

Your spiritual health is a vital part of your overall wellness. During your time at The Next Door, you have the opportunity to explore spiritual practices that can strengthen your connection to God and nurture your spiritual health. For many people, the daily discipline of reading and reflecting on Scripture is a practice that enhances their spiritual well-being. Scripture can be a source of comfort, wisdom, and strength for you on your recovery journey.

This packet includes 31 daily devotions. Each day's entry includes a suggested passage of Scripture to read (using the Bible you were given in your welcome bag), a reflection based on the passage, a question to consider in light of the reading, and a prayer for the day. You can begin with Day 1 or you may choose to read the numbered entry that corresponds with the day of the month.

May these devotions draw you closer to the One who created you, the One who loves you unconditionally, the One who offers you abundant life.

Rev. Tambi Brown Swiney

"Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and light for my path." Psalm 119:105

DAY 1 - The Storms of Life

READ: Matthew 8:23-27

REFLECT: Jesus' disciples were certain they were about to drown. Adrift in a small wooden boat in the midst of a terrifying storm, they felt disoriented and overwhelmed. As their fears escalated, they noticed that Jesus was sleeping peacefully. When the waves threatened to swamp their boat, in desperation they cried out for help: "Save us!"

When we feel disoriented, when we are overwhelmed, when we think we are about to drown, we can do the same thing. God has not left us to navigate the storms of life alone; we can cry out for help knowing that our voices will be heard. Storms will inevitably come, but we can be assured that God will always be with us. With God's help, you can experience calm in the midst of chaos. Take a deep breath. Have faith that God is with you. Have faith that God loves you.

PONDER: What evidence do you see that God is with you in the midst of the storms of life?

PRAY: God, help me to sense your calming presence today. May my faith increase when I remember that you are with me in the midst of the storms of my life. Amen.

DAY 2 - Honest Prayers

READ: Psalm 5:1-3

REFLECT: How would you describe prayer? Have you ever felt like you weren't praying the right way? The Bible is filled with hundreds of ancient prayers in various forms, a reminder that there is not only one way to pray. The book of Psalms features brutally honest prayers: desperate pleas for help, heart-breaking laments, even demands for vengeance. These prayers are not meant to be prescriptive, a model of how we should pray; rather, they are descriptive, revealing how people in ancient days expressed their deepest feelings and desires honestly to God.

In her book *In the Sanctuary of Women*, Jan Richardson writes: "Prayer draws us onto a threshold that lies between what we have known and what God may yet be calling us toward. In this calling, God challenges us to look into the layers of our lives, to offer up prayers of radical honesty, and to remember that since we are women created in God's own image, nothing in us is foreign to God or lies outside the circle of God's love and grace." You do not need to tidy up your prayers to please God. You can be honest with God as you pray.

PONDER: What would it look like for you to offer God a prayer of radical honesty today?

PRAY: God, you know me better than I know myself. Teach me to pray honestly, trusting that you will hear my prayers and respond compassionately. Amen.

DAY 3 - Cries for Healing

READ: Luke 17:11-19

REFLECT: The ten men who cried out to Jesus suffered from leprosy, a condition that meant they were outcasts from their community because their skin was "unclean." No one wanted to come near people who suffered from leprosy because they feared they would become infected. Somehow these ten men had heard that Jesus would be passing nearby. Knowing that he had healed others, they hoped he might heal them, too. "Have mercy on us!" they cried.

Luke reports that Jesus saw the ten men, which means he did more than simply look at them. With deep compassion, Jesus recognized how they had suffered in their isolation. He offered the men healing by instructing them to go to the priests, who had the power to declare that they were clean. As the men followed Jesus' instructions and began walking to the priests, healing miraculously occurred. These former lepers were now able to return to their community.

PONDER: Can you relate to the isolation these men experienced because of their disease?

PRAY: God, I am crying out to you, asking for healing. Give me the courage to do the things necessary to experience healing. Amen.

