entire home to focus on the beautiful view from the picture window. It was a spectacular vista of snow-capped mountains, changing colors with the passing of seasons—an incredible display of God's handiwork. Sometime after moving in, sitting in his overstuffed chair situated to claim the best angle through the window, the man noticed a little smudge on the glass, and rose to wipe it off with his shirttail. Upon closer inspection, he could see there were little smears and blotches all over the window. So he found a rag and cleaning solution and went to work. The next day, he invited friends over, and they brought their children. You guessed it. They left the bottom third of the window covered with fingerprints, so out came his favorite rag. This time, he discovered that many of these imperfections were on the outside of the glass. So off he goes to the hardware store to purchase the best cleaning products. Within a matter of weeks, his utility closet is packed with an arsenal of buckets and squeegees, ladders and extension poles. He has become so preoccupied with keeping the window clean that he has long since forgotten the view. He has become a Pharisee. Pharisees had been given a beautiful gift, the Law of God. They had taken upon themselves the task of protecting this Law, the Torah. Their motives started out pure, and their task was admirable. Within a matter of centuries, they had become preoccupied. The Law was intended to be a window into God's character, to display, from a safe distance, the magnificent splendor of his person.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee upon whom the truth is dawning. Conversation with Jesus has begun to shift his focus from the picture window back to the breathtaking vista beyond. Jesus himself is the manifestation of God's character, and he is coming into sharp focus as Nicodemus opens his eyes to see him. The central feature of God's character is love. Jesus explains, in the most famous verse, "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

At the outset of the conversation, Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Take some time to converse with Jesus today. In your own words, tell him that you want to see him. Share anything you've kept in the dark. Bring it into the light of his presence, and then listen to what he has to say.

DAY 2 • LECTIO DIVINA

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

Today's reading is a rather long passage for Lectio Divina, so you might wish to concentrate on the first two verses or the second two verses alone, your choice. As you read, keep in mind the theme behind the message of the prophets: correction/judgment and hope. Also, remember that Covenant is a kind of established relationship. Jeremiah is speaking to the people of Judah after the Assyrian conquest of Israel and toward the end of his forty-year prophetic career, having foreseen horrific visions of Babylon's destruction of Judah, his own homeland. He has now been blessed with the promise of restoration sealed by a new covenant.

PREPARE

Be seated in your comfortable place. Relax into your chair, intentionally let your shoulders relax, and take a few deep breaths. Greet Jesus as your Savior and friend. He is the mediator of the New Covenant.

READ (LECTIO)

Read through Jeremiah 31:31-34 listening to the message as the people of ancient Israel would have. Look for the word or phrase that catches your attention, that you are drawn to.

REFLECT (MEDITATIO)

Read the passage again and settle on that particular word or phrase. Is it a repeated word? What is it about that word or phrase that speaks to you, or what is it that catches your interest?

RESPOND (ORATIO)

Read the passage again and perhaps let the Lord initiate a conversation. What does he bring up to you? What do you notice about your response? Is there hope, a longing, or perhaps thanksgiving?

REST (CONTEMPLATIO)

Read the passage through again, noticing your word or phrase but taking in the whole of the passage. As you rest with Jesus, realize you live in the time of this New Covenant. What does this release you from or invite you into? Stay here as long as you desire.

RESOLVE (INCARNATIO)

How will you go forward through your day or week having spent this time with Jesus? How can you begin to participate in this New Covenant?

DAY 3 • IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

JOHN 12:23-33

As always when we bring our imagination to Scripture, we want to give our minds context and boundaries to stay within. The Apostle John gives us a time marker at the beginning of chapter 12: it is six days before the Passover. He tells us Jesus spent some time at a dinner served by Martha with Lazarus (whom he raised from the dead), their sister Mary (who anointed Jesus with some very expensive oil to honor him), and the disciples all present. The next day, Jesus entered Jerusalem in the midst of a great crowd that also honored him with palm branches and shouts of Hosanna! A greeting fit for a King. In the midst of this excitement, a group of Greeks, possibly God-fearers who had come to celebrate Passover, ask the disciples to speak to Jesus. And Jesus responds with the words we read in today's passage.

PREPARE

Sit in your comfortable place and be at peace. Take some breaths in and out to a count of four or five in, hold a beat, and then breath out to a count of four or five. Greet Jesus with thanks that he is present with you, and ask him for his story. Imagine the twenty-four hours he's had. The dinner to celebrate Lazarus back from the grave. Mary's oil ... perhaps that scent is still strong around Jesus. The noisy crowd excited for the Passover Feast entering Jerusalem and wanting a glimpse of Jesus. Perhaps the Greeks are impatiently waiting while the disciples announce them.

READ JOHN 12:23-33

Read into the midst of this celebration. Read it slowly aloud and hear the tenor of the message. Do people strain to listen? Does the noise fall away? Is this the message they hoped to hear? Where are you in the crowd? Are you a Greek seeker excited to meet this Rabbi? Are you a disciple, one who is in the close circle of the one they are calling King? Perhaps you are a bystander wanting to see what the excitement is? What do you make of Jesus' puzzling announcement? Why would he be troubled? Do you hear anything in the thunder? What effect does Jesus saying he will be "lifted up" have on the crowd, or on you? Stay with any part of this passage as long as it has your attention and fill in as many details as you can think to.

