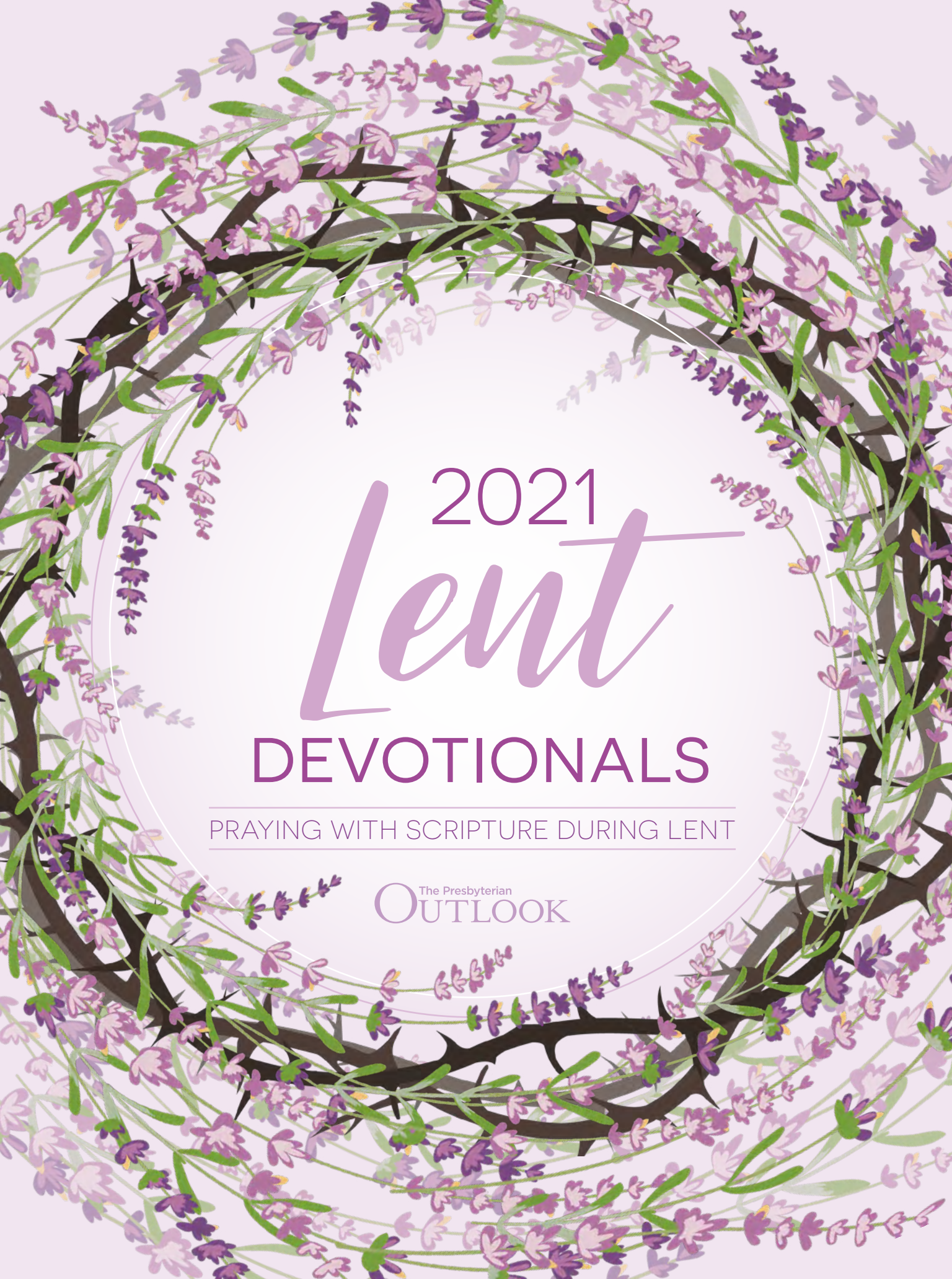

2021
Lent
DEVOTIONALS
PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE DURING LENT
The Presbyterian
OUTLOOK

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.

Week 5

MARCH 21–27, 2021

Transfiguration and transformation

by Roger Gench

HYMN OF THE WEEK: "Crown Him with Many Crowns"

PRAYER FOCUS: Supplication — As I pour out my heart as a needy person, what do I long for from God? What friends or relations are hurting? Where would I love to see God's healing power at work?

ACTION: Reflect on a mentor or teacher from your past who helped you grow in some way. Reach out to those you can to share what their influence meant to your life.