DAY 4 - Fully Known, Deeply Loved

READ: Psalm 139:1-6, 23-24

REFLECT: In this lovely passage, the psalmist describes God as the all-knowing Creator. God knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows our thoughts. God knows what we are about to say. God knows what we are doing. God goes before us and follows behind us, hemming us in with unconditional love. The psalmist takes great comfort in this image of God. He does not fear being intimately known by his Creator.

The psalmist concludes this tribute to God with a prayer. Because the psalmist is confident of God's love, he invites God to search his heart. He wants to rid his life of attitudes and actions that could hinder his relationship with God. The psalmist doesn't fear condemnation; instead, he welcomes God's guidance. The psalmist desires to live in harmony with God; he wants to experience wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

PONDER: Do you find the image of an all-knowing Creator comforting?

PRAY: Search me, God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is anything offensive in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

DAY 5 - Their Eyes Were Opened

READ: Luke 24:13-32

REFLECT: Two grieving men made their way down the dusty road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. After a trauma-filled weekend when their beloved Teacher had been executed by the government, they headed home unsure of what their future would look like without Jesus.

A stranger joined them on their journey. At first he appeared to be unaware of the dramatic events that had unfolded over the weekend, so the two men told him the story. Then the stranger began to speak, captivating them with his insight into Scripture. When they arrived home, they invited the stranger to stay with them. At the dinner table, when their guest took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, their eyes were suddenly opened. They realized that their guest was none other than the Risen Christ. They had not been left alone after all.

PONDER: When has God opened your eyes, helping you to see your situation from a fresh perspective?

PRAY: Open my eyes, God, and help me to see how you are present and active in my life. Deepen my understanding of Scripture. Amen.

DAY 6 - The Good Shepherd

READ: Psalm 23:1-6

REFLECT: The 23rd Psalm is one of the most frequently memorized passages of Scripture. Scholars believe that David was the author of this song of praise. Before he was anointed as Israel's second king, David was a humble shepherd, well-acquainted with the needs of sheep. David recognized that people are much like sheep, and from his own experience he had come to know God as the Good Shepherd who provided for his needs, guided him along the right paths, and comforted him when he faced danger.

Sheep cannot rest peacefully if they are hungry and thirsty. Sheep experience stress when they feel threatened. Sheep can't relax if they are being pestered by insects. Sheep will not be able to thrive if there is friction in the herd. No wonder sheep imagery is so appropriate for humans. Like David, we can learn to take delight in all the ways that God cares for us, like a good shepherd cares for the sheep.

PONDER: How has God been a good shepherd to you?

PRAY: God, thank you for shepherding me through life. May goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life, so I can live in your presence forever. Amen.

DAY 7 - I Need a Miracle (Part 1)

READ: Luke 8:40-48

REFLECT: A man who was seeking healing for his 12-year-old daughter was interrupted by a woman who was seeking healing because she had been bleeding for 12 years. This unnamed woman had spent all of her savings on treatment, but she had only gotten worse. She had lived an isolated life because of her condition, because anyone who was bleeding was considered to be unclean and was therefore unwelcome in the community. She had heard about the traveling healer named Jesus. She had faith that if she could touch Jesus' cloak, she would be healed.

Jesus knew instantly that something supernatural had happened. The newly healed woman courageously stepped forward and shared her story in front of the crowd. Jesus affirmed her: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." The woman believed that healing was possible and sought it out. With healing came peace - wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

PONDER: What will healing look like for you?

PRAY: God, give me faith to believe that healing is possible. Help me to experience your peace. Amen.

DAY 8 - I Need a Miracle (Part 2)

READ: Luke 8:40-42, 49-56

REFLECT: The synagogue leader had heard the stories of how Jesus had healed people, so when his 12-year-old daughter became deathly ill, he believed that Jesus could help her. Although Jesus was willing to make a house call to see Jairus' daughter, his progress was interrupted by a woman who was seeking healing for herself. How frustrating it must have been for Jairus to stand by and watch as Jesus interacted with this woman, since he knew that his daughter's life hung in the balance.

