

# Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings  
Lent Week Two, 2026



A reminder of our Lenten focus: "Listen. Pay Attention. Choose."

**Sunday, March 1:** *The LORD said to Abram: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you...you will be a blessing"* (Gn 12:1-4).

At the end of Chapter 11 in Genesis, we read Terah, Abraham's father, took Abram, Sarai, and his grandson, Lot (and presumably his other son Nahor and his family) out of Ur "to go to the land of Canaan." Instead, they settled in what is known as Haran, named after Terah's third son who had died. There are wildly different assessments of the distance they traveled, but after Terah dies, God calls Abram to continue the journey to their original destination of Canaan.

**Provision: PAY ATTENTION to the promptings of the Spirit.** Imagine you are Abram. You've already left the land of your kinsfolk and are now being called to venture far from your father's house, to leave behind all you've known and set out toward something new. Of course, the world was made up of nomadic tribes, so such migrations were common, but let's think of this metaphorically. The Spirit is always calling us to grow, to expand our understanding, to come closer to God, and that might mean leaving behind what we've known. We know Abram retained some of the customs of his ancestors, but he continued to follow the promptings of the Spirit, becoming an example and a blessing for all his progeny. Is the Spirit calling you to leave some things behind, to venture out into something new?

**Monday, March 2:** *"Justice, O Lord, is on your side; we are shamefaced even to this day"* (Dn 9:4-10).

Last week, my daughter and I spent the day at the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama (US). The museum is the brainchild of Bryan Stevenson, the author of the book, *Just Mercy* (made into a movie of the same name). It is the history of the African slave trade in the Americas, focusing on the lasting impacts of slavery in the United States "even to this day." It is a somber and sobering story, but one that I think all people—and not just Americans—should give witness to. In the current climate of revisionist history being perpetrated from the highest levels of government, the truth must be fiercely defended. (<https://legacysites.eji.org/about/museum/>).

**Provision: CHOOSE truth.** There is a quote from Thomas Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* that ironically comes to mind whenever I confront the sinfulness of humanity. In describing what is known as his "Fourth and Walnut" experience, Merton writes, *"I have the immense joy of being human, a member of a race in which God became incarnate."* I think about this in light of our collective sin and I am shamefaced. Shamefaced before God that we continue to mock Jesus, to crucify him by our cruelty and hate. Justice is on God's side and justice will be harsh if we turn away from the truth and fail to change our hearts. *"You need only claim the events of your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done ... you are fierce with reality"* (Florida Scott-Maxwell, from *The Measure of My Days*). (To read Merton's uplifting meditation to change your heart, go to <https://tinyurl.com/3j4h4596>).

**Tuesday, March 3:** *"Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool"* (Is 1:10, 16-20).

I am reading a fascinating book right now, *The Soul Also Keeps the Score*, by Fr. Robert McChesney, SJ. Fr. Rob suggests using the life of St. Ignatius (and his Spiritual Exercises) as a basis for spiritual directors and pastoral counselors and caregivers to work with those who have suffered spiritual injury or trauma. This type of injury can come from influences outside a person or, as is the case with Ignatius, a person's own history of sinfulness (he may be the only saint on record who has a criminal record!). The Exercises of St. Ignatius offer retreatants a place of growth from sin, to turn what is burning "scarlet, crimson red" in our lives into fodder and fertile ground for beautiful blossoming in God's mercy.

**Provision: LISTEN to God's invitation.** I'll share again this wonderful song by David Wilcox. It's called "Hard Part," and I like to imagine Jesus is singing: *"You think your shame and deep disgrace is more than I can bear. But you can go to your darkest place and I will meet you there. Cause I'm strong enough to take it and I know what you've been through. You've got a whole heart. Give me the hard part. I can love that too"* (David Wilcox, 2006; give the whole song a listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRnNLaQRG70>). Think of it as God's invitation to you.

Throughout Scripture, Old and New Testaments, God is continually encouraging us to seek forgiveness and to reconcile with God. If you suffer shame or guilt for past transgressions or because of sins committed against you, open up to God's invitation. Find a trusted friend, spiritual companion, or pastoral counselor to accompany you. Consider doing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius with a director trained to lead you. (You can go to <https://www.jesuits.global/where-we-are/> and follow the links to find out more and locate a program or director in your area or to companion you virtually.)

