

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF  
**JEREMIAH**

*28 Day Devotional*



**foundations**  
daily devotional

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**DAY 1****INTRODUCTION**

The book of Jeremiah isn't an easy read. It is filled with warnings and judgement. In fact, it doesn't give a whole lot of hope to those aspiring prophets out there – it basically says that if you are going to truly be a voice piece for the Lord, you can expect opposition, trouble and hardship. Yeah! But Jeremiah is faithful. He doesn't shirk back from what God is asking him to do. In fact, as the book goes along it seems that the opposition grows (he is even thrown into the muddy depths of an abandoned well to die), Jeremiah seems to grow more resolute and determined.

Have you faced hardships because of your faith in Jesus Christ? Have there been times when you were asked to do something very difficult, which you knew probably wouldn't work (in human terms) and which would lead to other's mocking you?

Jesus had many promises for His followers, one of His less popular ones would certainly be found in Matthew 7:14 (ESV) *"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* And then He famously said in John 16:33 (ESV) *"...In the world you will have tribulation..."* This may not seem very encouraging (and actually it isn't) but the *rewards are!* Oh sure in this world we may face tribulation BUT the full passage reads like this, *John 16:33 (ESV) "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*

Jesus has overcome the world! Amazing! And in the midst of all the trials that we face we can actually experience peace.

Jeremiah was no different. He was motivated by something different than the other prophets. He was a *true* prophet and a *true* believer! He understood the weight of what he was being asked to do and he did it anyway!

Although the book of Jeremiah is a book of consequences and judgement always remember that even when facing *these* difficulties, you know, the ones we choose for ourselves in disobedience, God is *still* the Master of peace and mercy. God always has a plan to redeem us out of the mess we find ourselves in!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend time praising and thanking God for the example of Jeremiah.
2. Ask God to help you to understand the seriousness of sin and disobedience while you read Jeremiah's book, but also that you would see the hope and mercy that God has for those who obey.
3. Ask the Lord to speak you personally, as you read prophecies that affected Judah thousands of years ago!

**DAY 2****READ:** Jeremiah 1:1-10

It's a great thing to be picked isn't it? Most people can relate to the feeling of *not* being picked and hopefully, most can relate to that excitement of being a chosen one! But what if the assignment was hard? What if you were picked to do something that you felt inadequate for? Most of the time when we are picked for human teams and tasks it is because we have some sort of strength or talent in that area, but with God, the standard is different. God looks at the person and sees past their strengths, and also past their

weaknesses, to their *heart*. He sees attitude as opposed to aptitude.

Jeremiah was reluctant to accept the invitation to join God's work. He complained that he was too young and wouldn't know what to say (v:6), but God wouldn't accept it. God simply silenced Jeremiah's concerns. "Do not say, 'I am only a youth...'" Well that's straightforward enough. It's kind of like telling God that you can't witness at work because you have only been a Christian for a few months. God isn't particularly concerned with our lack of experience. Why? Because He Himself will fill our mouths with the words – at least that is what God promised Jeremiah.

But you will notice that God didn't rebuke Jeremiah for his reluctance, He simply corrected it and gave Jeremiah some pretty incredible promises that would carry him through the dark times ahead. And then God equipped Jeremiah. He touched Jeremiah's lips and in that gentle gesture God anointed Jeremiah with courage and the capacity to see spiritual things.

God never calls us because of our talent, He sees past all that. And when God *does* call, He always equips and anoints us for the task!

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What has God asked you to do that you didn't feel adequate for? Are you in something *right now* that feels over your head?
2. Ask the Lord, "What did you see in me that I didn't see in myself?"
3. It is amazing to get God's perspective on our lives isn't it?

## DAY 3

 **READ:** Jeremiah 2:1-13

It would be a shocking thing to be given water from the Fountain of Youth (you know the stuff that will keep you youthful and full of vitality indefinitely) and decide that it just wasn't for you. Even if it would just keep your body healthy until you eventually just passed away from old age. Even if it was just the cure for one awful disease. Who would refuse this?

We live with a disease called sin, or rebellion against God, and while the symptoms are varied, the end result is always moral atrophy and death. Ah but there is a Fountain that offers Living Water which is the cure for our blight. Who would refuse it? Judah did. And so do we; often.

Judah, the nation with the miraculous history, had abandoned Yahweh for lesser gods. They exchanged their "Glory" for useless idols. And the Lord's response is to be horrified, shocked and utterly appalled at this (at least those are the words used in my translation.) And perhaps in some smug moment we *do* feel horrified, shocked and utterly appalled at the apostasy (abandoning of God) of Judah. How could *they* do that after all they experienced?

Sometimes we are even smug when we encounter contemporary apostasy. We look down at people who don't believe as we do, who have experienced God and abandoned Him. But are we horrified, shocked, utterly appalled at our own sin? Our own apostasy?

Occasionally we feel horror at the stories of botched abortions or government fraud, but what about our *own* apostasy? Isn't it rebellion against God, and the acceptance of lesser gods, to just sit by without so much as a prayer for salvation?

As you read Jeremiah, guard your heart against smugness. Make sure you are reading

yourself onto these pages because we have all abandoned the one cure for our chief disease; we have all left the Fountain of Living Water for lesser indulgences.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Consider your attitude towards rebellious Judah. Are you judgmental to them? Are you horrified, shocked and utterly appalled by their apostasy?
2. Now consider your attitude towards people who have the faith in your life. Are you judgemental towards them?
3. Ask the Lord to reveal any part of your life that you have substituted His life for lesser gods. How have you committed even partial apostasy in your own heart?

## DAY 4

 **READ:** Jeremiah 3

Romans 6:23 famously tells us that "*the wages of sin is death.*" To help children understand this I have often taught them that a wage is something you earn. My wage at my job is money, which is nice, but could you just imagine that I earned death every time I went to work? That would be an awful job! I would certainly want to quit and find another one (before my first paycheque!) But death *is* the *wage* of sin. Sin is costly.

Jeremiah chapter 3 talks about the wages of apostasy (abandoning of God), which is the essence of sin. This passage speaks about it in terms of prostitution, which is a sickening profession. If you have ever met a prostitute you will see the evidence of that lifestyle. I met a prostitute in Winnipeg once a few years ago and brought her some supper to share as we sat on the curb of the street. I don't know how old she was, but I know for sure that she was younger than she looked. She was worn by the harshness of her life. The amazing thing was her story. She hadn't always been a hooker, but she had lost her husband and it did something to her mind, and she went searching for him on the streets. Sometimes she imagined she saw his face in the John's who picked her up.

What sadness, what tragedy. There are few prostitutes who actually choose their life. They are either stolen and sold into the sex trade or they are so broken and in such bondage that it almost finds them. Regardless, the wages of their lifestyle is death in their bodies.

Judah played the whore we are told. They sold themselves into slavery (the metaphor of their apostasy), but... And oh this is a blessed truth. God desired to bring them home! "*Return, unfaithful Israel. This is the LORD's declaration. I will not look on you with anger, for I am unfailing in my love.*" (Jer 3:12b) What an amazing declaration. Oh to be rescued from the wages of sin!