Then the news came from home: Your daughter is dead. Jesus immediately reassured Jairus, encouraging him to have faith that his daughter would live. Had Jairus' faith been strengthened because he had just witnessed Jesus heal the bleeding woman? When they arrived at the house, everyone else was convinced that the time for miracles had passed. But Jesus proved that he was trustworthy, raising Jairus' daughter from her deathbed and restoring her to health.

PONDER: Have you ever been frustrated when it appeared that someone else's needs were more important than your own?

PRAY: God, help me to trust that healing will come in time. Show me what I need to do each day to make progress on my recovery journey. Amen.

DAY 9 - The God Who Sees Me

READ: Genesis 16:1-15

REFLECT: Hagar was an Egyptian slave who was forced to become a surrogate mother by Abram and Sarai. God had promised the elderly couple that they would become parents, but after years of waiting for a miracle, they decided to take matters into their own hands. After Hagar became pregnant, a jealous Sarai erupted, lashing out at Hagar. When the pregnant woman fled into the wilderness, she encountered an angel of God who posed a two-fold question: "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?"

Hagar's experience with God's messenger was so transformative that she did something that no other person in Scripture did – she gave God a name: *El Roi* - the God who sees me. After being disrespected in countless ways by Abram and Sarai, Hagar finally felt respected and valued by the God who saw her suffering, the God who met her in her time of need.

PONDER: Where have you come from and where are you going?

PRAY: God, help me to see myself as you see me. Remind me that I am your beloved child, worthy of rescue, deserving of healing. Amen.

DAY 10 - Come and See

READ: John 4:1-30

REFLECT: Perhaps you have heard a sermon where this unnamed woman from Samaria has been described as sinful. This highly speculative approach is based on two bits of information in the story: She comes to the well alone at the hottest part of the day (so she must be an outcast) and she has been married five times (so she must be a harlot). If you pay attention to how the woman reacts to Jesus' revelation that he knows her history, then you see that she reacts with curiosity, not with shame. Jesus makes her feel known, loved, and valued.

If this woman had been a social outcast, would she have hurried back to her community to declare: "Come and see the man who told me everything I ever did!" If she had felt shamed by Jesus, would she have continued to engage in a theological conversation with him? The Samaritan woman became a messenger of the good news of God's love to her community. Each of us can be a point of connection between God and others, a conduit of God's love. Each of us has a sacred story to tell.

PONDER: How might your story help someone else draw close to God?

PRAY: God, help me to understand what it means to worship you in Spirit and in truth. May my connection with you lead others to experience your unconditional love and acceptance. Amen.

DAY 11 - True Friends

READ: Luke 8:1-3, Proverbs 27:17

REFLECT: Because of the emphasis that has historically been placed on the twelve men who accompanied Jesus as he taught and preached and healed, many people are unaware that women were also vital members of Jesus' ministry team. A disciple is someone who follows the teachings of leader. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and other women were Jesus' disciples, followers who not only sought to learn from Jesus but who also used their own resources to support him as he traveled. These women were Jesus' disciples and his friends.

Who do you follow? Who sharpens you? Who brings out the best in you? Do you have someone in your life who reminds you that you are loved and worthy, someone who encourages you to be your best self? Look for an opportunity to thank these folks, then find ways to pay it forward.

PONDER: Who can you support in the days to come, helping them to bloom and grow?

PRAY: God, thank you for the people in my life who are encouraging me on my recovery journey. May I be a blessing to them in the days to come, just as they have blessed me. Amen.

DAY 12 - Do You Love Me?

READ: John 21:15-19

REFLECT: In an heart-wrenching passage in the final chapter of the Gospel of John, Peter has a painful conversation with Jesus. On the night when Jesus was arrested, Peter failed his mentor miserably, denying him publicly three times. Now in this post-resurrection conversation, Jesus asks Peter a probing question: *"Do you love me?"* Jesus poses this question to Peter not once, not twice, but three times - paralleling the number of times Peter denied him.

