

LENT PRAYER DIARY: INTO THE WILD

👤 LYNDALL BYWATER

🕒 **SETTING THE SCENE**

Welcome to the Into the Wild Lent Prayer Diary. For the past nine months, the UK Salvation Army Prayer Network has been on an adventure of encounter, exploring what it means to go beyond the safe and familiar into the unknown, uncharted places where we meet God in new ways. Pandemic and lockdown have taught us much about loss, leaving and letting go, yet we cling gratefully to the Easter story where death always gives way to resurrection and new life. As you journey through, we hope and pray that, no matter how hard this winter has been, you will find shoots of new life breaking through.

The Lent Diary is a carefully-constructed rhythm of centuries-old prayer practices leading you through seven different themes, all drawn from Jesus' own journey 'into the wild' after his baptism. All are designed to help you to engage with those themes in prayer, reflection and action.

If you were journeying into the wilderness, you'd need a set of disciplines to keep you strong and sane, and the same is true of the spiritual journeys we make. As you journey through these themes the prayer practices of silence, meditation, fasting, walking, connecting, journaling and prayerful reading will stretch different sets of 'prayer muscles', helping you stay focused and grow stronger. And the story of Jesus will help you move from being Spiritfilled to being Spirit-empowered

WEEK ONE: PACKING UP

The best journeys deserve good preparation. This week we think about the things which happened to Jesus just before he left to journey into the wilderness (Luke 3:21-37), and we consider how we might prepare for our own Lent journey.

📅 **DAY 1**

We begin our Lent journey in deep gratitude for all that God has done for us over the years of our lives so far. Sit in silence for a few minutes



today, allowing your thoughts to roam over the many ways you've experienced the goodness of God. Take delight in remembering.

DAY 2

Jesus didn't set foot in the wilderness until he knew who he was. 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased' (Luke 3:22). Those were the words the Father spoke over him at his baptism, and they must have become even more precious as he trudged through the wilderness.

Meditate on a Bible verse today – one that has meant a lot to you in the past. Carry it around in your mind (and even in your pocket), calling it to mind in each situation you face.

DAY 3

Luke chose this moment in Jesus' story to tell us his family line (Luke 3:23-37). It's as though he imagined Jesus stepping out into uncharted territory, consoled and inspired by the earthly family God had placed him in.

Connect with some of your family today – whether blood relations or 'chosen family'. As you pray for them, send each a message thanking them for the blessings they've brought into your life.

DAY 4

What did Jesus pack for the journey? There's no way to know, but we can do our own 'packing', before we set out. What have you learnt over recent months? What new gifts have you received? What old blessings have you rediscovered? What do you know God is telling you to hold on to in this season?

Do some journaling today, writing down five things you want to take on your Lent journey.

DAY 5

We assume Jesus travelled his wilderness journey alone, but it's notable that it began in a public place with lots of onlookers (Luke 3:21). It's easy to get caught up in our own concerns, but the people around us are on a journey too, and we all need the encouragement of fellow-travellers.



Go for a walk with friends or family today. Talk to each other about the journeys you're on and where you'd like to have got to by Easter.

WEEK TWO: SETTING OUT

'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness...' (Luke 4:1). This week we think about leaving home, embarking on a new journey and being led to unexpected places.

📅 DAY 6

We begin this week's reflections with some reading. As you read these words, sung by the hobbit Bilbo as he sets out on a journey at the start of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, notice what stirs in you.

'The Road goes ever on and on down from the door where it began. Now far ahead the Road has gone, and I must follow, if I can, pursuing it with eager feet, until it joins some larger way where many paths and errands meet. And whither then? I cannot say.'

📅 DAY 7

Luke tells us that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness (Luke 4:1). Does that mean Jesus set out without knowing where he was going, or did the Spirit overrule his plans? If you're the sort of person who likes to be in control, it can be hard to let the Spirit lead you.

Fast from one of your regular daily activities today – a meal, a TV programme you normally watch or your time on social media. See where the Spirit leads you in the time you free up.

📅 DAY 8

Whether he'd planned it or not, the wilderness must have felt like a daunting destination for Jesus, yet Luke tells us he emerged transformed – in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14).

Do some journaling today about a time in your life when you found yourself in a place you didn't want to be. How did you get there? What did God do in you? How were you different afterwards?



DAY 9

Forty days is a long time to be away from home. The Gospels make it clear that Jesus loved people and parties, so he must have missed being with his loved ones.

Take time today to connect with someone who is away from home. Ask how they're doing and ask how you can pray for them. Hold them in your prayers today.

