



tearfund

Discover God's heart for restoration

Lent devotional 2024
Reflections, stories and prayers



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Lent Devotional 2024

Week 1: God of restoration

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”* (which means *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*) When some of those standing there heard this, they said, *“He’s calling Elijah.”*

Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, *“Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”* And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, *“Surely he was the Son of God!”*

Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.

Matthew 27:45–55

Reflection

God is a restorer. He always has been. Throughout the Old Testament, and all the way to Revelation, there is a thread running through the Bible: God is making all things new.

This is good news for us all in such difficult times. As wars rage around the world, the cost of living rises, and our world seems to be getting darker, restoration is something we long for deep in our bones.

It's our human nature to want things to be better. Whether it's on a global scale, or closer to home, we know things are not as they should be.

In the gospels we read story after story of Jesus restoring people to their God-given potential. He was showing them a glimpse of God's kingdom and his plan to renew all things.

Kamona's story

We see this every day in Tearfund's work with local churches around the world. God is restoring hope for people living in extreme poverty, like Kamona in Bangladesh. Through training from Tearfund's local partner, made possible by supporters like you, her community were able to provide her with a fishing net and equipment. She is now able to go fishing every day, and sell her fish at the local market to earn an income and support her family.

This Lent, we'll spend time praying for the restoration we long to see across the world, and in our own lives. But as we do, let's not forget the greatest miracle of all—that God has restored our relationship with him.

'At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.'

Matthew 27:51

In today's passage, the curtain of the temple is torn in two. Everything that separated us from God is destroyed. God's power and love have had the final say. He has overcome the power of sin and death, and restored us to a loving relationship with him.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we have been invited into his story of restoration. We long for the day when Jesus will return to make all things new. But as we wait, God is inviting us to partner with him, to pray and work towards restoration here on earth.

Discussion questions

1. What does restoration mean to you?
2. Where do you long to see God bring restoration in your life? What might God be saying to you about it? Ask him to speak hope into your heart today.
3. Where do you long to see God bring restoration in the world? How might God be inviting you to be part of that restoration?

Prayer

Father God,

Thank you for restoring me to a loving relationship with you through Jesus.

Thank you that the curtain has been torn, and I am yours forever.

I long to see your restoration in every area of my life. [Bring to mind people or situations that need God to break through.]

Would you fill me with hope and faith that you really can restore all things.

In Jesus' name, amen.



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Week 2: Restored relationships

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptising more disciples than John – although in fact it was not Jesus who baptised, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'

'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?'

Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'

He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'

'I have no husband,' she replied.

Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'

'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'

'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.'

Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you – I am he.'

John 4:1–26

Reflection

Have you ever experienced the pain of a broken relationship?

The Bible tells us we are made for loving relationships with one another. God is love, and **'we love because he first loved us'**. (1 John 4:19)

But what happens when relationships don't work? When people let us down or disappoint us? Whether it's a friend, family member or partner, sometimes the people closest to us can cause the most hurt. And if we're honest, even with the best intentions, we can disappoint and hurt others too.

Throughout this devotional series, we will see that God is in the business of mending what is broken and bringing restoration, even when it seems impossible.

Some relationships might not be fully healed until Jesus returns, and for others, it might not be healthy or wise for us to try and repair them. It can be painful to let go. But the season of Lent reminds us that there is hope among the brokenness. That even as we wait in the wilderness, we can know the comfort of God's presence.

In today's reading, Jesus meets a woman who has experienced a string of broken relationships. In her culture this would have been a source of shame and isolation from other people. But Jesus, who knew all about her brokenness, didn't judge her. He came close. He reminded her of her God-given potential.

Jesus restored her dignity, and as a result she received salvation and brought her whole village to Jesus! She went from broken relationships to helping others restore their relationships with God.

Komola's story

At Tearfund we see God restoring relationships all around the world through our work with local churches. Komola in Bangladesh used to have difficult relationships with her friends, family and neighbours. But when she attended Tearfund's Bible training at her church, made possible by supporters like you, her life and relationships were completely transformed.

**'We love because
he first loved us.'**

1 John 4:19

Broken relationships are not God's plan. Where might God want to bring healing and wholeness in your relationships? Spend a few moments in silence, and ask him to speak to you.

