



# GOD WANTS US BACK

## STUDY GUIDE

The events of 2020 have brought us to our knees. COVID-19 has taken the lives of over 100,000 Americans and put many more out of work. Under quarantine, many of us have grown lonely and spiritually numb. The murder of George Floyd has prompted our nation to reckon with our legacy of systemic racism, sparking protests and demands for justice. In the midst of these competing crises, it seems like both our society and our personal lives are spiraling out of control.

Despite this personal and cultural exile, the Lord is not silent. What is God's invitation to us in this upheaval? To answer that question, we will turn to the prophet Jeremiah, whose messages from God to His people contain vibrant and startling images that both expose our spiritual condition and magnify God's merciful heart toward us.

Over the next 10 weeks, we will see that God wants us back, and is offering us a fresh hope, a clarified purpose, and a promised season of renewal.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Each week following the sermon, re-read that previous Sunday's preaching passage every day, asking the Lord to be with you and speak to you. (For example, *after* you hear the Sunday sermon on Jeremiah 1:1-12, read Jeremiah 1:1-12 each day for the following week.) Consider memorizing the suggested verse at the top of each week of study.

Then, either in one sitting or throughout the week, respond to and meditate on the study questions and personal questions in your prayer journal. (Don't have a prayer journal? Grab any blank-ish notebook and start one!)

If you are meeting with a group for online Sunday worship, or with your RezGroup during the week, consider including a discussion of your responses as part of your time together.

If you want to study in the context of the daily prayer offices, you can download them [here](#).

#### **GROUP STUDY OPTION:**

If you are studying the passage with a group, you can expand your discussion using these four questions:

1. What does this story say (about people, God, you)?
  2. How do we obey?
  3. Who needs to hear this story today?
  4. How does this help me to pray?
- 

### **Week 1: A Childhood Call (Jeremiah 1:1-12)**

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."*

**SUMMARY:** God's calling on our life exceeds our human capacities. He gives us assignments that are more difficult, adventurous, and tedious than we expect at first. Living faithfully and courageously through this crisis is one calling we all share. The power to fulfill his calling on us comes directly from him.

#### **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

- ❖ The passage launches Jeremiah into his life-long calling to preach to a people who largely rejected his message. What's on Jeremiah's resumé that qualifies him for this calling?
- ❖ What role does God assume in Jeremiah's calling? What is the purpose of the vision of the almond tree branch (vv. 11-12)?

#### **PERSONAL QUESTIONS:**

- ❖ What are some of the fears that you carry or have carried about your call to serve others (see 1:6)?
- ❖ How does God's reassurance to Jeremiah resonate or challenge your personal sense of God's empowerment as you serve him?
- ❖ Are there any aspects of our culture or world that God might be calling you to help uproot and to plant, to tear down and build up?
- ❖ How is God calling you to step into mission in your spheres of influence?

**PRAYER:** *Almighty God, in your infinite wisdom you chose to proclaim your word and display your saving power through the foolish and lowly of this world to display. Grant that we may obediently heed your call and boldly proclaim the message you have entrusted to your sacred church. Amen.*

---

### **Week 2: A Broken Cistern (2:1-13)**

*"They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."*

**SUMMARY:** Our spiritual adultery with God is more serious than we care to admit. From God's perspective, we are attempting to drink water out of a broken cistern which can never satisfy. Meanwhile, we are neglecting the True Fountain of Living Water. God wants us back.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

- ❖ Verses 2-3 begin with an affirmation of God's remembrance of us. How does God describe his love for his people?
- ❖ What do verses 5-8 teach us about the relationship between idolatry and *our* remembrance of God?
- ❖ What are the two things that the Lord declares should cause us to shudder in horror?

#### PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What are some ways that you have forgotten God or his past mercies to you? What habits or practices can remind you of who God is and what he has done?
- ❖ When have you experienced the glory and beauty of God in your life? How did it affect you?
- ❖ Verse 13 says that God is "the spring of living water" (2:13). Where do you find yourself returning to when you are "spiritually thirsty"? What habits or practices keep you close to the Holy Spirit, the eternally satisfying spring (Jn 4:14)?

PRAYER: *Glorious God, forgive us for when we have exchanged your life-giving presence for worthless idols that do not satisfy. Renew in us the devotion of our youth, that we may drink deeply of your Holy Spirit and find eternal satisfaction in you. Amen.*

---

## WEEK 3: Scarecrows in a Cucumber Patch (10:1-18)

*"But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding."*

SUMMARY: The "way of the nations" which seem secure and powerful are actually pathetic. That's the truth behind Jeremiah's image of a scarecrow in a cucumber patch. These ungodly ways are not to be feared or imitated. In comparison, the Living God is to be feared, adored, and obeyed.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

- ❖ This passage addresses our fears by contrasting God and idols. What fears do you imagine the people of Israel had in their day (see 10:2, 5)?
- ❖ What differences does Jeremiah highlight between their idols and the God of Israel?

#### PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

- ❖ Compare the "way of the nations" of Jeremiah's time with our day: When have you seen our cultural idols and worthless practices on display?
- ❖ What encouragement does God give us to not fear? How can we respond to God's kingship over our neighborhood?