Yes, the wages of sin is death "*but* [blessed conjunction!] *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Consider your life before you knew Christ. Ask Him to show you where you would be today if you had continued on that road. What would have been the price?
2. Now ask Jesus to show you what your life cost Him. Someone had to pay for your debt!
3. Spend time in worship thanking God that He pursued *you* even when you were far from Him.

**DAY 5** **READ:** Jeremiah 5:1-13

The key passage in this reading is Jeremiah 5:12-13 which says, *They have contradicted the LORD and insisted, "It won't happen. Harm won't come to us; we won't see sword or famine." The prophets become [only] wind, for the [LORD's] word is not in them. This will in fact happen to them.* (HSCB)

The nation of Judah was so lost in her sin that she was blinded to the warnings that Jeremiah was giving her. But it was really worse than that, they were oblivious to the world around them. They weren't paying attention to the whispers in the wind, or what we would perhaps call "coffee shop talk."

How many Christians are like this? Certainly when you watch the news and you see the inaction of nations in the face of such blatant violent threats towards Judah, or even against our own nation, you have to wonder how they can miss it. On a national level there is a political game to be played for sure, but Christians should not allow their hearts to become clouded to our current reality because of politics. We know something that they don't know (at least potentially), we know what the Bible says of the Last Days. There will certainly be wars and rumours of wars!

Did you know that some very influential people in the world actually believe that we are living in the most peaceful time in history? This is not uncommon among young, ideal, thinkers, but there are sociologists who write papers on this and even *presidents of neighbouring countries* claim that we are living in the most peaceful time of the last 40 years.

Judah refused to listen to Jeremiah and they refused to look at the horizon to the approaching army. "It won't happen to us" they claimed, which is precisely the reason so many Jews remained in Nazi Germany; they couldn't quite believe that something horrific would happen to *them to their family*. It is what some scholars have called the *normalcy bias*, essentially that we fool ourselves into thinking that normal life will prevail.

But the prophets are speaking. They spoke in scripture, in fact they are still speaking from scripture and the Last Days score card Jesus gave His disciples is increasingly being filled in (Matthew 24). Will you allow yourself to see what God is about? Or will you be as the Israelites in Jeremiah's day who refused to look and see.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask the Lord to show you if you are harbouring unbelief in your heart towards what He says is currently and will yet take place on the earth.
2. Ask Jesus to help you understand the times that we live in and praise Him that He is most certainly in control!

**DAY 6** **READ:** Jeremiah 8:1-13

There is punishment for all who fall into sin and rebellion, but did you know that some will be held more accountable than others? James 3:1 for example says that a teacher will be held to a higher standard than others. It is because of authority! As Aunt May tells her

nephew Peter Parker (he's Spiderman) "With great power, comes great responsibility." (Jesus said something similar in Luke 12:48.) This is why some will be judged with more severity. Indeed each person will be judged by the "light" given them (Romans 2:11-16) and so it follows that if someone has received more "light" (or revelation, or Truth) then they will be held accountable for what they did with that light.

This only makes sense. Did you know you can be held accountable in court for a crime you *didn't commit* if you simply knew about it and did nothing? In human court, as in God's court, you will be held accountable for what you did with the knowledge you were gifted with.

This means that leaders need to think seriously about their actions. For example, is it morally wrong to drink alcohol? Not according to the Bible, but a leader is extremely careful about his freedom because he knows that in his freedom he may cause someone to stumble into sin, and he will be held at least partially accountable if he contributed to their sin.

Jeremiah 8 speaks about the punishment for Judah's leaders. Not only did they act corruptly but they did not listen to the word of the Lord. It is the responsibility of a leader to listen for God's instruction and then carry it out – but they refused. Now before you are tempted to think that you are off the hook because this passage deals only with national leaders, or church leaders, or prophets, be careful! Everyone finds themselves in leadership positions from time to time. Whether it is a home or in a classroom, we all have varying degrees of influence at any given time and God expects us to behave in a certain way with the influence He has entrusted to us.

We should be very sober minded when it comes to taking positions of increased leadership. It is always flattering to be promoted but promotion always comes with a price tag! Namely, increased self-sacrifice!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Where are you a leader? Where do you have positions of influence? Are you humble about your position or do you abuse your power?
2. Ask the Lord to show you if you have neglected any word that He gave you for your position.
3. Ask Him to continue to speak to you about the responsibility He has entrusted to you so that you can be everything He desires you to be!

**DAY 7** **READ:** Jeremiah 9:12-26

Consider the things that we think of as reasons to boast. Money has to top the list I'm sure! Next to it would be possessions, prestige and power. Perhaps one might boast of their heritage. Someone might boast in their strength (not me... but someone might). Other's might boast in their job, their spouse, their kids (in particular, their ability on the ice or the dancefloor), or even their faith or church. But there is not one item on that list that could not perish in a day. (I hear you objecting... how could you lose your heritage? Well consider that you always thought that your great-great grandfather was a wealthy rancher and then you find out that he was indeed wealthy but he made his millions off the sweat of human slaves. You might not boast in that! Or what if you found out your grandfather was adopted and you really don't know where the family line goes up from him. Point proven.)

But there is one thing that we can boast in, “*that he understands and knows Me—that I am Yahweh, showing faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things...*” (Jer 9:24)

Think about that – the Christian *understand and knows* God. Now do we know or understand all of Him? No of course not, but when you think about it, we know an awful lot (I consider the Holy Spirit my friend)! Now that is something that can’t be taken away! Why? Because if you know Him here, you will know Him in eternity.

But is that a value for you? Do you value knowing God as much as you value your things or your family? There is a simple way to test it, give stuff away. (Not your kids.) Try it. Try living a simpler life. Cancel the cable, unplug the internet, power down the devices. Can you honestly say that the knowledge of God is more valuable than all of that? It’s a hard question, I know. But it is a worthwhile exercise. The nation of Judah had made abilities and things (wisdom, strength and wealth) into idols and they paled in comparison to the knowledge of God.

Not everything you love is an idol, not every pastime is a waste of time and every broken relationship should be mourned, but all these things should be held in perspective. They are gifts from God that we are meant to steward, not misuse; they could be gone tomorrow.

## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Are there things in your life that have become idols? You might need to do listening prayer to ask God, but chances are in simple reflection you will find things that have taken His place.
2. Pray a prayer of release of these things, then ask for a small action step to change your priorities this week. It could be a bit more time in the Word or heading to the Prayer Room a few times this week. Whatever it is, let someone know so that they can pray for you as you work to change habits and values.

## DAY 8

 **READ:** Jeremiah 11

There are times when I wish we would all read the same translation of the Bible. For example in my Bible translation (HCSB) Jeremiah 11:3 states, “*You must tell them: This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let a curse be on the man who does not obey the words of this covenant,’*” but the ESV says, “*You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant.*” Now clearly they both imply the same thing, you need to listen to obey and when a mom says, “You had better listen!” she is implying that you will listen *and* obey, not just sit there like a blank eyed lump listening.