DAY 10

'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland' (Isaiah 43:18-19). These words would have been familiar to Jesus. What might they have meant to him as he journeyed into the wilderness?

Meditate on these Isaiah verses today. What do you learn from them as you set out on your Lent journey?

DAY 11

If you gave God an hour of your day, where might the Spirit take you? Go on a prayer walk around your local community today, but don't plan your route in advance. See where the Holy Spirit prompts you to go, and pray for each street you walk down. You could invite a few friends to go on their own prayer walks, then compare notes afterwards to see where God led you all.

DAY 12

Luke tells us that Jesus was 'full of the Spirit' and 'led by the Spirit' (Luke 4:1). It's difficult to be filled or led when we're rushing around. As we come to the end of this week of reflecting on 'setting out', let's open a space in our lives, sit still and welcome the refreshing, renewing Spirit of God.

Spend ten minutes in silence, holding an empty cup in your hands. Each time your mind wanders, bring it back by focusing on that empty vessel ready to be filled.



WEEK THREE: LETTING GO

'Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil' (Luke 4:1-2, *The Message*).

The wilderness may well be the place where we come face to face with all that is most destructive to us, but it's also the place where the Spirit can purify and refine us.

📅 DAY 13

Jesus was tempted. Jesus, who preached and healed, saved and was raised from the dead, was as human as we are, and he was tempted to do things that would put up barriers between him and the Father. Is there something in your life which you've chosen but which has become a barrier between you and God? In your journal, write a letter to God, the Father who loves you so much, telling him how you feel and asking for help to find your way back to him.

📅 DAY 14

Addiction can be described as being in the grip of a habit that's stronger than you are, and those who live with addictions often feel oppressed by darkness and hopelessness.

For your prayerful reading this week, look up some information about local addiction services and read it through slowly, stopping to pray whenever the Spirit prompts you to.

📅 DAY 15

Is there something in your life which feels like it's stronger than you are – maybe a fear, an addiction, a coping mechanism or a feeling of hopelessness? So often we end up shut away in shame, but we all have our struggles and we don't have to face them alone. There's great power in talking and praying together.

Connect with someone you trust this week by telling them what you're struggling with. Ask them to pray for you regularly, and agree to pray for them too.



DAY 16

Jesus was tempted by the Devil, but some of the testing came with the circumstances. There were no creature comforts, no reassuring company, none of the familiar pastimes – nothing to make the desert more bearable. We only know how much we depend on things and people when they're not there.

What are you depending on too much? Find a way to fast from it today – or maybe for the coming week. Take time to stop and pray, asking God to help you develop new, healthier habits.

DAY 17

If you know someone who's battling addiction, you may have found it difficult to know how to pray for them, especially if the battle has been a long, drawn-out one. That's where silence can be very helpful.

Spend time today sitting still in silence, holding that person in your mind. Don't try and form a prayer or think of a solution; just picture their face and imagine you're sitting together at Jesus' feet.

DAY 18

Another word we use for temptations and dependencies is 'idols'. Idols are things which have come to have too much power and authority in our lives. When we demote them, we find real freedom.

Find three or four stones/bricks to represent 'idols' in your life which you want to topple. Walk to a quiet place, carrying them with you. Notice how heavy they feel. When you get there, lay each one on the ground as a sign of your desire to be free. Then walk home without them and enjoy the feeling of lightness.

DAY 19

What would freedom look like in your church community? Are there fears or tensions that hold people back? Are there idols – things that seem to be more important than God?

'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Spend some time today meditating on this verse and praying for your church community.



WEEK FOUR: DOING WITHOUT

'He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"' (Luke 4:2-4)

God is our provider. We get a taste of that truth in the times of plenty, when every need is met with abundance and every prayer is answered. But it's in the wilderness that we truly learn God is enough.

DAY 20

Having left behind every other human comfort, Jesus chose to fast for 40 days. It was a bold choice – even a life-threatening one – and it left him utterly dependent on God in every way. In a pale imitation of Jesus, we fast as a sign of our desire to rely on God more than we rely on food and physical comforts.

If you're able to fast safely, fast from at least one meal today, spending the time in prayer. You could also work out the cost of your meals and give the money to a charity working with those in food poverty.

DAY 21

Hunger may be an uncomfortable experience for us when we fast, but for some people it is an unavoidable daily reality. Lent is a time when churches often work together to raise money for those living in poverty.

Find out what fundraising is happening in your area and connect with it this week, either by contributing financially or attending an event. Whatever you do, make sure prayer is part of your response.

DAY 22

To walk in the wild is to be willing to have our lives stripped back; to go without; to slow down; to empty ourselves in order that God might work in us. Sometimes circumstances do the stripping back for us and sometimes we do it ourselves by choosing disciplines like simplicity.