Discussion questions

1. Are there any relationships in your life that need God's healing? Is there anyone you need to forgive, or ask for forgiveness?
2. Are there relationships in your community that need restoring?
3. Where might God be inviting you to reach out to someone and bring restoration to a relationship?

Prayer

Father God,
Thank you for showing me your perfect love through Jesus Christ.
I give my relationships to you, and ask that where there is brokenness, your love would break through.
Where I feel hurt, would you bring me healing.
Where I feel like giving up, would you give me hope.
And when I am wronged, help me to forgive as you have so graciously forgiven me.
In Jesus' name, amen.



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Week 3: Restored health

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned round in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'

'You see the people crowding against you,' his disciples answered, 'and yet you can ask, "Who touched me?"'

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'

Mark 5:25–34

Reflection

Sometimes when we come to God in prayer, we can feel a bit like this woman as she peers and reaches through the crowd. Have you ever felt that way? Weary. Desperate. Tired of waiting for an answer. Maybe even ashamed. Noise and busyness all around you. You worry your voice will be drowned out. Can God even hear you?

But look at Jesus' response. He notices the woman immediately. He turns towards her and speaks to her directly. You can just imagine the kindness and attentiveness in his face, as the whole crowd hushes, shocked by the intimacy of the moment. Jesus didn't just heal her physical body. He healed her from shame as he publicly recognised her dignity and worth.

Jesus sees you, just as he saw this woman. He's paying careful attention to you. And he wants to restore you. Body, mind and soul.

'Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'

Mark 5:34

Are you waiting for healing? Perhaps for yourself, or someone close to you?

Lent is a season of waiting. Of feeling the tension between darkness and light. We know God's kingdom has come in part, but we long to see it in its fullness. We long for the day when Jesus returns and we will receive total healing, in body, mind and soul.

But as we wait, we can receive Jesus' comfort right here and now. Just like the woman in this passage, you can come to him with confidence, just as you are. Why not picture someone in your mind who needs healing, and as you pray for them, picture Jesus' kindness and attentiveness as he turns towards them.

Discussion questions

1. Have you ever been in a season of 'waiting'? What gives you comfort in those times?
2. How do you feel about praying for healing for yourself or others?
3. Are there any stories of healing from the Bible, or from people you know, that have encouraged you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus,

Thank you that you see me, and you're never too busy to hear me.

I picture you now, turning towards me with love and kindness.

I ask for your healing for *[pray for someone by name, or for yourself]*, in body, mind and soul.

And as I wait, help me to know the comfort of your presence.

Thank you for your promise that one day, you will make all things new.

In Jesus' name, amen.



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Week 4: Restored calling

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

John 21:15–19

Reflection

In today’s passage, we meet with Jesus’ beloved disciple Peter, who is dealing with the consequences of sin, shame and despair. Before Jesus’ crucifixion, he denied his Lord three times, despite boldly declaring that he was willing to die with Jesus. And now, in the season of waiting that follows Jesus’ death, the disciples

can no longer bring themselves to go out and fish for people. They've gone back to simply fishing... for fish.

But miraculously, after their failed attempt at sea, the resurrected Jesus appears on the shore, inviting them to a meal on the beach. Peter runs ahead to greet his Lord. This is a meal of reconciliation. In three simple commands – 'Feed my lambs', 'Take care of my sheep' and 'Feed my sheep' – Jesus restores Peter to his calling. He reminds him of the privilege of partnering with God in his work of provision, restoration and hope.

Sometimes, we disqualify ourselves from God's work because of past mistakes or present circumstances. We start out with excitement and good intentions, but at some point we trip and fall. Jesus' response to Peter – and to *us* when *we fall* – is not to abandon or reject us. It is to invite us back into a loving relationship with himself.

In asking Peter three times, 'Do you love me?' Jesus encourages his disciple to voice out loud where his true loyalty lies. And in the wake of that declaration, Jesus invites Peter to live out this love practically in care and compassion for his people.