Undoubtedly, Peter's mind was flooded with painful memories as regret surged to the surface. But Jesus' intent was not to shame Peter. Each time Peter responded to the question by affirming his love, Jesus extended an invitation: "Feed my lambs." "Shepherd my flock." "Feed my sheep." Peter's regret propelled him forward into a new chapter of life, a new phase of ministry. Peter accepted Jesus' invitation to shepherd Christ's followers. Jesus freed Peter from remaining stuck in the failures of his past. Jesus offered Peter a fresh start.

PONDER: What can you learn from an event you regret?

PRAY: God, thank you for offering me a fresh start. Help me to learn from my mistakes. Amen.

DAY 13 - Navigating Grief

READ: Ruth 1:1-18

REFLECT: Naomi experienced a staggering triad of grief - the death of her husband followed by the deaths of both of her sons. Grief upon grief upon grief. As she mourned, Naomi blamed God for her suffering. After returning home to Bethlehem, she informed her friends that she no longer wanted to be called Naomi, which means "pleasant." The new name she chose for herself in the midst of her grief was Mara, which means "bitter."

Naomi returned to Bethlehem bitter but not alone. Her daughter-in-law Ruth refused to leave her side, choosing to depart from her homeland and her family to support her mother-in-law. Ruth was grieving deeply, too - she had lost her beloved husband. Together, the women found that their grief was bearable. Together, the women found ways to support one another. Together, the women saw evidence of God's provision and care for them. With God's help, the women charted a path to healing and hope.

PONDER: Have you ever felt bitter toward God?

PRAY: God, comfort me as I grieve. Place people in my life who will walk alongside me, accompanying me as I navigate the pathways of grief. Amen.

DAY 14 - Coming Home

READ: Luke 15:11-32

REFLECT: This story is commonly known as the parable of the prodigal son. A parable is a simple story with a spiritual lesson, and Jesus often used parables as he taught his followers. Many people assume that the word “prodigal” means runaway, but the word actually means someone who is wastefully extravagant. The younger son demanded his inheritance, relocated to a distant land, and promptly wasted his newfound wealth.

After the younger son returned to his senses and recognized the error of his ways, he chose to return home. His loving father greeted him with open arms, generous gifts, and a joyful celebration. When the older son protested that his brother was undeserving of such grand gestures, his father declared, “We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” Although the older brother had never left home, he was lost in his own way, unable to receive the love that his father freely offered. Jesus’ story reminds us that we can always come home to God.

PONDER: Do you identify most with the younger brother or the older brother?

PRAY: God, thank you for welcoming me home when I come to my senses. Help me to be as merciful to others as you have been to me. Amen.

DAY 15 - Known and Forgiven

READ: Psalm 103:1-13

REFLECT: Lewis Smedes wrote, “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.” The psalmist takes comfort in the knowledge that the God who created him, the God who knows him intimately, is the same God who freely offers healing and forgiveness. The psalmist envisions his sins being cast away as far as the east is from the west. Forgiven and loved, the psalmist experiences spiritual freedom. With a joyful heart, he praises God.

Many of us find that it is easier to forgive others than to forgive ourselves. If the God who knows us better than we know ourselves can forgive us, why do we cling to the chains that keep us in bondage? Forgiveness is an often painful process. But as we learn to forgive ourselves, we can experience blessed relief, newfound peace, and spiritual renewal. Set yourself free. Embrace the freedom that accompanies forgiveness.

PONDER: What do you need to forgive yourself for today?

PRAY: God, help me to accept the forgiveness you freely offer. Help me to forgive myself. Amen.