PRAY

Finish your time with Jesus in this particular moment of his life with a prayer for him. Perhaps a word of encouragement since you know what he is/was about to go through. Does he have a word for you? Let this time spent with Jesus linger with you throughout the rest of the day.

DAY 4 • BIBLE STUDY

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Today our reading is in the book of Hebrews. We don't know who the author is, some speculate Paul, others have put forth Apollos or even Luke. We do know the text met the criteria to be put in the Canon of Scripture. The author tells us something unique about Jesus, so let's hear what he has to say and see if we can grasp what he is revealing.

PREPARATION

Gather your pencils, pens, and Bible and come to the place where you meet with Jesus. Have a seat and rest for a minute in his presence. Ask the Lord to guide your thoughts.

OBSERVATION

Read through the passage several times. Look for unfamiliar words, repeated phrases, unusual names, things you might be curious about. As always, ask questions. What is the glory of a high priest? What does it mean the Son learned obedience? How is he who is perfect made perfect? What is the order of Melchizedek?

INTERPRETATION

Reflect on what you've observed. Does your Bible have notes about the passage or cross references? See if Melchizedek is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. Think about the process of learning to obey, to submit to authority. Do you wonder what a High Priest does? Bible study tools (<https://www.biblestudytools.com>) is a site that might help, as well as Blue Letter Bible (<https://www.blueletterbible.org>) which has a study guide for this chapter of Hebrews. Also, on this particular chapter, The Bible Project has what might be a helpful and short video you might want to access (Melchizedek video link: <https://youtu.be/KlZjA-3hiys>).

APPLICATION

Perhaps you might want to write a summary of the information you have gathered today. When we can organize and write out our thoughts about information, we make it our own. Think about Jesus being God, yet submitting to his parents, the Jewish authorities, and the Roman Governor. What authority are you under? Is there something you aspire to, and are you willing to wait for God to lift you to that position? Is there a situation in your life where you need to trust and obey Jesus? Talk with him about these things and any hesitations you might have; then resolve to step out in faith. Ask him to help you with this.

DAY 5 • VISIO DIVINA



“GETHSEMANE: THE WINEPRESS OF GOD’S LOVE” BY SKIP MCKINSTRY

TURN TOWARD

Jesus spent much of his time in prayer with the Father. As described in Hebrews 5, those times of prayer were more than mere nursery-rhyme, Jesus-loves-me-this-I-know kinds of prayers, as valuable in their innocence and naivete as those prayers are. Instead, Jesus’ supplications were punctuated “with loud cries and tears.” On the night he was arrested, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced down a compelling temptation to abandon his mission to rescue us through his own death. Perhaps his request to us today is the same as his request to his disciples that evening as he began the last steps of his journey toward the crucifixion, “Sit here while I pray ... remain here and watch” (Mark 14: 2, 34).

SURRENDER

This breath prayer is a good way to begin:

[On the inhale] *Immanuel*
[On the exhale] *God with me*
[On the inhale] *Open my heart*
[On the exhale] *That I may truly see.*

READ

With the image in mind, read the following from Hebrews 5:7-10 (NKJV).

“who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And having been perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,”

ENGAGE

Can you feel the depth of loneliness that Jesus, in his humanity, must have felt. Here he is, betrayed by Judas, and his followers unable to stay awake to watch and pray with him. The dragon hovers nearby, much the same way it stood close to Mary in the unabridged nativity described in Revelation 12:4. Perhaps the dragon thinks it has one last chance to devour the baby—now a full-grown man—that Mary had given birth to. This is not a scene out of a VBS skit.

How is it possible to say Jesus “was heard because of his godly fear.” Can God fear? When considered next to the words “prayers,” “supplication” (begging), and “vehement cries and tears,” our usual understanding of fear falls a little short of the verse’s full intent. Was his fear only a part of his humanity or a reality experienced fully in both his humanity and his divinity?

Scripture often paints a picture that is alien to our modern, sanitized expectations. Mary’s baby, God’s only begotten, is crying out to the Father for his life. He didn’t cry out like that to Pilate, nor to the priests of the Sanhedrin, nor to his executioners. In fact, Isaiah tells us, “... as a sheep before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth” (53:7).

In all of this, he learned faithful obedience to the Father and became the “author of eternal salvation.” In these cries, as full of agony as his cry of dereliction on the cross and as visceral as his crying out to bring Lazarus back from the dead, Jesus was crying out to the Father *on our behalf*.

REMEMBER

Carry the image and the questions it raises in your heart and mind throughout your week. This is not easy to do; and we surely will not be able to fully grasp the significance of those events until the moment, as it says in Colossians 3:4, “... when Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with him in glory.” Yet we shall surely know then.