**Wednesday, March 4:** *"Come, let us contrive a plot against Jeremiah. It will not mean the loss of instruction from the priests, nor of counsel from the wise, nor of messages from the prophets. And so, let us destroy him by his own tongue; let us carefully note his every word"* (Jer 18:18-20).

"Come, let us plot against people and their leaders who think differently than 'us.' Our pundits, our leaders, our news media will continue to echo the messages that support our point of view. And so, let's keep track of everything our opponents say; or, even better, let's use AI to put words in their mouths or create images to destroy them!"

**Provision: PAY ATTENTION. LISTEN to Jesus.** Those of my vintage will remember the song, "Heard it through the Grapevine:" *"People say believe half of what you see, son, and none of what you hear."* AI makes "believe half of what you see" foolish now! The attack on truth comes from all sides of the political spectrum, and from those outside the system looking to create anarchy. This is why direct, honest, and respectful dialogue is crucial among opponents. This is why God's words from the high mountain on Sunday are essential: *"This is my beloved son. Listen to him."*

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**Thursday, March 5:** *"Cursed be the man who trusts in humans, and makes mortal flesh his strong arm. He shall be like an arid shrub in the desert, and he shall not see when good things come. He shall dwell in scorched places in the wilderness, a barren land that cannot be settled"* (Jer 17:5-10, Hebrew translation).

*"A barren land that cannot be settled."* These words spoke to me today. There's been a lot in the news about people worldwide feeling unsettled, disquieted. Things we have come to know; things, frankly, we have taken for granted, are being yanked out from under us. We talked Tuesday about Fr. Rob's book on trauma and its impact on the soul. For many around the world, this trauma is real—wars, immigration raids, political and criminal violence. If you are fortunate like me, this doesn't amount to trauma as much as it is disconcerting. Perhaps it is an opportunity to take stock in how much I trust in human beings. Perhaps it is time to renew my trust in the Lord.

**Provision: CHOOSE to trust in God.** In writing a few years ago, I asked God, "If I'm not supposed to trust in human beings, why did you put so many around me?!" Community is essential in these times of displacement, and being in community requires a level of faith and trust in others. But, when all else fails—and sometimes, it does—God alone is our anchor and our strength. Pray each morning that your faith and trust in God will increase and bear fruit.

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**Friday, March 6:** *Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age... They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver* (Gn 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28).

As a follow-up to yesterday's reflection, have you ever considered how quickly Joseph's life gets torn apart? Here he is in his special "favored son" tunic, and in a matter of hours or days, he's sold as a slave. Think about people in areas plagued by war who have gone from living a comfortable life to abject poverty in a matter of months. I think about families in my own country working and contributing to their communities who now, in a matter of weeks, are afraid of leaving the house for fear they will be sent to some far-off detention center or land. Life can change in a split second. How do we ground ourselves when our world is falling apart? How do we help those whose lives are turned upside down?

**Provision: Pray for the courage to PAY ATTENTION.** Yes, it takes courage to pay attention, to look reality in the eyes and acknowledge what is happening. Otherwise, we are, as imagined in Matthew and Luke, like those eating and drinking and making merry before the flood. And we need extra courage to look beyond our own situations to see reality through the eyes of the oppressed. We can't assume to know how they feel and what they need. Look for opportunities in your community to work WITH and FOR those in need or whose lives have been up-ended.

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**Saturday, March 7:** *"He pardons all your iniquities, he heals all your ills. ...far has he put our transgressions from us"* (Ps 103).

I'm working on a retreat I will be co-leading soon on forgiveness: "Unbind him and let him go free." It's about God's forgiveness, self-forgiveness, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness and reconciliation in community; a huge subject on which we will only scratch the surface. Some people are troubled by the thought they have to "forgive and forget." It's hard enough to forgive...but to forget? That can seem impossible. Even if we have accepted God's forgiveness and forgiven ourselves, we can hold onto the memory of sin, our own or those committed against us, keeping ourselves bound by the past, holding transgressions tightly rather than letting God cast them afar.

**Provision: CHOOSE to unbind yourself and others.** I've had many surgeries in my life and so have many scars. There are two ways to look at scars: to focus on the pain associated with them, the difficult recovery, the fear of recurrence of disease or injury; or, to give thanks for healing and for the skills of my care-givers. The scar remains. Does it remind me of hurt or of healing? Make a choice today to let go of one hurt you still hold. Pray God will help you find growth and healing. *"God says to us, 'By thy very wounds, I will heal thee'"* (The Talmud).