But obedience, that is the word of the day! In the HCSB translation the word “obey” appears 6 times, which is quite a few for one chapter. We are often hard on kids who don’t obey, but the truth is adults can find this even more difficult. That’s why good leaders know how to “help” people obey without telling them to obey!

Now with God, there are always blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, but the great thing about God is that he is not capricious. He doesn’t expect something from us without telling us His expectations and He doesn’t change the rules at halftime so you wonder what you’re going to get on the field today. No, the reason we can actually know God (see yesterday’s devotional) is precisely because He doesn’t change! He isn’t erratic!

He is a good Dad who warns His kids of what is going to happen if they go against His word.

This is good news for us! This means we not only know *what* to do, we actually know that we’ll receive a *reward* when we do it! Unfortunately on the other hand, you can’t deny non-compliance (or act shocked for that matter) when God, a fair judge, executes his judgements as warned.

Nonetheless, this attribute of God, His unchanging nature, is a unique feature among the so-called gods of the earth. And thank God it is!

## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Have you obeyed God in the past and received a blessing? What about a curse for disobedience? What is more powerful – the promise of a blessing for obedience or a consequence for disobedience?
2. Has God asked anything of you lately that you have not taken seriously or followed through with? Confess it and ask God to give you a next step in getting it right.

## DAY 9

 **READ:** Jeremiah 12

In all the horror of war and pain, two voices can be heard above the din; that of Jeremiah’s laments and the Lord’s reply. There is such mercy in this. Just the fact alone that God would choose to answer is an astonishing fact, one which cannot be claimed by the many lesser deities of pagan nations. Recall the bloodbath of a stunt pulled off on Mount Carmel when more than one hundred Prophets of Baal combatted the lone figure of Elijah. Where was their god anyways?

Consider today the god of Islam, so distant and unknowable that the only thing that can be done is to work at submitting to him through the words of a human prophet (and more often through copying the life of the prophet). Yet when death arrives, no Muslim can be assured that all he strived for on earth will outweigh the bad deeds he committed. Or take the pantheistic religions of the world. Hinduism has millions of gods, but the end goal of Hinduism is not submission to a god, but to become one with the ultimate reality, an impersonal force known as Brahma. Buddhism is essentially atheistic, although like Hinduism, believes that you essentially become one with the universe when you die after your enlightenment. If there is nothing but an impersonal force, who do you pray to? There certainly isn’t going to be an answer back.

And then take our current model of Western atheism. Vocal and violent against the notion of God. Their creeds declare that we can only know what we can sense and test in a laboratory, not understanding that this very creed is untestable in a laboratory. Who hears the cries of the lonely atheist when their marriage is failing and war is posed at their bedroom door? When their daughter has been found in the arms of a violent man, or their son has been diagnosed with something evil and incurable. No one? Wrong! God hears.

God hears everything. God hears the complaints of the beggar in Dubai and the butcher in Moscow. He hears the mother in Nepal and the Father in Mumbai. He hears the child in Uganda and the elder in North Dakota. He hears the wails of the victim and the curse of the criminal. He hears it all. And that’s the point. We know a God who hears.

So did Jeremiah. And even when his prayer rose as a complaint, God in His remarkable and humble mercy replied.



## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend time worshipping God for the simple fact that He hears you.
2. What is the cry of your heart today? What is making you sad and what is elevating your heart? Tell God about it! You know that He knows, but He also loves to hear it from the mouth of His child.
3. Ask the Lord to speak to you more and more clearly in this next season of your life.

## DAY 10



**READ:** Jeremiah 15: 1-14

There comes a time in life when you can no longer help a person and you have to watch as their life falls to ruin. You pray that it won't be your kid that needs the hard reality of rock-bottom before they smarten up, and you pray that for anyone you love that the trip to the bottom is quick like a bandage being ripped off quickly; painful for just a moment.

That's where we are at with the story of Judah and Jeremiah. God has even resorted to throwing out some pretty big names, Moses and Samuel, who both in their own way influenced the path that God would take the Israelites on. Moses is even credited with changing God's mind, not once but several times. Unfortunately in the current reality there won't be any changing of minds, because there isn't a personality strong enough to stand up to God, not this time.

And God is in a quandary of sorts Himself. He hates what has to happen, He hates that there is no recourse, but He also hates the insolence and betrayal of His people. He has already gone well past His duty in warning and giving chances and now their sins have caught up with them. They deserve to be annihilated for it, but instead He is punishing them at the hands of a brutal dictator; at least their ethnicity will be retained. No one is left to change the course of their life, in fact there is no one left who would even be able to intercede with such authority as to even rescue them from their impending exile, save One, God Himself.

In the HCSB translation (and some others) Jeremiah 15:11 says, *"The Lord said, 'I will certainly set you free and care for you. I will certainly intercede for you in a time of trouble, in your time of distress, with the enemy.'"* Now I know that some translations say something that gives a different impression and I know that some make it sound like God is interceding for Jeremiah but I really believe that this verse is God interceding on behalf of His own people.

How is that possible? How can a person intercede between himself and another, on behalf of the other? It's simple really, Jesus wasn't born a mediator, He always was one.

**Hebrews 7:22-25 (HCSB)** *So Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant. Now many have become [Levitical] priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. But because He remains forever, He holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore, He is always able to save those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them.*

God Himself in the Person of Jesus, interceding before God Himself in the Person of the Father. Who ever heard of such a thing? Even in the absence of such powerful intercessors as Moses and Samuel, God had a plan to not leave His people without and Advocate. Wow.



## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time worshipping God, thanking Him for providing an advocate in Jesus.
2. Then ask the Lord to give you a picture of your need for an intercessor.
3. Ask the Lord who you can also intercede for today.

## DAY 11



**READ:** Jeremiah 17:1-18

*"The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable, who can understand it?"* The word "deceitful" is interesting because the deceitful heart is also described as "incurable." It is an interesting way to describe a liar. The truth is that "diseased" is a much better translation of the word here. So the heart is not just deceitful, it is diseased; sick with deceit.

This is not an easy prognosis, in fact, when fully realized, it arrives almost like a thud in the gut. We tend to walk around feeling pretty good about ourselves, or at least not thinking we have a tumour growing somewhere internally, and to hear that there is sickness when we thought we were doing pretty good hits hard. It's like being told by someone that you can't sing after years of thinking you were a veritable Pavarotti. It's like being told that you aren't actually funny, even though you think you're hilarious. It's like being told you have cancer, out of the blue, without warning, when you have been the picture of healthy living.

How can *my* heart be diseased?

And not only is it diseased, it is an incurable disease! What a tragedy! What hopelessness. We have all been there haven't we? As we think about this, we begin to see the warning signs we missed. The little jab at someone we love. The tendency towards watching movies right on the line of appropriateness. The eyes that wander or the lips that gossip. Yes there have been warning signs, but now you realize that things are much, much worse than you could have ever expected.

Oh and how hopeless it *would* be, save for the fact that Jeremiah knows the Great Physician, and, I trust, so do you. *"Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed."* There is One who knows the remedy for even the incurable human heart, He is Jehovah-Rapha, God our healer.



## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord to do a check-up on your heart. What areas are still in need of His healing touch? Is there deceit still lingering? Is there lust or bitterness? But don't stop there, ask Jesus to show you how far your healing has come! Ask Him to reveal the areas of your life that have steadily improved.
2. Now pray for strength to face the treatment that He has for you. You will need it!

## DAY 12



**READ:** Jeremiah 18:1-17

Whereas Isaiah the prophet spoke of people being the clay on the potter's wheel, whose lives are shaped and moulded by His skilled hands, Jeremiah expands on the vision to a national level. Not only is the life of an individual in the hands of the potter, so is the entire nation.

Does this trouble you? Does it leave you with questions? It certainly does for me. I understand personal free will, where individuals have the ability to choose to cooperate with God or not, but how can a nation do the same? A nation is not a person with a mind that can choose. Does this mean that the path of a nation cannot be changed or influenced?

Oh no! Of course it can! Don't forget that a nation is made up of individuals who can choose to obey or rebel. Don't lose fact that God *warned* the nation of Israel that they needed to *turn* from their ways in order to be preserved. What sets apart a nation and individual is that when a nation as a whole is living in rebellion, there is invariably collateral damage. In other words, in the midst of a nation set on edge are the lives of children, not to mention the few remaining faithful. Jeremiah would be one of those caught in the tsunami of immorality in Judah. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a famous Lutheran Pastor who was in immoral Nazi Germany. He was martyred for his stance against the Third Reich.

We tend to see sin as a very personal thing, but we learn from the potter and clay in Jeremiah 18 that there is no such thing as a sin in isolation. One cancerous cell can metastasize into a cluster of diseased cells across the body. The same Potter who shapes the lives of individuals, giving them the freedom to choose to cooperate with Him, uses nations in His master plan just the same; as they choose Him that is.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. When we understand these amazing abilities of God, how He uses individuals and yet shapes nations, our minds are a bit boggled. We stand back in awe of a very powerful and sovereign Deity.
2. Ask God whether your life is an influence in your neighbourhood, or whether the neighbourhood is influencing you.
3. Ask God to give you strength to stand as a lone voice (if it comes to that), in a sea of immorality and opposition.

## DAY 13

 **READ:** Jeremiah 20:7-18

There are days that just seem to cause tears. For some it's the weather, for others it is their circumstances. It may even be simply watching the news and the overwhelming despair that our brothers and sisters are experiencing across the globe. It might be much more personal, a struggle within that seems unwinnable.

I can hardly fathom being in Jeremiah's place. To work and work and work at turning the hearts of the people towards God with absolutely no success must have been discouraging on the grandest scale. This passage is one of his many laments and complaints in the midst of the mess he was living in. It's pretty stark – he is bordering on suicidal when he wishes he hadn't been born or that God would have killed him in the womb. Bleak.

But hidden in the middle of these very depressing verses we find this small swell of hope, *"But the Lord is with me like a violent warrior. Therefore, my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. . . Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD, for He rescues the life of the needy from the hand of evil people."*

Where did these lines come from? It is my experience that even in the midst of very dire circumstances, a worship song might come on the radio and worship soars in my heart. Or in the depth of depression suddenly faith wells up and I pray in a wave of confidence. If you are facing good times right now, do not neglect to fill your heart with Truth and promises from God that will sustain you in the difficult times.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Consider your life. Are you in the middle of good times or bad? Are you dry or are you passionate in your spirit?
2. Regardless of where you are at, ask God to give you a promise for this season of your life. What does He want to accomplish?
3. Finally worship Him and thank Him for everything you can think despite your circumstances! Worship turns the heart of despair to hope.

## DAY 14

 **READ:** Jeremiah 23:1-7

Sometimes you just have to do things yourself. There are definitely times to delegate tasks and train up someone else, but eventually if the job isn't getting done well, and particularly if the job is going very badly, you need to intervene.

God is unbelievably patient. UnBELIEVABLY patient. He knew full well how things were going to turn out when He put Adam and Eve in charge. He knew full well how things would go with Abraham's descendants. He knew full well Saul would lose his integrity, that Jonah would truck off in the wrong direction, that Moses would strike the rock and that Judas would betray His Son. Nevertheless, God's chosen method of working in the world is through His human creation.

The shepherds (the leaders) of Judah were horrendous. They were leading the people astray and with sinister intentionality. Like it or not, much rises and falls on leadership! As a follower you may think that you are immune to the bad influence of leadership and when you are a leader you might not like thinking about your potential to influence people, but that changes nothing about the truth of leadership! Leadership makes a tremendous difference and spiritual leadership is particularly important. When spiritual leaders fall into immorality, souls are lost to hell and hell is precisely what was infiltrating God's chosen nation.

And still God was patient. If you think that God didn't have a contingency plan, you don't know my God. There is no evil known to man that God has not made a plan for, and the dastardly shepherds who were managing Judah's affairs were no different. Although He wasn't going to act right in the moment, He did send a word of hope to His people – there will one day rise up from the branch of David, a Shepherd who would rule righteously.

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*  
John 10:11 (HCSB)

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Have you been hurt or led astray by human leadership? Have you been the one leading others astray? Give that bitterness to the Good Shepherd and ask for Him to gently guide you onto the right path again.
2. Thank God for His impeccable planning.

**DAY 15** **READ:** Jeremiah 29:1-29

Things are going from bad to worse for the nation of Judah. They are facing a second siege with the rebellion of the first puppet king, Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar placed in Jerusalem. Uriah the prophet, sided with Jeremiah and Jehoiakim had him killed after a chase that ended far away in Egypt. Other supporters of Jeremiah were also executed.

But with the rebellion of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar began moving his army back to Jerusalem. Before they arrived Jehoiakim was killed and Jehoiachin took the throne. Unfortunately for him he only reigned three months – during this period Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem a second time, and a victorious Nebuchadnezzar deported many of the leading elite to Babylon and into exile. Zedekiah was then named the new puppet king under Nebuchadnezzar, until he rebelled as well.

Can you imagine living in these times? One king after another refuses to submit under the authority of Babylon and with each passing siege more and more of Jerusalem is destroyed. What a humiliation for the proud Jewish nation! And it is during this time, between rebellions and sieges that Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles in Babylon. But what does he say to encourage them?

**Jeremiah 29:5-6 (HCSB)** *“Build houses and live [in them]. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters to men [in marriage] so that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there; do not decrease.”*

And then comes the most shocking phrase in the letter, *Seek the welfare of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the LORD on its behalf, for when it has prosperity, you will prosper.”* **Jeremiah 29:7 (HCSB)**

Pray for your enemies. Bless them. Help them to become prosperous. Has anything so absurd and impossible ever been suggested? Yet, this is precisely what the vassal kings, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and eventually Zedekiah refused to do, and it led to the utter annihilation of Jerusalem.