Today, choose simplicity by walking somewhere instead of driving. If you would normally walk anyway, walk a longer route and slow down, giving time for prayer and reflection as you go.

DAY 23

In a relatively wealthy society, our first experience of 'lack' often comes when our prayers aren't answered in the way we'd like. The pain of unanswered prayer is a deep hunger and a true wilderness experience.

Take time today to journal about some of the prayers you still haven't seen answered in the way you'd hoped, writing honestly about your feelings and your questions. Then pause and listen to what God wants to say to you. You may still not get the answer, but God wants you to know you're not alone.

DAY 24

Jesus had grown up in a relatively busy, prosperous town in Galilee. In contrast, the desert must have been an eerily silent place to be for so long. There was no comforting buzz of activity to anaesthetise him against the pain of loss and grief. There was just the space to feel.

We're very good at anaesthetising our pain with noise and activity. Read over yesterday's journal entry, and then sit in silence for half an hour, letting the feelings come. Remember, you're not alone.

DAY 25

'There are, no doubt, passages in the New Testament which may seem at first sight to promise an invariable granting of our prayers. But that cannot be what they really mean. For in the very heart of the story we meet a glaring instance to the contrary. In Gethsemane the holiest of all petitioners prayed three times that a certain cup might pass from him. It did not. After that the idea that prayer is recommended to us as a sort of infallible gimmick may be dismissed.' (C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*)

Read this quote through prayerfully, noticing which words or ideas the Spirit draws your attention to.

DAY 26

'Can a mother forget the infant at her breast, walk away from the baby she bore? But even if mothers forget, I'd never forget you – never. Look, I've written your names on the backs of my hands. The walls



you're rebuilding are never out of my sight.'
(Isaiah 49:15-16 *The Message*)

Meditate on these verses today, giving thanks to the one who will always be with you and who will always be enough.

WEEK FIVE: LOSING CONTROL

'The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"' (Luke 4:5-8)

Jesus has all power and authority, but he didn't get there by claiming his right to it. He got there through surrender and submission, through pouring himself out and losing control, even unto death.

📅 DAY 27

Power and authority are tempting because being in control feels safe, whereas being out of control can feel like the scariest thing in the world.

Connect today with someone who's in a situation where they feel completely out of control. Ask how you can pray for them. Assure them of your love and care.

📅 DAY 28

Are you facing a situation where you feel powerless and out of control? Maybe it even feels like the Devil holds all the cards. Jesus' response to that feeling was simply to worship.

Sit a while in silence today, acknowledging your weakness and your inability to change what needs changing, but declaring from the depths of your soul that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

📅 DAY 29

Jesus lived in a society where some had great power and others had no power at all. So do we.



Go on a 'power walk' today, planning your route to pass the places of power in your community (council offices, law courts, prosperous businesses etc) as well as the places of deprivation and powerlessness.

DAY 30

John the Baptist knew what it was to live in a wilderness and to submit to God. Here's what he said about Jesus: 'Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less' (John 3:29-30 *NLT*).

Meditate on these words today. What does it mean for Jesus to become greater and for us to become less?

DAY 31

Power, authority and control are seductive. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that one of Jesus' temptations was the offer of being put in charge of everything straight away. Yet he chose the humbler, harder way.

Is there a situation where you know you cling on to power or control? What could you do to fast from doing that today? Could you stay silent, delegate something or let someone else choose?

DAY 32

Leaders come in all shapes and sizes, and we admire some more than others. Think of a famous person (living or dead) whose leadership you admire.

For your prayerful reading this week, read about that person, researching their life, the circumstances they faced and the choices they made. What do you hear God saying to you through their example?

DAY 33

The Church has a mixed record when it comes to power, authority and control. Sometimes we've used it well, speaking out for the powerless. At other times we've used it manipulatively and abusively.

Spend some time today journaling – writing about the ways in which power has been used well and badly in your church community.



WEEK SIX: LOSING FACE

‘The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Luke 4:9-12)

A dramatic high-dive followed by an angelic rescue would have been a short-cut to fame and acclaim for Jesus, but the wilderness is where we dare to say ‘no’ to human notions of success.

DAY 34

In the seclusion of the desert, the Devil showed Jesus Jerusalem – that bustling city where a budding rabbi might make his name. If Jesus was doubting himself, that kind of popularity must have seemed tempting.

You are enough. Whatever you’ve achieved in life; whatever others think of you; whatever you think of yourself – know today that God says you are enough. Spend some time in silence, letting that truth sink in.