Restoration in Bangladesh

At Tearfund, we believe that each one of us has a part to play in showing God's compassion to others. Poverty is not God's plan. You are. And thanks to supporters like you, God is using his church to transform the lives of people living in poverty all over the world. In Bangladesh, the local church is at the heart of bringing restoration to whole communities.

As Christians we are to be concerned less with our own performance and more with God's call, less with our mistakes and more with God's motivating mercy. This doesn't mean that what we do doesn't matter. It does. But what matters more is what Jesus does with our flawed actions, insufficient efforts, and struggling attempts. He redeems and restores them for his glory.

Discussion questions

1. Where might previous mistakes and sin be holding you back from following God's calling on your life? You can offer them to the Lord in prayer, asking for his forgiveness.
2. Who might God be calling you to 'feed' or 'take care' of? How can you show them the love of Jesus in a practical way?
3. Are there any injustices in the world that particularly move you with compassion? How can you support these causes in prayer or action?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your power and willingness to restore and call me back to the work of your kingdom, even when I fall short.

Would you open my eyes to the ways I can partner with you to glorify your name and work for justice for my neighbour.

I'm sorry for the times I have denied you through the things I've thought, done, or not done.

I receive your forgiveness.

King Jesus, come and renew my vision for compassion so that I can be bold in feeding your lambs and taking care of your sheep.

In Jesus' name, amen.



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Week 5: Restored creation

'This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from the evil one."

Matthew 6:9–13

Reflection

Signs of spring are popping up a little earlier every year. We see this in the leaves and flowers that seek to burst and bloom ever sooner, only to be bitten by a late frost. Our climate, and our world, is changing.

At Tearfund, we see the impact that our changing climate has on people living in poverty. They often face more frequent storms, droughts and floods, which destroy homes, crops and livestock. And we know this does not reflect God's good design for his creation.

In Matthew 6:10, Jesus teaches us to pray '**your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven**'. At the heart of this prayer is a sense that the earth, and everyone in it, matters – that's why we long for the will of God to be done here.

It's a big question: what is the will of God? In scripture, we learn of his ongoing restoration story for the whole of creation. This is the story that began in a garden (Genesis 2) and will play out for eternity in a garden city (Revelation 22). God spoke into life a world of perfect harmony – between himself, humankind and the rest of creation. But that peace was broken when sin entered the world.

The climate is just one of the ways that we see this brokenness, with pollution and biodiversity crises combining to threaten the air, land, water, plants and animals that the Creator loves and we all rely on. Creation is groaning. How do we respond?

Churches at the heart of change

Through Tearfund's work with communities around the world, we see examples every day of the church being a powerful agent for change. Churches and communities in the midst of this crisis are also innovating solutions, such as farming techniques that produce more food and reduce carbon emissions.

Explore ways that you and your church community can also play your part in caring for the whole of creation in our new Restorative Revolution Bible studies: learn.tearfund.org/restorative-revolution

We're so grateful to supporters like you who are already joining Tearfund in this work. Although it takes courage, knowing we may not reap the harvest of this work in our lifetime, we can follow Jesus' example of love and sacrifice, knowing we're investing in the generations to come.

Discussion questions

1. Where do you long to see restoration in creation?
2. Are there any small actions you could take to better care for God's creation?
3. How can your church community partner with God to see his kingdom come in wider creation?

Prayer

Creator God,

Thank you that I can be confident of your love for us and your restoration plan for the whole of creation – for the earth, and for your people.

Thank you that peace and wholeness are possible because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

As you once sent your son to the earth, please help your church to be your

witness in this world.

Where I feel disconnected from creation, would you teach me more about the world you made.

When I feel overwhelmed by the extent of poverty around the world, would you give me hope and courage to see more of your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.



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Week 6: Restored society

'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'

Matthew 5:13–16

Reflection

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus teaches that the church is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He says, '**let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**' (Matthew 5:16)

In my work as Country Director for Tearfund in Bangladesh, I have the privilege of witnessing firsthand the ways that local churches are salt and light to their communities.

Tearfund works through local churches because they are at the heart of communities. And often when the church leads the way in restoring people's lives, the whole of society is changed.

Although Bangladesh is a predominantly Islamic country, Christians have the freedom to practise their faith, and so it's a blessing that Tearfund's community training can be successfully delivered through the church.