Do you refuse to submit to a non-Christian boss who shares different morals than you? What about a university professor? What about the spouse? Do you pray for their prosperity? This is the contemporary ideal of Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles, and it stings a little bit.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

3. Reflect on your life. Who are the people in authority over you? Do you find it difficult or easy to submit to their leadership? Why?
4. How do you pray for your leaders? Do you pray God would remove them or that God would make them prosperous? Ask the Lord if you have fallen into sin in your attitude towards them.
5. Finally pray a prayer of blessing over your leaders and ask God for a way to bless them this week.

**DAY 16** **READ:** Jeremiah 30

The days we read about here are so grim and life so difficult that even the men moan like women in childbirth. This isn’t a pretty picture, and God knows it. He knows that His chosen people are on the edge of the kind of despair from which you don’t recover and so He reminds them of their distant future. Their immediate future is awful. It is war and pestilence and exile, but their future after that is one of restoration.

Thank God for a reprise in the middle of a difficult book.

One day, God reminds them, they will be restored and a righteous King will rule over them. God will discipline them justly, and even though there will still need to be consequences for actions, it will be just! Then God will heal Zion’s wounds. Although their sickness is incurable, with God things impossible are made possible. And finally even the physical land will be restored; the presence of the Lord will remain in the land and not depart again.

What do you face right now that feels like the edge of despair? Who is the unsaved friend who will not budge in her position? Who is the wayward child that shows no sign of returning home? What financial disaster can no longer be avoided? What position of leadership is going to be removed when they discover the sin of your heart?

Know this: In the midst of the impending consequences of human rebellion, God has hope for you and the ones you love. There is no evil known to man that God does not have a contingency plan for. And He will be just in dealing with those who need to be disciplined. So take heart and remember that God has walked the path through pain to restoration many times before, and on one occasion at least, with an entire nation.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Reflect on the areas of your life that feel grim and hopeless. Write down exactly what they are and exactly how they make you feel.
2. Now ask God for a word, thought or picture of a promise for what lies beyond this dark time.
3. Finally, resolve in your heart that you will cooperate with Jesus and the path that He has you on, and praise Him for the expected outcome.

**DAY 17** **READ:** Jeremiah 31:1-22

The joy of promises continue from Jeremiah 30. You can just feel God’s heart for His people in this passage. He has loved them *“with an everlasting love.”* He will build into them so that they can rebuild as virgin Israel. He will restore the work of their hands and they will be prosperous. And there will once again be laughter and dancing in the land.

But they didn’t feel like laughing and dancing when Jeremiah received this word from God. I wonder if they felt anything at all or were just numb from the promiscuity, rebellion and fear. How does this whole “promise from God thing” work?

It is important to know that God is truly in control. He really does make unbelievable promises to us and He really does keep His word. But there are several things that we need to consider. The first is that God has a big picture in mind that we don’t usually see, *particularly* when we are walking in dark days. People are never a means to an end for God, but He does care very much about the trajectory of history and of the future. God

certainly has an end goal in mind, and there is no man or woman who will deter Him from that plan. Second, we need to remember that whenever God issues a promise, there is always an expectation of cooperation on us.

Notice that after the beautiful promises of verses 1-20 God says through Jeremiah, *“Set up road markers for yourself; establish signposts! Keep the highway in mind, the way you have traveled. Return, Virgin Israel! Return to these cities of yours.”* These words there that are directives for the *people*; set-up, establish, remember, and return. We can receive many promises from God but they are actually conditional upon our willingness to walk them out.

So the person in bondage to lust and pornography can receive a beautiful picture of restoration but unless they are willing to get rid of the devices which they access that garbage on they won't be doing their part. The nation of Israel actually did become comfortable in their exile and when it came time for Ezra and then Nehemiah to lead parties back to Jerusalem to rebuild, many Jews stayed in Babylon. Clearly if you refuse to leave your exile, you can't be restored to your land.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Yesterday we asked God to give us promises about some darkness we are facing. Today, ask Him to show you what your part is. What is the next step that is your responsibility alone to take?
2. Now make plans to do what He showed you. Make a task list, set reminders, mark up your calendar or phone whoever you need to talk to if this thing is going to happen. And then ask for the courage to carry out God's directives.

## DAY 18

 **READ:** Jeremiah 31:31-40

Our seasons in the centre of Canada are extremely pronounced. Being far away from the moderating effects of the oceans we tend to experience fairly dramatic extremes with temperatures varying from below freezing to plus 20 in just hours. I happen to like this; it makes life interesting and gives us something to look forward to when we are tired of the snow and cold. There is a spring flower that my mom and I tried numerous times to grow called a crocus. The crocus is in fact Manitoba's flower. This amazing, delicate flower can actually push through the snow even while the ground is still virtually frozen popping up with little bursts of green with purple flowers to warm the heart and delight the eyes.

We need heralds. (Not "Harold's" although I know a couple nice ones.) No, *heralds*. As in, *"Hark the herald angels sing..."* they *heralded* the arrival of Christ just as crocus's *herald* in spring. Jeremiah 31:31:40 is a description of a herald that was yet to come. Here Jeremiah is describing something in the future that will usher in new days – a new season you could say! Keep in mind Jeremiah has only seen this event from afar, he is living in the death grip of winter, but prophetically he is looking forward. You could think of it as if he were trying to describe a crocus in a vision but it will be the first crocus anyone has ever seen. It's not an easy task; even less believable.

But a new day *is* approached and something dramatic is going to take place. The role of prophets will change in this new day when God *"will put [His] teaching within them and write it on their hearts."* It will be so dramatic that no one will have to evangelize anymore because everyone will know Him! What an amazing day that will be and what a promise

in a dark time. In this passage Jeremiah is telling his nation to watch for the herald, when towers are rebuilt and measuring lines extended again, which will be the sign of a new season.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What is your favourite season? Take a minute and write down all the things you love about that particular season (trust me there's a point!)
2. What is your least favourite season? Write down all the terrible and nasty things that make you loathe it so.
3. What are the signs you look for as the transition out of that season? What are the signs that herald the end of that loathsome time of the year?
4. What is the season of *your life*? (Are you facing illness? Challenges at work? Are you in the baby stage? Etc.) What are your favourite things about the season of life you are in right now? What are the challenges of this season of your life?
5. If you are in a wonderful warm summer season right now, spend time reflecting and thanking Jesus for the good in your life. And if you are in a season that is challenging hard, perhaps even final, ask God for a word of hope as you wait for the season to change. As surely as the snow melts in spring, your season in life won't last forever.

## DAY 19

 **READ:** Jeremiah 32

Today's reading is a little bit longer but the reflection is shorter. Look at what you just read, what just happened here? God attached a promise to the act of Jeremiah purchasing a piece of land, what a strange thing. (Although it isn't nearly half as strange as the prophetic marriage of Hosea and Gomer. Wow.) Now the specific meaning of the purchase of land aside, what I find interesting is that we are sometimes called to do something in the natural that has a prophetic meaning.

