



Lent study questions

Free additional material for *New Daylight* subscribers

Contemplative prayer

MARGARET SILF

Suggested meeting date: week commencing 3 March

- Is there a physical space, either in your home or in the natural world, that helps to draw your deepest centre into orbit around God?
- Spend some time ‘basking in the light’ of God’s love. How easy is this for you to do and what difficulties do you encounter? How do you feel afterwards?
- Take time this week to gaze into the heart of a plant, a tree or any other natural object, and see the wonder that is hidden inside it. Can you now apply this wisdom to those people who live alongside you – family, friends, colleagues, neighbours? Can you look into the mirror and apply this wisdom to yourself?
- Where and how do you draw upon the deep oceans of life that sustain you through the dry periods of your life?
- When you are feeling anxious or exhausted, where do you go to soak up the refreshing dew?
- When and where have you experienced ‘timeless moments’?
- Have you ever been ‘in a hard place’ and discovered that God was there, even if you didn’t realise it at the time?

Group questions

- As you look back over the past seven days, did you find any time simply to ‘gaze on God’ and let God’s light shine upon you?
- Can you make this part of your regular spiritual practice?
- What personal challenges might you encounter in trying to do so?

Contemplative prayer

MARGARET SILF

Suggested meeting date: week commencing 10 March

- Can you recall any times in your own life when you have felt ‘emptied out’? In hindsight, can you see how God used that emptiness to lead you to a new level of fullness?
- How do you see your own inner Martha and inner Mary? How do you feel about the balance between them? Do your reflections reveal anything you would wish to adjust in your own priorities?
- What form does your own ‘well of contemplation’ take?
- What does the ‘secret place’ mean for you, in practice? How might you make contemplative prayer a part of your Lenten practice?
- When you pray, can you let the seed of your longing fall into God’s heart and trust God to grow it for you, or do you feel you need to give God the growing instructions?
- Have you ever stayed in the silence at the still centre of a stormy conflict? How did that feel, and what was the effect?
- What are the challenges for you in ‘staying awake’?

Group questions

- What has struck you most about the reflections of the past two weeks?
- Is there anything that you would now wish to make part of your ongoing spiritual practice?

Place

LIZ HOARE

Suggested meeting date: week commencing 17 March

- Is there a place you can return to, perhaps in your memory, where you first called on the name of the Lord and found clarity for the road ahead?
- What should we make of Jacob's prayer in Genesis 32:26? If we find ourselves in a place where we are echoing Jacob's words, are we prepared to face the cost involved as well as the reward?
- Have you ever had an experience like Moses did at Horeb? What do you think it meant?
- Can you recall a wilderness experience where you knew that God was sustaining you? Can you find a metaphor to describe this?
- What things are important for you to remember, and what 'memory stones' help you to do so?
- If God asked you, 'What are you doing here?', how would you answer?
- Have you ever resisted God's call because you felt unworthy? How does Isaiah's experience in the temple help you to be more ready to go?

Group questions

- Which of the places this week has spoken to you most deeply?
- Why do you think certain places echo our spiritual experiences?

Place

LIZ HOARE

Suggested meeting date: week commencing 24 March

- What have you learned when it seems that nothing is happening?
- ‘Follow me’: what does that involve for you today?
- How does the image of living water speak to your needs?
- What places and situations seem dark and without hope? How could you pray for them to be transfigured?
- Is ‘friend’ a name you often use to address Jesus? What difference could it make to your praying to call him ‘friend’?
- How often do you pray ‘Your will be done’ as a prayer of trust rather than as a way of opting out of being specific?
- Is there anything in Jesus’ teaching during his earthly ministry that would lead us to expect his response to the thief’s request on the cross?

Group questions

- What has surprised you about places and their significance in the life of Jesus on earth?
- Are there places in your life story that bring to mind something Jesus said about himself? Where are these places and what was it about them that spoke to you about the Lord?