Housing for all

Recently, as a result of our community training, local pastors in the village of Pachuria have been able to facilitate schemes for both Christians and Muslims to access safe housing. This not only meets practical needs, but also builds trust between the church and the community, and people see a display of Christ's love.

Another challenge in Bangladesh is our geographical location, which makes the country climate-fragile. Our coastal areas are on the receiving end of extreme weather events such as flooding, which are the impact of climate change.

But through Tearfund, the local church is bringing transformation there too. In one of the coastal areas, we set up a reverse osmosis water plant, which purifies water for drinking. Before that, the community had great difficulty accessing clean drinking water. Now they have clean water, and church members are helping to maintain the water plant for the whole community.

These are just some of the ways that the local church is restoring communities in Bangladesh, just as Jesus taught us to do.

I am so grateful for supporters like you who help to make all of this possible. Thank you.

Sanjeev Bhanja

Sanjeev is Tearfund's Country Director for Bangladesh

Discussion questions

1. How does today's passage inspire you to dream of ways our society could be restored?
2. Are there particular areas of society where you long to see God's renewal? Perhaps in business, education, family life, politics, healthcare, the arts, or somewhere else? How might God be encouraging you to contribute?
3. Are there any injustices in the world that particularly move you with compassion? How can you support these causes in prayer or action?

Prayer

- Pray for local pastors in Bangladesh – for strength, wisdom, and innovative ideas about how to take their communities forward.
- Pray for the work of Tearfund in Bangladesh – that God would continue to restore and transform many lives through our partnerships with local churches.
- Pray for churches we work with around the world – that God would bless our partnerships with them, and use them to bring restoration to their communities.

Heavenly Father,
Thank you for using your church to be salt and light in the world.
Thank you for the joy and privilege of partnering with you to restore societies and see your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.
Would you show me how I can contribute and bring restoration where I am.
In Jesus' name, amen.



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Week 7: Restored hope

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralysed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ”

So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

John 5:1–15

Reflection

How did you feel when you woke up this morning? Tired? Excited? Anxious? In the midst of all that's going on in the world, sometimes it can feel pretty hopeless. Wars are raging. Hatred and injustice are spreading. The cost of living is rising, and people living in poverty are in urgent need.

It can be easy to feel discouraged. But even in these circumstances, God's word promises that as we trust in him, we will **'overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'** (Romans 15:13)

We see this hope in the gospels, in the person of Jesus.

In today's passage, Jesus meets a man who has been suffering for 38 years. Can you imagine waiting 38 years for something? Maybe you have. Maybe you are still waiting. This man waited patiently, showing up to the pool every day. But his hope was in the wrong place. It wasn't the waters that healed him, it was Jesus!

Sometimes God answers our prayers instantly. And other times, change takes years. But if we keep our eyes open, we can see hope everywhere.

Ratna and Joseph's story

In Bangladesh, the church is at the heart of bringing transformation to whole communities. When Ratna and her husband, Joseph, attended Tearfund's training in their local church, they not only learned new skills, but they strengthened their faith in Jesus. Ratna started a Bible study and became influential in helping her community improve their clean water supply.

Poverty steals people's hope. But through the generosity of people like you, God is restoring hope all around the world.

Joseph says, 'I would pray to God in the night with tears in my eyes about all these things, and now a lot of changes have come in my life. So I firmly believe that God has heard my call.'

Is there something you've been praying for for a long time?

Discussion questions

1. Have you ever put your hope in something other than Jesus? In money, health, career, or relationships? Ask God for forgiveness, and for help to put your hope in him.
2. What are you hoping or praying for? Write a list, including the big things and the small things. Ask God to renew your hope for each one.
3. Do you know someone who is feeling hopeless at the moment? Lift them up in prayer, asking God to encourage and strengthen them.

Prayer

Lord,

I'm sorry for the times when I put my hope in the wrong things.

Thank you, Jesus, for being my living hope.

Would you fill me with joy and peace by the power of your Holy Spirit, and strengthen me daily as I put my trust in you, so that I might overflow with hope to those around me.

Would you breathe new life into my dreams, and remind me that nothing is impossible with you.

In Jesus' name, amen.