



Approaching God

Begin your time with an opening prayer

Take a moment to quiet your heart and ask God to help you experience his presence today. Ask Him to free you from any distractions as you begin to read and meditate on today's passages.

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation - Slowly Read the Following Passages

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words.

Jonah 3

1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: **2** "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you." **3** So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the Lord's command. Now Nineveh was an extremely large city, a three-day walk. **4** Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, "In 40 days Nineveh will be overthrown!" **5** The men of Nineveh believed in God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth-from the greatest of them to the least. **6** When word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. **7** Then he issued a decree in Nineveh: By order of the king and his nobles: No man or beast, herd or flock, is to taste anything at all. They must not eat or drink water. **8** Furthermore, both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth, and everyone must call out earnestly to God. Each must turn from his evil ways and from the violence he is doing. **9** Who knows? God may turn and relent; He may turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish. **10** Then God saw their actions-that they had turned from their evil ways-so God relented from the disaster He had threatened to do to them. And He did not do it.

Luke 19:1-10

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. **2** There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. **3** He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man. **4** So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since He was about to pass that way. **5** When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, because today I must stay at your house." **6** So he quickly came

down and welcomed Him joyfully. **7** All who saw it began to complain, "He's gone to lodge with a sinful man!" **8** But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord! And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much!" **9** "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus told him, "because he too is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

Acts 9:26-31

21 But all who heard him were astounded and said, "Isn't this the man who, in Jerusalem, was destroying those who called on this name, and then came here for the purpose of taking them as prisoners to the chief priests?" **22** But Saul grew more capable, and kept confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this One is the Messiah. **23** After many days had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him, **24** but their plot became known to Saul. So they were watching the gates day and night intending to kill him, **25** but his disciples took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through [an opening in] the wall. **26** When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple. **27** Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how, on the road, Saul had seen the Lord, and that He had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. **28** Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. **29** He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they attempted to kill him. **30** When the brothers found out, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. **31** So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in numbers.

Thoughts to Ponder - Making Room for the Lost Cause

Read the short essay from Russ Ramsey - <https://hereadstruth.com/2019/05/17/making-room-for-the-lost-cause/>

I have a pastor friend who used to say, “Except for the grace of God, at any given moment, every one of us is less than a week away from virtually ruining our lives.” For some of us, we crossed that line a long time ago. Do you believe you are your past? That the bad things you’ve done have so defined who you are that you will never be anyone other than the screw-up who made all those mistakes and committed all those sins? Do you know anyone who believes this about themselves and needs to be brought in out of the relational cold?

The apostle Paul was a man like this. Before his conversion, he was committed to ridding the world of Christians. Then, he was converted to Christ by Jesus Himself while traveling to Damascus to round up Christians and have them put to death. If there ever were a lost cause, Paul was it. Three years after his conversion but before he had begun his ministry to the Roman world, Paul traveled to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles in that city. They were wary of him; they had every reason to be. After all, Paul had overseen the stoning death of Stephen, one of the deacons in the Jerusalem church.

Barnabas likely knew Stephen personally, since they were both part of the church from its early days. And now he was being told Paul had become a Christian. Embracing Paul must have been complicated for Barnabas. Making room for Paul cost him something. He would have had to personally forgive Paul for the pain and suffering he had caused. Barnabas had felt the heat of the persecution Paul had ignited years before. Some of Barnabas’s close friends had been martyred, others tortured, and others were still living as exiles because of Paul’s behavior.

Not only did Barnabas need to forgive Paul, he also had to believe in Paul’s call to minister the very gospel he once worked so hard to destroy. He had to trust that Paul was not a wolf trying to come in among the sheep Barnabas loved. So what did Barnabas do? He spoke with Paul and sought out the genuineness of his faith. He soon became convinced that the God who had raised Jesus from the dead had also given new life to this infamous Pharisee. So Barnabas took Paul by the hand and led him before the apostles. He stood as one with Paul, lending his own reputation in order to affirm God’s work in Paul’s life. When Barnabas put his arm around Paul, he wasn’t just confirming Paul’s calling to the apostles; he was confirming it to Paul too. This is a beautiful picture of what it looks like to bring someone who feels like a lost cause in out of the cold. Hospitality for the lost cause can cost us something, and it usually involves risk. So why should we do it? Because Jesus did. And because none of us are very far from finding ourselves in the same place—where we’ve failed or sinned in some way that leaves us dependent on the kindness of a friend to pull us up from the pit of shame and accusation.

Daily Reflection Questions

1. Why does Scripture urge us to welcome the Lost Cause?
2. Who is a specific person in your life you have written off as a lost cause? What are some specific things you could do to make room for this person?

Close in Prayer:

Pray for this person. Ask God to give you a soft heart toward this person, and pray for mutual humility, restoration, and repentance.