Here's what I mean. When you get married several things take place, but the most important action to happen is the exchange of covenantal vows. The covenant is not just flowery words that are required so that we can get to the after-party, they are at least *meant* to carry heavy significance – they aren't *promises* they are *vows!* Marriage carries with it a prophetic meaning. In Ephesians 5, Paul writes about the necessity of mutual submission in marriage and he relates the love a husband has for his bride as Christ's love for the Church. He then writes something intriguing, *"This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church."* (Ephesians 5:32, HCSB) So there is a supernatural picture in marriage that pictures Jesus the groom, and the Church, His bride. But there is also a prophetic picture of something that is yet to come, because the marriage of Christ and the Church will only really happen when all things are made new and ready after the end of this age. Marriage is a ceremony steeped in sacred imagery and prophesy. (As an aside, this is why I believe the consequences for a broken wedding vow are so profoundly painful.)

So Jeremiah was told to buy a field as a prophetic word for the future. Marriage is a prophetic picture of a future event as well. What I love about this is that God speaks through the everyday stuff of our lives. (Ok, we don't get married everyday but there is something common about it!) What does God want to speak to you about today? What common and ordinary actions, events or objects does He want to use?

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Job 33:14 tells us that God speaks again and again but we often don't notice it. Is that because it is too ordinary? Romans 1:20 tells us that God's character can be known through His creation, in fact Psalm 19 boldly declares that, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of His hands. Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge."* (Psalm 19:1-2, HCSB)
2. Today you are going to have to pick up your journal twice. I could have you reflect and as the Lord to show you where He has spoken to you in the past through nature or events, but aren't you more interested in paying attention to what He has to say *today*? So today (or tomorrow if you are reading this in the evening) you want to be *attentive* to the lessons that God is trying to communicate to you. He may even use very ordinary things; perhaps your children, a co-worker, a new car, or a meal. Paying attention is the key! Record what He shows you in your journal.

**DAY 20****READ:** Jeremiah 33:1-13

There are a couple really, really famous verses in Jeremiah. Today's reading takes you right over one of them. Jeremiah 33:3 (HCSB) says, *"Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know."* This verse has been used in Hearing God and Prophetic courses around the world and it is truly an astonishing promise.

There are some passages of scripture that I am a little hesitant to call universal promises. You know, such as when God tells Abraham at 99 years of age that his wife, Sarai, 90 years old herself will have a child. I daresay we aren't dealing with a promise that if you live to 99 you will regain child bearing capabilities (to the cheers of octogenarians far and wide.) We need to be careful when we are reading scripture that we don't assume a word that is spoken to a specific person (or nation) is actually a universal promise for all people.

But Jeremiah 33:3 isn't like this. It *would* be an abuse of the passage if this was the only place where God makes a statement like this, but it isn't! In fact the Old Testament scriptures are loaded with references to the Lord revealing His plans to prophets, priests, kings and even the odd commoner. It is true that there was a fairly select group of individuals who were privileged with the spiritual ability to hear the voice of God, and Jeremiah would have either been pleased as punch with God's word to him or filled with dread on what he was going to hear. This all changed with the arrival of the Holy Spirit after Jesus died, rose and ascended to heaven. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon *all believers* for the first time in history and they were universally able to demonstrate spiritual abilities including the ability to hear God's voices!

What an incredible God we worship! He doesn't leave us to our own devices to try and figure out life on our own. Our God *speaks!* He tells us great and incomprehensible things that we do not yet know! Things about His character and what His requirements are for a relationship with Him. Things about our families, our past, our children and yes even our futures! Amazing!

Quite frankly there are too many references in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments to create any sort of exhaustive list, so I won't attempt to, you can search the scriptures on your own for further promises like Jeremiah 33:3.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. To begin today, go on a bit of a search through scripture hunting for other references to God speaking. Try to find half a dozen or so just making note of them in your Bible. I would suggest that every time you come to a passage at any point in your devotions that you put a little mark in your Bible to indicate another place that we can learn about God speaking. (HG for Hearing God for example.)
2. Then spend time in worship thanking God that He speaks! That He spoke to rebellious Israel and He speaks to you!

**DAY 21****READ:** Jeremiah 34:8-22

Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 18 about a servant who becomes overwhelmed with the debts he owes his master. In terror he goes to his master and confesses that he cannot repay him. Initially the master orders that everything important to him is sold, including his wife and children, but after the servant falls at his feet and pleads with him to relent, he has compassion and forgives the debt entirely. Beautiful story. Almost. The story doesn't end here. Turning away from the master to his new life free of debt he meets another servant, this one owes the first servant money (incidentally a **WHOLE** lot less!) but instead of having mercy on him servant 1 has servant 2 thrown in prison (which I might point out pretty much makes repayment impossible. It was a dumb move in my opinion.) Well, you can imagine the master's pleasure in hearing about servant 1's behavior. "What on earth?" He demands. "I forgave so much and yet you were willing to forgive so little." And then he hands down a rather stern punishment.

The point of the story is, when it comes to forgiveness of our fellow man we need to remember that nothing they have done to us is as bad as what we have done to God who has given us everything.

Jeremiah 34 tells a similar tale. King Zedekiah has proclaimed that all Hebrew slaves go free in Judah and Jerusalem. (This was in observation of an old law in which Hebrew slaves were freed on certain years, but also, I suspect because the Babylonian army was advancing and Zedekiah wanted a few extra hands on deck; free men fight better than slaves.)

At first the people comply freeing all their slaves, but the transition from being served to having serve oneself was evidently trickier than they had thought and upon reflection reclaimed their slaves. God was less than happy. Here is a people whom He led out of slavery and they don't have the decency to free their fellow Hebrew slaves. There were consequences, again.

The vice of hypocrisy is a wicked one. Never forget that you were once a slave to sin (1 Corinthians 7:23). Never forget the extent to which Christ forgave you! Release the people in your debt, those whom you will not forgive. The consequences are severe if you are unwilling.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Are there people in your life that you will not forgive? Why won't you? Why can't you?
2. Reflect on what God has forgiven in your life. Now consider what has been done to you, does it jive? Ask God to help you and then write out a prayer of forgiveness for anyone He brings to mind.

**DAY 22** **READ:** Jeremiah 35

I have written elsewhere that no one sins in isolation. It is impossible for you to commit a sin that affects you exclusively, there is always collateral damage when we choose rebellion over obedience. However there is a wonderful counter-promise in that you can't obey in isolation either. In fact the blessings for obedience *always* affect those around you. IN FACT, the blessing for your obedience will affect those who live after you. You can leave a legacy of obedience!

This is precisely the situation in Jeremiah 35 with the Rechabites, who had kept the command of a forefather, Jonadab, to be a nomadic people living in tents and whom wouldn't touch alcohol. God even sets them up – He tells Jeremiah to try and serve them wine, which he does and they summarily refuse for reasons of loyalty to the commands of Jonadab. God is impressed. He is impressed that these men have such outstanding character that they would live in submission to a command given generations before. God points out that they stand out in stark contrast to the majority of their Hebrew clansmen who not only ignore the voice of their forefathers and prophets, but of God Himself. (It's kind of a "why-can't-you-be-like-your-older-brother" situation.)