DAY 16 - Antidote to Worry

READ: Matthew 6:25-34

REFLECT: Most of Jesus' sermons were delivered outside, and he used his surroundings to underscore his message. When a crowd gathered around him on a mountainside sloping down to the Sea of Galilee, Jesus pointed to the flowers blooming nearby and the birds soaring overhead. Pay attention to these things that God has created, he urged them, and remember that the same God created you. The God who feeds the birds and causes the flowers to grow cares for you. You can trust God to provide for your needs. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was teaching a simple grounding technique - an antidote for worry.

The people who heard Jesus preach that day were worried about many things. Jesus reminded them that worrying would not add a single hour to their lives. We now know that constant worrying can take a toll on us, not only on our mental health but also on our physical health. The next time you find yourself worrying about something, take Jesus' advice. Find something to look at that is a reminder of God's love for you. Remember how God has provided for your needs in the past. Trust that God will continue to care for you in the future.

PONDER: What grounding technique can you practice when you begin to feel worried?

PRAY: God, thank you for the flowers and the birds and other reminders of your care for your creation. Use these things to calm my worried spirit. Amen.

DAY 17 - Seasons of Life

READ: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

REFLECT: Did the song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" come to mind as you read these verses? The preacher who wrote Ecclesiastes composed a litany of contrasts: birth and death, planting and harvesting, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing. We experience multiple seasons of life simultaneously. Which stage of life are you in: young adulthood, middle age, or senior? If you are a parent, is your child an infant, toddler, preschooler, elementary age, pre-teen, adolescent, or young adult? If you are married, how would you describe this stage of your relationship?

As you reflect on these words from Ecclesiastes, which ones describe your experiences thus far in recovery? What is being born in you and what needs to die? What seeds are you planting during treatment? What evidence of healing do you see? What are you mourning? What are you celebrating? For everything there is a season. This is the season for recovery.

PONDER: Which seasons of life are you in?

PRAY: God, help me to sense your loving presence during every season of life. Guide me as I move deeper into this season of recovery. Amen.

DAY 18 - Love Yourself

READ: Mark 12:28-34

REFLECT: When a religious expert asked Jesus to identify the most important commandment, Jesus responded by naming two: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. But when we break these two commandments down carefully, we find that a third one is hidden in plain sight: *Love yourself*. What does that look like for you?

We are often our own worst critics. We can quickly list our faults and failures. Constant negative chatter can easily become the soundtrack that underscores our days. If you have trouble believing that God loves you, then you will likely have difficulty loving yourself. If you believe that you are unlovable, then your capacity for loving others will be diminished. Since love is an action, not just a feeling, learning to love ourselves requires us to practice compassionate self-care. When negative self-talk creeps into your mind, stop and think about what you would say to a friend or family member who was in the same situation. As we intentionally care for ourselves, our love for ourselves will flourish.

PONDER: What will you do today to care for yourself?

PRAY: God, teach me to love myself like you love me. Help me to practice self-compassion and self-care. Amen.

DAY 19 - Rock, Fortress, Deliverer

READ: Psalm 18:1-19

REFLECT: The psalmist vividly recounts the threats he has faced at the hands of his enemies. When his life hung in the balance, the psalmist cried out to God for help, and God responded. The words he uses to describe God are powerful: strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, shield. The images he uses to portray God's divine rescue are memorable: earthquake, smoke, flames, glowing coals, dark storm clouds, hailstones, thunder and lightning. The psalmist's imagination depicts a God who has the power to save.

The psalmist's words can easily be used to illustrate of the perils of addiction. Your drug of choice is the enemy seeking to destroy you. Recovery is indeed a matter of life and death. God desires to rescue you, bringing you to a place of safety, a spacious place where you can grow and thrive. God can be a source of strength in recovery - a rock, a fortress, a deliverer. Cry out to God for help when you need it, and praise God when you receive it.

PONDER: How has addiction threatened to destroy you?

PRAY: God, I need your help on my journey of recovery. Please be my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer. Amen.

