

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Week Three

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

Exodus 17:1-17

Additional Scriptures for this week: Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-11, John 4:5-42

Reflect

This week's passage from Exodus takes us back to the story of God's chosen people, the Israelites, as they wandered the desert searching for food and water, on their journey to the Promised Land. Their leader, Moses, did not know how to end their grumbling and complaining, other than asking the Lord to provide

Throughout their story told in the Old Testament, we see how the Israelites chose to forget God's provision and goodness, and instead focused selfishly on their own desires being met. This often led them into trouble; as they forgot what God's living water tasted like, they began to create idols in their life and lost their thirst for true sustenance.

It may feel easy to distance ourselves from the story of the Israelites because it was so long ago; we don't often spend our days wandering in literal deserts or struggling with idols of gold statues. But perhaps the story of forgetting God's faithfulness and becoming caught up in selfish desires sounds a bit more familiar.

Thankfully, today we have the blessing of knowing Christ, the living water. Unlike the Israelites, we have the gift of being able to look back on the stories of Jesus in our Scripture, and see who God is. In this week's passage from John, we are presented with the scene of Christ befriending a woman at a well who had not only earned a reputation for promiscuity in her community, but also was from the group known as the Samaritans, who did not associate with Jews. Though most would not give her the time of day, Jesus offered her himself as the living water that quenches all thirst, and revealing to her that he was the Messiah. He even allowed her to serve him a drink of water, to quench his physical thirst.

In this action, Jesus shows us that God's love breaks down our human social divides and extends salvation to all who will accept it, so that we may "never be thirsty." This scene also teaches us that Jesus did not simply give this woman blessing and leave. He sat with her, befriended her, and allowed himself to be served by her. Jesus embodies a model of relationships that is not easily found in our world today: taking in those who are cast out, leading them to the life-giving water, and expecting to learn from them in return. Though there is no guarantee that this kind of relationship will be easy, we can trust that it will be a blessing of deepening and challenging our faith.

In many ways, these kinds of relationships are what Zoe Empowers seeks to facilitate. Through empowering orphans to meet their own physical needs and teaching them of God's love, Zoe partners in the U.S. are challenged to learn from the stories of those very different than them, who have been cast out in their own societies. Each party is inevitably blessed by the relationship.

The Ruhashaya Working Group of Zoe orphans in Rwanda provides one profound example of the impact this kind of interaction has. Together, this group of 127 young people had great success in learning vocational skills, hygiene, home construction, and, most notably, the transformative love of God. After experiencing their own empowerment, the group noticed there were still many orphans



in their community who were struggling and needed similar resources. So they decided to use half of their proceeds from a coffee harvest to “adopt” 89 other orphans! In addition to providing them with micro-grants, vocational training, and a share in the coffee plantation as ways of breaking the cycle of poverty, these orphans developed relationships of mentoring and friendship. Clearly, the life-giving water of Christ was not hoarded or forgotten in this community, but gushes forth as a spring for all to share.

Reflection questions:

1. How can you relate to the Israelites in this passage, forgetting the blessings and faithfulness of God and choosing instead to grumble and complain? What are some things you have to be thankful for?
2. How have you led others to the life-giving water of Christ, particularly those who are cast out by society? How can you follow the example of the Ruhashaya group in your own community?

Pray

Respond by speaking or writing out a prayer to God, or use the prayer below as a starting point:

Jesus, our Lord, we praise you for being the source of unchanging, life-giving water, that quenches all our thirsts. Forgive us for the ways our hearts become dry and complacent so quickly and easily, and for the ways we fail to emulate your example of friendship with those around us. Fill our hearts with your Spirit, that your love might overflow for all to taste. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

As we see from the example of Christ in this week’s Scripture, as well as the Ruhashaya Group, sometimes leading other people to the life-giving water is as simple as becoming their friend. Sitting beside them, sharing stories with one another, and sharing a meal are very small but powerful ways that facilitate the kind of relationships that Christ calls us to.

Act

Consider the ways you might emulate this example in your own life. Some ideas might be hosting a dinner with your neighbors, volunteering to tutor those who might need extra help, or choosing to eat lunch with a co-worker you do not know. This would also be a great thing to discuss with family and friends, and would be a helpful way to hold one another accountable.

Learn

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