And God rewards their remarkable character! He vows that there will never cease to be a man from the house of Jonadab, son of Rechab, who stands before the Lord. That's an amazing reward for obedient loyalty.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Are you a loyal person? The Rechabites were not actually rewarded for their loyalty to an old dead guy, but for the character of their hearts, which was *demonstrated* by their loyalty to an old dead guy. Their choice to live in simplicity and submission was a demonstration of character that God could use.
2. Ask the Lord to reveal areas of your life where you have been blessed because of the obedience of someone in your family. Then ask Him to reveal areas of your life where your character is going to be a blessing to those who come after you.
3. Be encouraged today as God reveals these good places in your character and worship Him for His faithfulness to you and your future descendants.

**DAY 23** **READ:** Jeremiah 36

It is unfair of a parent to give a consequence to a child that doesn't match the bad behavior. It is also unfair to give an arbitrary consequence to the child, one which was not clearly understood before. This is why we give our kids chances. They do something once and you warn them and give them another chance explaining that if they pull that same stunt again "these" will be the consequences. (And then you sit back as a parent and wait and watch...)

God is the same. If God were to send people to hell without warning, He would be the definition of wickedness. If He would arbitrarily kill, imprison, penalize, and discipline He would be at best unjust. But God *is* just and He *is* fair. Yet people, like little children, can be fools, disregarding the obvious teaching of the Bible and the obvious voice of God.

This is what Jehoiakim did with Jeremiah's prophetic words written on a scroll. He didn't like them, so he burned the scroll and in an act of surprising perseverance Jeremiah dictated yet another prophetic word, recorded on yet another scroll, which was thrown

into the same fire. In fact, Jehoiakim went a bit farther and threw in some other "words like them" into the fire in what was an apparent attempt to make a strong statement.

What a fool. You can't ignore what God has ordained – judgement for the disobedient. But before we come down too hard on the king, what words of the Lord have you ignored either by disregarding them or by allowing them to be forgotten?

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask the Lord to reveal if you have ignored His promptings or voice in the past few weeks. As He shows you different things you neglected, confess it to Him apologizing for the disrespect of your actions.
2. Next ask the Lord if you have let any of His promises slide into forgotten files. What has He told you He would do that you have lost the faith to believe or the energy to pray for? Confess this as well and commit yourself again to renewed faith and reenergized prayer.

**DAY 24** **READ:** Jeremiah 38:14-28

Have you ever found yourself in over your head where there aren't any good options left? The picture that comes to mind is from my childhood. I grew up on a farm and we loved spring because the ditch that ran between us and our neighbours was the major drainage point from the fields to the Red River. This meant that as the snow melted we had a rushing creek to play in. For some reason mom hated when we got in too deep and flooded our boots (the technical term is a "booter.") If we were going out to play in spring you could be assured that a warning would be issued to not get a booter and we would give our scout's honour that we would avoid the deepest water.

But have you ever been in a puddle or ditch or creek where there is mud at the bottom? You could have every intention of keeping the water out of your boots and judging by the depth of the water you should make it across, if not for that MUD, which has the capability to consume entire rubber boots. I remember being halfway across and feeling the suction of the mud holding my boots and the feeling of "oh no" in my stomach. Of course as you wiggle to get your boot free from the clutches of death, you only succeed in pressing it further in at which point you realize you are about ¼ inch from disaster, also known as "the booter!" What do you do? Do you leave the boot behind? Is it worse to get a booter or come home with wet pants? There are no good options at this point. As you lean forward the first trickle of cold, wet water runs into your boot, and then you realize that it's all or nothing. Lunging forward, you finish the job and end up knees and hands in the water. Now you're soaked, your boots are filled and mother is watching from the living room window. In too deep.

There comes a point in our rebellion when there isn't an easy way out. There is going to be the devil to pay for our sin. People are going to hurt and all you can think about is mitigating the damage, like Zedekiah in Jeremiah 38. It is astonishing how even at this juncture one can justify and work to try and get away from the clear consequences of the evil in our heart.

There is no place you go where God cannot rescue, but you will need to swallow hard, take the high road and accept the lumps as they come, praying for the best and sticking close to Jesus who promises to walk you out of the mess.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Are there any areas of your life where you are currently in over your head and need rescuing? You need to ask the Lord for a strategy, a next step, which might be the first step out of the water. Is there a wise person you need to ask for wisdom? Is there debts to pay? Are there confessions to be made?
2. You may not be in the deep at this moment but things can turn in at a moment's notice. Ask the Lord if there are areas where you have not seen or heeded the warning signs. Thank Him for His mercy in warning you and ask what the next step is to safeguard yourself from a foolish action or decision.

**DAY 25****READ:** Jeremiah 41

Jeremiah 41 describes the anarchy of a land that has no king. Now strictly speaking that wasn't true, king Nebuchadnezzar was ruling the land, but Babylon is a long way from Israel and the thieves and scavengers left behind knew it. The whole land was acting like a classroom without a teacher to maintain order. There is a truth to the fact that when we are not supervised we get into trouble regardless of our age.

Unless we have a certain moral fortitude. There are people who will live with integrity whether there is someone around or not. They are the people who refuse to roll through the stop sign. Who won't fudge their taxes, or take cash payments under the table. They are the ones who understand what Oswald Chambers meant when he said "character is what you are in the dark."

I believe that the number one reason that some people live with this kind of insufferable integrity is that they have a healthy fear of the Lord. Where does this fear of the Lord come from? Certainly there are some people who are just legalistic and they don't feel right unless they are keeping (and enforcing) some set of rules. They would have what appears outwardly to be the fear of the Lord, but if the truth was probed you would discover they actually have deep pride and they are more worried about appearances than actually living in close relationship to God and others.

No, a true fear of the Lord that produces severe integrity can only come out of a deep relationship to Jesus. I may obey a dictator out of fear for my life, but that is only if they are close enough to harm me. I won't be so inclined to submit to their will if I am out of arm's reach. But I am never out of God's reach and He is not a dictator. Of course, God is supreme, His word final, but He doesn't rule by terror.

People tend to live as though God is far off and that we are beyond the reach of His mighty arm. We are not! So then it only *feels* like God is far off! And that feeling betrays a lack of relationship, not actual distance. If you are going to have peace in the land of your own heart, you need to have a relationship with King Jesus, understanding that His love for you is so deep that you wouldn't think of being hurt by it. When we live otherwise, there is anarchy within us.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Reflect for a moment, does God feel close or far away? If He is close, try to identify why that is and what needs to happen for you to maintain that relationship today. But if He feels far off, ask Him why that is. Is there sin that you need to confess, or simply some discipline needed in your devotional time with Him?

2. Today, as you go about your day, talk to God as if He were going with you (He is.) Ask Him to remind you of His presence and ask Him for the courage to behave knowing that you will answer to Him at the end of the day.

**DAY 26****READ:** Jeremiah 43

My mom is an avid birdwatcher, she always has been. Therefore, several times while living at home mom has asked for new binoculars. This was always a good present for both her and me because it meant that she would likely no longer need her old binoculars and my siblings MORE than likely didn't care a lick about owning a set so they would be passed down for me to use. Good presents are ones where you get a present as well, that's my philosophy!