DAY 20 - Shared Faith

READ: Luke 5:17-26

REFLECT: Do you think the paralyzed man asked his friends to take him to see Jesus? Or did these four friends decide as a group that they wanted to bring their paralyzed friend to the miracle-working man? Whatever the case, the man's healing was a cooperative effort that required perseverance. When the friends realized they could not enter the over-crowded house where Jesus was teaching, they were not deterred. They somehow managed to lift their paralyzed friend onto the roof, dug a hole in the roof, and lowered him carefully through the opening they had created so that he was finally face-to-face with Jesus.

"When Jesus saw their faith, he said the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" Pay attention to that sentence. Jesus noticed the faith of those who had gone to great lengths to access healing for their friend. Also notice that this was a two-fold healing: spiritual and physical. We are spiritual beings, and we need spiritual healing as much as we need physical and emotional healing.

PONDER: Did you find your way to The Next Door on your own, or did others help you access healing?

PRAY: God, thank you for bringing me to a place where I can access healing. Help me to make the most of this opportunity. Amen.

DAY 21 - A Fresh Start

READ: Psalm 51:1-12

REFLECT: The first sinful act didn't seem to be harmful in King David's eyes, those eyes that lusted after another man's wife. The second sinful act was a power play, as the king abused his authority and sent his men to bring the powerless Bathsheba to him. Later, when he learned that she was pregnant, he attempted to cover up his sins, a scheme that led to the murder of her husband. The consequences of our sins often escalate beyond what we can imagine.

Only after Nathan the prophet confronted him did King David understand the scope of his sinful actions. We are often blind to how our actions have harmed others and ourselves. Psalm 51 is believed by scholars to be David's confession, his lament over his sins, his plea for forgiveness. David seeks spiritual cleansing. He longs for a fresh start. In this prayer, David professes his desire for a willing heart and a right spirit. Although he may have felt that he was beyond redemption, David cried out to the God of all compassion for forgiveness.

PONDER: What would a fresh start look like for you?

PRAY: God, create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. Amen.

DAY 22 - Making Amends

READ: Luke 19:1-10

REFLECT: As the chief tax collector in Jericho, Zacchaeus would have been despised by his Jewish neighbors. As a representative of the oppressive Roman government, he took advantage of his position of power by stealing money from his neighbors when he demanded they pay more money than they actually owed in taxes. Thus, Zacchaeus became a wealthy man at his neighbors' expense.

Along came Jesus. Zacchaeus likely was suspicious of this traveling preacher. The Roman authorities suspected that Jesus might attempt to overthrow the government, which would mean that Zacchaeus would be out of a job. Jesus stunned Zacchaeus by calling him by name and inviting himself over for dinner. That meal transformed the tax collector's life. We don't know what he and Jesus talked about, but Zacchaeus was so moved by his encounter with Jesus that he was eager to make amends to those he had harmed. He would redistribute his wealth, paying back what he had stolen. He would share his money with the poor in his community. This is a picture of radical transformation. This is what repentance looks like.

PONDER: Who do you need to make amends to when the time is right?

PRAY: God, give me the courage to make amends to those I have offended without injuring or harming them further. Continue your transformative work in my life. Amen.

DAY 23 - Lament and Longing

READ: Psalm 13:1-6

REFLECT: Can you relate to the psalmist's prayer of desperation? We don't know what has happened in his life, but his pain is palpable. He feels like God has abandoned him. His body, mind, and spirit have been worn down by his ongoing struggles. He senses that his enemies are mocking him, delighting in his downfall. How long will this continue? How long must he suffer?

But then the psalmist's lament gives way to praise. He still prays. He still believes that God will come to his aid. The psalmist trusts in God's unfailing love and anticipates God's rescue. This season of struggle will not last forever, even though it feels unbearable and never-ending. God is working in ways the psalmist cannot imagine. The sparkle will return to the psalmist's eyes and a song will return to his lips. Rescue will come. Healing will come. God has not forgotten him. God has not forgotten you.

PONDER: Have you ever felt abandoned by God?

PRAY: God, give me signs that remind me that you are at work in my life bringing healing and hope. Help me to trust in your unfailing love. Amen.

