

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Week One

Prepare

Take a moment to center yourself for communion with God. You may do so by lighting a candle, signifying the presence of the Spirit with you, singing a hymn, saying a prayer, or simply sitting in silence before God. Invite the Holy Spirit to come and speak to you through these words of Scripture and time of meditation and reflection.

Read

Psalm 32

Additional Scriptures for this week: Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7, Romans 5:12–19, Matthew 4:1–11

Reflect

In the season of Lent, we reflect upon and celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the deep significance these have for our lives today. We examine the stories of Jesus' ministry on earth, and consider the ways we are called to follow his example in our own daily lives. By studying Scripture, praying, making sacrifices of our own, and reflecting upon where God is at work in our hearts, this season draws us into deeper knowledge and love of the one who gave himself up for us.

The words of this week's Psalm take us through the different stages of salvation: death in sin, repentance, forgiveness, and joy. We are presented with images of "groaning," a body "wasted away," and strength being "dried up" as a characterization of life without God. For many of us today, we interpret these words metaphorically, to refer to the state of our spirits before finding God, the darkness of a life brought down by sin. Most of our physical needs remain consistently met throughout our journey of salvation. But, for many orphans in Africa, this is not the case. Can you imagine being able to read these words in a literal way?

Zakayo was just 12 years old when he lost his mother. Only two years later, his father also died. Left to care for himself and his two younger siblings, Zakayo was forced to drop out of school in order to try to grow food for their family to be able to eat. Unfortunately, this was often not enough, and they would go days without a meal. In addition, one of his siblings developed malaria, and without the funds to provide medical care or school fees, their school attendance dropped. Zakayo felt as if God had abandoned him. Thankfully, Zakayo was introduced to a Zoe empowerment program in Kenya and joined a group of orphans learning about their identity as beloved children of God, and working together to overcome poverty and achieve self-sufficiency.

Through all he learned at Zoe Empowers, Zakayo was able to improve the health of



his family by installing mosquito nets above their beds, registering for health insurance, and learning how to properly wash and dry their dishes. He also learned skills to improve his home garden and open a business kiosk along with other orphans in his working group. The family is now able to regularly eat regular meals and pay for all of the children's school fees on their own. Most importantly, Zakayo and his siblings have been transformed by the message of the Gospel and their identity as part of God's family. They regularly attend church together, and Zakayo sings in the choir.

Zakayo's story of starvation, poverty, and disease is the story of thousands of orphans across Africa. They can read the words of the Psalmist and know what it is like for body and soul to be wasting away. But, Christ came to redeem and fulfill both bodies and souls, and the ministry of the Zoe program witnesses to God's love for them through providing resources to help them recover their livelihood.

It is a common practice for individuals to give up something they cherish during the season of Lent. Whether it is dessert, Facebook, or even daily fasting, the idea is to sacrifice something that has become an integral part of your routine and replace it with dependency and meditation upon Christ. This connects us, in a very small way, with the sacrifices Christ made on our behalf, which we remember and celebrate in Easter. You may have already chosen something to give up this year. If so, take some time to think and pray about the ways the Spirit is calling you to use that sacrifice to lead you into deeper relationship with God. If not, prayerfully consider what God might be calling you to sacrifice this season.

Reflection questions:

1. Can you, like Zakayo, read the words of the Psalmist and know what it is like to feel your strength being dried up as a result of hunger or illness? If not, who around you may be able to relate to these words and how can you be in prayer and service to them this week?
2. Whether or not you have chosen something to give up for Lent, what is one way that you can sacrifice your own interests today or this week, in surrender to Christ?

Pray

Respond by speaking or writing out a prayer to God, or use the prayer below as a starting point: Merciful God, you hear all of our prayers and know our needs before they become words on our tongue. Thank you for your unchanging goodness to us, and for the opportunity to reflect on that this season of Lent. Help us to grow into deeper dependency upon you these next seven weeks, and to become more conformed to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Act

After considering the reflection questions, what ways do you think you could minister to those in your community (neighborhood, church, workplace, etc.) who are experiencing the hunger of poverty, pain, or sickness this season? If your church has the means to create a community garden, that could be an exciting an exciting opportunity to not only build relationships and cultivate food, but join the orphans halfway across the world who are doing the same.

Lastly, consider how this season of Lent might more deeply connect you to the sacrifice and pain Christ endured on our behalf. Even if you have given something up, consider also trying the practice of fasting which has been done by Christians throughout the centuries. You could try fasting during the mornings, or taking one entire day each week. This time of dependence upon God is sure to enrich your relationship with God as well as instill a deep gratitude for the material blessings you have.

Learn

To learn more about Zoe Empowers and the ways our organization partners with orphans in Africa, visit www.zoempowers.org!