Binoculars are great tools when you understand how to focus them and line them up properly. But they also provide endless fun looking through the wrong end of the lens. If you've never done this I suspect this is simply because you have never actually used binoculars before, but what happens is that instead of bringing everything closer, everything appears much further away. One year at Bird River Bible Camp the High School ministry played binocular soccer; it was hysterical as I'm sure you can imagine! There are times when distorting reality leads to hilarious results.

But then are times it doesn't. For example, you can buy something called beer goggles which mimic the effects of alcohol, schools sometimes use them as educational tools. It's true that the goggles, like the binoculars make for a fun game or experiment, but the effects of actual drunkenness on our perception is neither fun nor game.

Pride is to the heart what alcohol is to the physical body. It always distorts reality. When pride creeps into our hearts it makes it so that we cannot understand even God's word. Either we misinterpret it to make it say what our pride-drunk hearts want to hear or we simply dismiss it entirely. Can you imagine?

It's one thing to dismiss something from God that is out of context and doesn't make sense but when a prophet has been working signs and wonders for several years in the presence of many people and so many of his predictions have come true already, that's an *entirely* different thing! That is the epitome of arrogance.

Jeremiah 43 says that it was the arrogant men who responded to Jeremiah and said that his prophetic words were a lie. Arrogance blinds the heart. If we intend to live with a proper perspective on God's reality, we need to work tirelessly to root out the pride in our hearts.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Arrogance is defined as *having or revealing an exaggerated sense of one's own importance or abilities*. How many young boys have stood bare-chested in front of a mirror and thought they *must* be stronger than their fat old dad. What youthful arrogance. There may come a time when they will be stronger than their dad, but they, nor we, will ever be stronger than our Heavenly Father. So to cultivate humility we need to ask Him how He sees us.
2. Ask the Lord to describe you. What words does He use for your strengths? How does He describe your weaknesses? Can you accept this from God?
3. Ask Him to help you to grow in humility so that you can have a proper perspective of reality and so that you won't disregard His precious words to you.

**DAY 27** **READ:** Jeremiah 44:1-14

When I was a teenager I had a bit of trouble submitting to my parents, particularly my dad. Now this was made all the worse because they were so generous to me. In fact, after graduation, they were prepared to send me to Austria to Bible School. Tuition, flights, ground transportation, all of it was paid for, I just needed to accept it and go. Several weeks before I was set to leave our town was having its annual fair. Friday night was rides and car shows and Saturday would begin with a parade, which my school band was playing in. I asked permission from my parents to stay in town with some friends as I needed to be back the next morning. My dad said no. I'm not sure what his rationale was and perhaps I would have even been able to negotiate with him but I got mad, which made him mad, which also sealed my fate.

At some point in the evening I ran into my parents at the fair and my dad reiterated that I was to come home for the night and I summarily informed him that as an 18 year old I no longer required his permission to live my life as I wanted and that I would be staying in town. Now he could have brought up the fact that I was driving his car – which would have been quite valid, but he went elsewhere. He informed ME that I was allowed to stay as long as I wanted after the fair ended but that when he looked into my room in the morning if I wasn't in my bed that my airline ticket to Austria would be ripped up and thrown in the garbage.

I went home for night.

Now as a young man I would have felt as if this were the greatest injustice. How could my dad threaten to rip up my ticket? How could *he* do this to *me*? But is that really what was going on? I was the one who hadn't accepted his answer. I was the one who was going to choose disobedience. Who was actually the one doing what to whom? I was completely in charge of my fate! I was choosing to go to Austria or not.

In Jeremiah 44:7 God asks His people, "Why are you doing such great harm to yourselves?" Oh the skeptic cries, "How could a loving God send His OWN people into exile and at such a great price?" They could *never* believe in such a tyrant. But wait a second, was it predestined that they go into exile? Not in the least! The only predestination involved in Israel's exile was the predestination of judgement if they wouldn't obey. God was merely keeping His end of the bargain, the people were choosing freely.

Why do we choose harm for ourselves? Why can we not submit even knowing that the outcome will hurt us? Only God can reveal the deficiency that leads to this self-deception.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Have you ever blamed God for something that was clearly your fault? If you have, take a minute to apologize to God for placing the blame on Him instead of taking it maturely.
2. Reflect on your attitude towards God as a just judge. Do you feel that God is actually just? Do you have trouble accepting that God might be loving and just? Why is that? Ask God to show you where you came to believe that love and punishment are mutually exclusive.
3. Finally thank God that He has given us the ability to choose right and wrong and ask Him to help you increasingly choose obedience.

**DAY 28** **READ:** Choose a prophetic word against a nation in Jeremiah 46-51 to read

Jeremiah 46-51 marks a shift in Jeremiah's ministry from prophetic words for and against Israel and Judah to prophetic word for and against other nations (chapter 52 is the final chapter in both the book of Jeremiah and the history of Israel before their final exile). There are many remarkable features of these prophetic words. For example, Jeremiah's boldness. Because He was imprisoned and tortured for his faithful ministry to Israel, it is astonishing that he would speak against other nations as well. Another noteworthy feature is the detail of the prophetic words – these are specific predictions. But I think the most remarkable thought is that God is absolutely sovereign over the nations. God truly does hold the future of the people in the palm of His hands.

Not only does God use Israel, but He knows how to incite pagan nations to war against His chosen people as a consequence for their rebellion and *then* He disciplines those nations for warring against Israel! And God can do this! It is possible because He knows the hearts and motivation of men. He knows in advance what they would freely choose if they were given the opportunity and so He supplies the opportunity which they step into.

God is absolutely in control of what takes place on earth, and yet He never violates our ability to freely choose Him. What an amazing God we worship!

But is what was true in the past, still true today? Is God still guiding nations towards His sovereign ends? Absolutely! And He is currently setting the stage for the last global conflict. Currently God is arranging the opportunities that will expose the hearts of men who will lead their nations into war against His chosen people and against His ultimate purpose. We are living in Jeremiah's day!

On a national scale Jesus and Paul both exhorted the faithful to pray for their leaders. As already pointed out Jeremiah even told the exiles to pray for the peace of the city in which they were exiled. So there is a national calling to prayer, but there is also a call on the lives of all believers to intercede for their neighbours. The world may one day go to war with God's enemies, but within those nations we are promised that more souls will be saved for the Kingdom than ever before in the history of Earth!

Will you follow the word of God or like the Israelites remain stubbornly out of touch with God's reality?

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Pray for our leaders. Intercede that our government would please God and that His favour would rest on our country.
2. Pray for your neighbours. Ask God for opportunities to be a witness to them. Pray that they would one day become Christ followers.
3. Pray for yourself. That God would develop perseverance in your life so that you would remain faithful to His Word to the end.



## The Book of Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a prophet who lived during a very dark time in Judah's history. As a result the book of Jeremiah can read like one story of impending doom to the next. However, hidden in the disobedience we can find gems of wisdom teaching us about God's character; His justice and mercy. Jeremiah is a book of warning and blessing; promised judgement and restoration.

### **Jeremiah 17:10** (HCSB)

*"I, Yahweh, examine the mind, I test the heart to give to each according to his way, according to what his actions deserve."*



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