DAY 24 - The Poor in Spirit

READ: Matthew 5:3-10

REFLECT: This passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is known as the Beatitudes. This list of those who are blessed seems counterintuitive: How can someone who is mourning be blessed? How can someone who is being persecuted be blessed? When Jesus stood on the mountainside by the Sea of Galilee, he looked out at a sea of people who fit into all of these categories: the mourners, the persecuted, the peacemakers, the justice-seekers, the merciful, the humble, the pure of heart, the poor in spirit.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Father Richard Rohr equates being poor in spirit with powerlessness. These are Step 1 people who recognize that they need help from their Higher Power to heal and recover their God-given wholeness. All of the Beatitudes describe people who are in need of divine help. When we reach out to God, we experience the blessedness of connection with the One who created us, the One who loves us, the One who sustains us.

PONDER: Which of the Beatitudes resonates the most with you today?

PRAY: God, help me to embrace my powerlessness. As I seek your help, may I experience the blessings of being in relationship with you. Amen.

DAY 25 - A Wise Woman

READ: Joshua 2:1-21

REFLECT: Rahab was a wise woman who seized the opportunity to save herself and her family from an invading army. She kept her promise to protect the Israelite spies and trusted that they would, in turn, keep the promise they made to her to protect her family. She hung the scarlet rope from her window as a sign to them, a reminder of their deal. The spies kept their word, and Rahab and her family were unharmed when the war broke out.

The Israelites welcomed Rahab into their community, and she married an Israelite named Salmon. Rahab and Salmon had a baby boy named Boaz. As an adult, Rahab's son Boaz would show mercy to another foreign woman - Ruth, daughter-in-law of Naomi. Both Rahab and Ruth's names are found in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). A prostitute from Jericho became the great-great-grandmother of King David, a forerunner of Jesus Christ. What a story!

PONDER: What surprises you the most about this story?

PRAY: God, help me to trust that you are at work in my life in mysterious ways. Help me to be a wise woman. Amen.

DAY 26 - The Lord's Prayer

READ: Matthew 6:7-13

REFLECT: This passage of Scripture is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer. A similar version is found in Luke 11:1-4. In some churches, these words are recited by the congregation every Sunday. In the Catholic tradition, this prayer is known by its first two words: Our Father. Though this prayer can certainly be prayed by individuals, the words are communal in nature. As a community we ask our Father to give us our daily bread, forgive us, lead us, and deliver us.

This prayer is a reminder that we do not exist in isolation. God created us to live in community. Our actions have consequences not only for us but also for those around us. This prayer recognizes God as the One who provides for our daily needs, the One who forgives our sins, the One who leads us away from the things that tempt us, the One who delivers us from evil. When we pray these words together, we are strengthened spiritually as individuals and as a community.

PONDER: What temptations do I need to be aware of today?

PRAY: God, thank you for giving us what we need each day. Give us the strength to overcome temptations that could harm us and our community. Amen.

DAY 27 - A Prescription for Healing

READ: 2 Kings 5:1-14

REFLECT: Naaman was a powerful man who commanded an army, but he lacked the power to heal himself of leprosy. In this fascinating story, a slave girl is the wise one who points Naaman to the source of healing. This unnamed girl had heard of a prophet of God named Elisha, and she was confident that Elisha could cure Naaman of his leprosy.

Naaman was offended when Elisha offered words of instruction via a messenger rather than appearing before him in person. At first, he angrily resisted following directions, but his servants spoke calming words of wisdom to him: *If the prophet had told you to do something hard to be healed, wouldn't you have done it? Why won't you follow these simple instructions?* Naaman then headed to the Jordan River and washed himself seven times. Naaman experienced the healing he sought when he humbled himself and followed the prophet's instructions.

PONDER: How have you resisted following instructions that could lead to your healing?

PRAY: God, teach me to follow the instructions that will help me to heal. Thank you for everyone who is working to help me on my recovery journey. Amen.