Sunday, MARCH 21, 2021

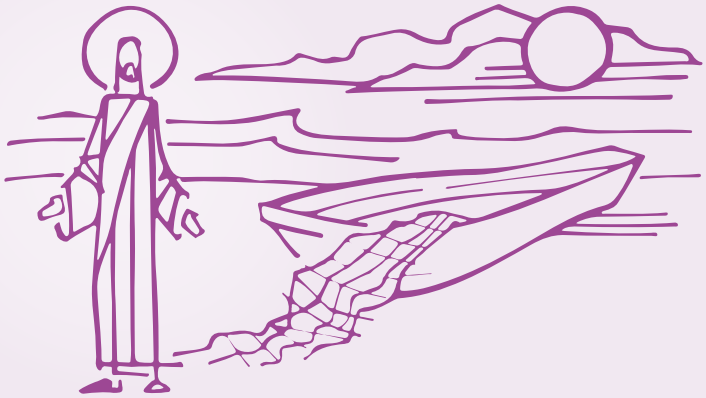
LUKE 8:22–25

As you pray this passage, imagine that you are present in the boat with Jesus and his disciples, endangered by the raging wind and waves of a storm. The boat is often depicted as a symbol of the church. As you pray with this text, think of storms that currently endanger your life and the life of the church and that threaten to undo us.

Practice: Prayerfully read this story and enter into the boat with Jesus and the disciples. What assurance or challenge do you hear Jesus addressing to you in the midst of storms?

Journal: Note in your journal what emerged in your prayer time, and your sense of movements of your spirit toward God or away from God as you prayed with this text.

WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?



Monday, MARCH 22, 2021

LUKE 9:12–17

The story of Jesus' feeding of 5,000 people is the only miracle story found in all four Gospels, which highlights its importance in the memories and imaginations of early Christians. The story prompts our reflection on how we perceive ourselves and the world around us: do we perceive and act out of a sense of scarcity or a sense of abundance? Scarcity is the world's logic, but abundance is the gospel's logic.

Practice: Prayerfully read this story several times and imaginatively enter into the scene. How does it challenge your perception of scarcity or of God's abundance?

Journal: Note in your journal any movements of your spirit that you discern – toward God or away from God – as you prayed with this Scripture.

Tuesday, MARCH 23, 2021

MATTHEW 17:1–8

This story takes us to a mountaintop with Jesus and his disciples, where he is transfigured before them, his face shining like the sun and his clothes dazzling white as a cloud overshadows them. Most startling of all, however, is the very voice of God, which we rarely hear in the Gospel stories. That voice was heard at Jesus' baptism, and commands our attention as it is now heard for the second time in Matthew's narrative, declaring: "This is my Son, my beloved with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Practice: Prayerfully read this story and enter into the scene in your imagination, noting what it evokes in you. Listen as the divine voice identifies Jesus and urges you to "Listen to him!" When you think of listening to Jesus, what do you recall hearing and learning from him — from both his words and the life that he lived?

Journal: Note briefly in your journal what you remember of the essential teachings of Jesus.

Wednesday, MARCH 24, 2021

MATTHEW 25:31–46

The parable of the sheep and goats is not a scenario of individual judgment; "all the nations" are gathered before the Son of Man and held accountable. Have they tended to "the least of these," feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting those in prison? The parable invites reflection on the church's engagement in civic matters and its public witness to God's concern for "the least" among us.

Practice: Prayerfully read this passage from Matthew, meditating on "the least" in your community. How might the church embody God's concern for their well-being in its public witness?

Journal: Write in your journal of your experience reading and praying this passage from Matthew.

Thursday, MARCH 25, 2021

LUKE 10:25–37

Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan in response to a question that a lawyer asks of him: "Who is my neighbor?" After sharing this parable, Jesus flips the question, asking instead, "Which of these do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" From Jesus' perspective, the important question is not "who is my neighbor?" but rather "how can I be a neighbor?"

Practice: Prayerfully read this passage, pondering the lawyer's question, as well as the question Jesus flips back to him. Ask yourself: How can I be a neighbor in my community and world?

Journal: In your journal, record your answer to this question.

Friday, MARCH 26, 2021

JOHN 1:35–42

The first words out of Jesus' mouth in the Gospel of John set before us a critical existential question: "What are you looking for?" At the other end of the Gospel, on Easter morning, the risen Lord asks Mary Magdalene a similar question: "Whom are you looking for?" (John 20:15). Who or what are we looking for? These questions frame John's Gospel and invite reflection on our deepest longings. They also reflect John's conviction that our deepest longing is for relationship with God, made available in Christ — a conviction shared by St. Augustine in his "Confessions": "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

Practice: Pray and ponder deeply John 1:35-42 with special attention to Jesus' question, "What are you looking for?" How would you answer this question?

Journal: Note in your journal what reflection on this question evoked for you.

Saturday, MARCH 27, 2021

JOHN 11:1–44

The church has traditionally pondered the Gospel of John's vivid story of the raising of Lazarus in its journey toward Lent. In it, Jesus makes a statement that goes to the heart of John's Gospel, followed by a very important question: "I am the resurrection and the life. … *Do you believe this?*" Do you believe that Jesus offers eternal life — that is, fullness of life, a rich quality of life in relationship with God *now*, not just life that extends beyond death? When Lazarus emerges from the tomb, Jesus also articulates an important command for the Christian community – "Unbind him and let him go" – charging us with the ministry of unbinding others, that they may experience fullness of life.

Practice: As you pray with this vivid story, imagine that you are present in this scene. What most captures your attention as the story unfolds? How would you respond to the question Jesus asks? How might you assist in the unbinding of others?

Journal: Make a note in your journal of reflection evoked by your prayer with this story.