DAY 35

‘Be there for me, God, for I keep trusting in you. Don’t allow my foes to gloat over me or the shame of defeat to overtake me. For how could anyone be disgraced when he has entwined his heart with you?’ (Psalm 25:2-3 *The Passion Translation*)

Meditate on these words today. They help remind us what really matters and where our security really lies.

DAY 36

If Jesus had jumped from the top of the Temple in the middle of Jerusalem, a lot of people would have been impressed. It’s tempting to want to do something just because you know it will impress people.

If you’re honest, are there things you know you do only because you want to impress others? Could you fast from those things today?



DAY 37

The Devil knew the Psalms as well as anyone worshipping at the Temple. If Jesus had jumped, it would have been a sure-fire way to prove his credentials as Son of God. Yet somehow he knew that wasn't the Scripture to be putting into action at that moment in time.

How do we know which Scripture is right for which situation? How do we interpret the word of God? Connect with some friends and talk about how you apply the Bible in your everyday lives.

DAY 38

We humans tend to fear failure. Perhaps that's why it's so tempting to conform to society's view of what success should look like... or perhaps the Church's view of what success should look like.

Spend some time journaling about failure. What do you consider to be your greatest failures? How did they happen? What do you wish you'd done differently? What do you think God would say about them?

DAY 39

The Devil took Jesus to two high places, a mountain and the Temple roof; but Jesus knew his route was downwards: down from glory, through humanity, even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Go on a walk today, starting in a high place (the top of a hill, for instance) and walking downwards. As you walk, reflect on what it means to refuse the temptations of the high places – popularity, wealth and worldly success – and to choose the self-emptying way of Christ.

DAY 40

'He came in peace to give the people peace. They preferred salvation from taxation to salvation of their souls – and so in a few days they would prefer Barabbas to be freed instead of Jesus. Jesus could see that this was their mindset, and so in the midst of this praise, with people waving the palm branches like a national flag, Jesus wept.' (Paul Wallace, 'Palm Sunday')

Read and ponder these words as you celebrate Palm Sunday today.



WEEK SEVEN: HOLY WEEK

'Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.' (Luke 4:14-15)

In the coming days, we will journey with Jesus through a far deeper wilderness than the one we've just been reading about. As we track with the Easter story, let's look back over our wilderness wanderings and learn how these losses and letting-go enable us to live more fully in the power of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 41

The wilderness experience depleted Jesus' resources considerably. Matthew's Gospel tells us that angels came and attended him before he returned home (Matthew 4:11).

Spend some time journaling today, writing about several moments when you've seen God's supernatural provision over the past six weeks, either in your own life or in the lives of those around you.

DAY 42

In Week Two of this Lent journey, we considered what it must have been like for Jesus to choose to set out from home, leaving friends, family, work and worship rhythms, to go wherever the Spirit might lead him.

Go for a walk and a ponder today. Where has the Spirit led you over the past six weeks? What have you discovered about yourself and about God?

DAY 43

In Christian tradition, today is the day when we remember the story of the woman who gave up her most precious possession for the sake of worship. She broke her jar of priceless nard, the heirloom which would have secured her future, and anointed Jesus with the perfume in an extravagant demonstration of her love.

Meditate on her story (Mark 14:3-9). What might costly, sacrificial worship look like for Jesus' Church today? What might we need to be ready to let go, in order to love with that same joyous extravagance?



DAY 44

'Desert spirituality is characterised by the pursuit of abundant simplicity – simplicity grounded in the possession of little – and the abundance of God's presence.' (Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women*)

Read these words today and reflect on what it means to live simply in the midst of God's abundance.

DAY 45

Good Friday is the day when we remember that Jesus relinquished all control, allowing himself to fall into death, in order that we might fall into the arms of everlasting love, forgiven, healed and renewed.

Over the centuries, Good Friday has also been a day when God's people would fast. Now that we mark it as the start of a holiday weekend, it's easy to forget the significance of it. Can you find a way to fast from something today, to remind yourself that love holds you, even when you feel out of control?

DAY 46

It's Holy Saturday, the day when all fell silent. Jesus had died and his disciples were coming to terms with having lost their teacher and their friend. Grief is always a wilderness.

Spend some time in silence, holding in your heart before God all those you know who are walking the deserts of grief today.

DAY 47

Setting out, letting go, doing without, losing control, losing face... these are all a kind of death, yet they're also the way to resurrection life. Jesus came out of the wilderness in the power of the Spirit; Jesus came out of the tomb with resurrection life in his veins. As you celebrate Easter today, may you know that, through Jesus Christ, God himself has raised you from the dead and the power of the Spirit is at work in you.

Connect with others today, praying for each one by name as you wish them Happy Easter.