DAY 28 - Do You Want to Be Healed?

READ: John 5:1-15

REFLECT: Can you imagine showing up at the same doctor's office day after day for 38 years seeking healing, yet finding no relief? That's effectively what this man has done by positioning himself near the pool of Bethesda, whose waters were believed to have healing powers. The man's physical limitations prevented him from getting into the pool at the right moment. Still, day after day, he held out hope for healing. He stayed near the pool.

One day a stranger approached the man and asked him a seemingly ridiculous question: *Do you want to be healed?* Surely the man's presence at the pool was evidence that he wanted to be well. Then the stranger spoke with authority: "Get up. Pick up your mat and walk." The man faced a critical decision at that point: Would he follow the instructions of this stranger or continue to linger by this pool where he had found no relief? A new opportunity for healing had presented itself, and the man didn't waste it. He was willing to be healed. Because of Jesus, the man was restored to wholeness. His life would never be the same again.

PONDER: What evidence can you point to that shows that you want to be healed?

PRAY: God, help me to do the next right thing on my recovery journey. May others see clear evidence of the healing that is occurring in my life. Amen.

DAY 29 - New Mercies

READ: Lamentations 3:19-24

REFLECT: The writer of the old hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness" drew inspiration from this passage. A lament is a passionate expression of grief or sorrow, and in this book of laments, the anonymous author mourns on behalf of his people. The Israelites have been conquered by the Babylonians. Their holy city of Jerusalem has been destroyed by the invaders, their beloved Temple burned. Many of the Israelites have been forced out of their homes, taken captive by the Babylonians, and forced to live as exiles in a distant land.

Even as he pours out his lament with a broken heart, the writer of this passage still clings to hope. God has been faithful in the past. Even though the Israelites' circumstances have changed, God's character has not. Even in the midst of suffering, they have reason to praise God, for God's mercies are new each day. God is with them. God is faithful.

PONDER: When have you been aware of God's mercy in the midst of suffering?

PRAY: God, thank you for your great love and faithfulness. Help me to recognize your new mercies each day. Amen.

DAY 30 - Go in Peace

READ: Luke 7:36-50

REFLECT: A woman with a bad reputation interrupted a dinner party where Jesus was the guest of honor. Simon, the host of the dinner, was appalled as he watched her anoint Jesus' feet with perfume and tears. Why would Jesus allow a "sinful" woman to do such a thing, he wondered? Simon clearly felt morally superior to this woman.

Even though Simon didn't verbalize his disdain for the woman, Jesus knew his heart. The story Jesus told him made it clear that the woman's actions were motivated by her grateful heart. We don't know when she first encountered Jesus. We don't know why she was labeled in her community as a sinful woman. But her extravagant gesture makes it clear to us that Jesus had changed her life. No matter what labels others affixed to her, she knew her true identity. She was loved. She was worthy. Forgiveness had freed her. Faith had saved her. Now she could experience the peace of God.

PONDER: What can you do today to express your gratitude to God?

PRAY: God, when I focus on the mistakes I have made, help me to remember that you forgive my sins. Help me to go in peace, assured of your love and forgiveness. Amen.

DAY 31 - A Hope and a Future

READ: Jeremiah 29:10-14

REFLECT: Through the prophet Jeremiah, God sought to reassure the Israelites with a promise. They would not live in bondage forever. Although it appeared that their Babylonian captors were in control of their destiny, the all-powerful God was at work in ways the Israelites could not understand or imagine. God had heard their prayers. They would one day be able to return home. God had plans to give them a hope and a future.

When you seek God with your whole heart, you will find God. When you pray to God, you can be assured that God hears you. God may answer your prayers in a surprising way. You will not be in bondage forever. God wants you to be free.

PONDER: Do you believe that God has plans to give you a hope and a future?

PRAY: God, I am seeking you. Help me to trust that you have plans to prosper me and not to harm me, plans to give me a hope and a future. Amen.