Exile

MICHAEL MITTON

Suggested meeting date: week commencing 31 March

- What do you feel as you read about the exile from Eden?
- Do you find it easy to express your laments to God? What do you think he feels about them?
- As you look back at your journey with God, what memories feel like empowering memories?
- How could an exile experience cause you to see a new vision of God?
- How have your experiences of exile changed your view of God?
- When we experience an exile of any kind, what do we need to help us choose love over self-pity?
- How does being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven affect how you live in this world?

Group questions

- What types of exile have you experienced/are you experiencing in life? What has been particularly difficult about them? How did you manage/are you managing them? Where has God been for you in each situation? Give time for each person to tell his or her story.
- How easy do you find it to express your laments to God? Think about how you do this personally and also together with others in corporate worship. Can you think of ways of doing lament better? How can lament (both personal and corporate) be therapeutic and faith-building?
- We have been reading about the power of memory, presence, hope and love in exile. Which of these have been significant for you and why? Are any of these particularly difficult?

Exile

MICHAEL MITTON

Suggested meeting date: week commencing 7 April

- What do you feel about this image of the Spirit of God being the dove, whose natural habitat is the wilderness?
- Who might be the equivalent of the centurion for you? Can you see signs of faith in their heart?
- What is the equivalent of Caesarea Philippi for you? How might Christ be revealed in such a place?
- What imprisons you? When you feel trapped or imprisoned, try starting to praise and worship God from your heart.
- How do you view your body? How do you imagine the resurrection body that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15?
- How hard do you think it was for Jesus to feel at home in this world? What are the characteristics of his homeland?
- What difference does it make to you today to know that God yearns to dwell fully in your company?

Group questions

- What sort of life experiences have felt like a wilderness to you? Has God felt close or absent at such times? How do you think the Spirit might help us to feel at home in a wilderness place?
- What might be a modern-day equivalent of Caesarea Philippi? What would a church founded in that place look like? What might be a sign of the gates of Hades giving way?
- In the final two readings, we discover a God who delights in making himself at home among humans. Is this how you see God? What is there about your church that you think God would like and would make him feel at home? How does John's vision in Revelation 21 affect how you live today?

To Calvary and beyond

NAOMI STARKEY

Suggested meeting date: week commencing 14 April

- Which is harder to endure – physical or mental pain – and why?
- What more can your church(es) do to welcome little children?
- Have you – or somebody you know – had a life-changing encounter that you can share with the group?
- In what practical ways can you show something of God's astonishing generosity in your local community?
- What would you find hardest to sacrifice in answering God's call to service – and why?
- What are the risks of popular acclaim for those in church leadership?
- Share your experiences as a group of sensing God's presence in a place of pilgrimage (or your regular place of worship).

Group questions

- How much (honestly!) do you feel you know about what it means to be a follower of Jesus? Who are the outsiders in your community who need to hear the good news of God's kingdom?
- The disciples so often failed to understand the implications of Jesus' teaching, despite their closeness to him. To what extent might the church today be at risk of failing to understand?

To Calvary and beyond

NAOMI STARKEY

Suggested meeting date: week commencing 21 April

- Can you think of examples of national leaders who have acted decisively for good, even if at personal cost?
- What impression of your church's priorities would a visitor receive from the building?
- Could the negative effects of social media outweigh the positives?
- How hard is it to rebuild trust after betrayal? Are there times when it is impossible?
- What part does Maundy Thursday play in your experience of Holy Week?
- Have you sensed God at work (or communicating) through natural phenomena? What are the possibilities – and pitfalls – of looking for such 'signs'?
- How might church members use their personal positions in the community – in both working and leisure hours – to spread the ways of God's kingdom?
- How do you deal with your doubts about God, faith and the church?

Group questions

- Which are better attended in your church – Christmas or Easter services? Is there a balance that needs redressing?
- Which of the different characters in the Easter story resonate most with you – and why?
- Do we have to hold back on joy till Easter morning, or is it appropriate to be glad on Good Friday too?

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