PRAYER: *Lord Jesus, you founded the world and spread the heavens with matchless power and unimaginable glory. Grant that we, being encouraged by your creative power, may boldly and compassionately call all things into the loving obedience of your perfect ways. Amen.*

---

## WEEK 4: A Fruitful Tree in the Desert (17:1-13)

*"Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream."*

SUMMARY: Even in spiritually arid conditions, the people of God can bear fruit by sending their roots down into the underground streams of God's vitalizing presence. We can thrive in exile, whether due to quarantine, personal rejection or cultural resistance to the Gospel.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What are the key differences between the person described in verses 5-6 and the person described in verses 7-8?
- ❖ What is the source of each person's strength and how do they access it? Where are those decisions leading them?

### PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What are the challenges in your life right now that undermine a life of fulfillment and fruitfulness in the Lord?
- ❖ What are ways that you can ground yourself more deeply and sustainably in your life with God?
- ❖ What fruit do hope this kind of rootedness will bear in your own life and your life with others?
- ❖ How does that lead you to pray?

PRAYER: *Merciful God, whose Presence brings us hope in the season of weariness and confidence in times of trial, so root our lives in your Spirit that we, being nourished for every good work, may bear fruit in the parched places of our homes and neighborhoods and be preserved through all adversity, to the glory of your name. Amen.*

---

## Week 5: The Potter & the Clay (18:1-23)

*"Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel."*

SUMMARY: Suffering and upheaval provide us with a remarkable opportunity: to be reshaped by the Lord himself into the people he originally called us to become.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

- ❖ How do you see judgment and repentance at play in this passage?
- ❖ What does the interaction between Jeremiah and his critics teach you about the role of the prophet in society (18:18-23)?

### PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

- ❖ In what ways do you identify with the clay being shaped?
- ❖ What kind of "marring" do you see in your life, family or household, and city?
- ❖ How does this passage give you hope in the midst of challenge or evil?

**PRAYER:** Great Redeemer, who loves the works of your hands and works all things together for the good of those who love you, mercifully fill our lives with your redemptive power, that in our frailties and ailments we may be strengthened and shaped in conformity to the image of your Son. Amen.

---

## **Week 6: A Teeming Garden-City (29:1-14)**

*"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

**SUMMARY:** God calls us to seek the long-term shalom of the people and places where we'd rather not be. Our exile is an opportunity to reject the short cuts promised by false prophets and contend for God's purposes.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

- ❖ How do verses 1-3 describe the people of Judah's exile, an exile they neither expected nor desired.
- ❖ How do verses 4-7 go on to call the people to a life of love and service in the place they would rather not be and to the people they would rather not serve?
- ❖ What do verses 10-14 teach us about the role of hope within our work for shalom?

### **PERSONAL QUESTIONS:**

- ❖ To what place or people has the Lord carried you? Whom are you called to serve in your home, your neighborhood, your city or country?
- ❖ What are some practical ways for you to seek their prosperity in the short-term or long-term?
- ❖ How does this lead you to pray for them?

**PRAYER:** Almighty God, you have planted us where we are and called us to our work according to your good plans and infinite wisdom. Grant us grace to seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which you have called us with steadfast hands and sincere hearts. And fill us with hope for the good future that you have promised, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

---

## **Week 7: A Homecoming Song & Dance (31:1-26)**

*"I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow."*

**SUMMARY:** Our future in God is so good that we can anticipate it with joyful song and dance. Because of Jesus, our weeping will give way to joy.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

- ❖ Describe the people that God is addressing (see 31:2, 7).
- ❖ What do the people do that causes God to shift mourning into gladness?
- ❖ What words of hope and compassion did God extend to his people in this passage?

#### PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

- ❖ Describe a time when you held onto grief and hope at the same time?
- ❖ How would you thank God for his hope based on this passage?
- ❖ What kind of joy and hope are you called to extend to your household or neighborhood?

PRAYER: *Merciful and Mighty God, we bring into your presence all the things that we are mourning in these days of confusion and pain. [SIT SILENTLY BEFORE THE LORD]. Now, My God, in your resurrection power, begin to turn my mourning into gladness. Pour the comfort of your Holy Spirit into my heart this day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

---

#### Week 8: Buying a Field (32:1-15, 36-44)

*"I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord"*

SUMMARY: Invest in God's future! Even when things seem bleak, bank on his promises. At God's command, buy the field and plant a garden in it. God's judgment and promises will reward your faith in the end.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

- ❖ Verses 1-15 describe a prophetic act by which Jeremiah testifies to the certainty of God's promise to return his people to their land. What does this prophetic act reveal to us about God?

#### PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What areas of your life at the moment seem bleak? Based on this passage, what is the future that God promises you in those circumstances? How can those promises of a good future shape your life now?
- ❖ How can you arrange your life so that it becomes a prophetic witness to others of the trustworthiness of God's promises? Is there any specific action that God may be calling you to take?
- ❖ How does that lead you to pray?

PRAYER: *Gracious and trustworthy God, you never cease in doing good to us. Grant us singleness of heart and action, that our lives may bear witness to your covenant faithfulness and your kingdom come, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

---

#### Week 9: The Return of the Shepherd-King (33:12-26)

*"In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land."*

SUMMARY: Jesus is a Shepherd-King after God's heart, who has returned to fulfill all of the promises in Jeremiah. Under his rule, we can flourish and learn to lead in his way.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What importance did the arrival of the Shepherd-King hold for the Israelites?
- ❖ How does the New Testament show that Jesus fulfills this identity?
- ❖ What proof does God provide that he will keep his promise?

#### PERSONAL MEDITATION QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What does the promise of the Davidic king tell you about the importance of righteous and just leadership?
- ❖ How has the kingship of Jesus changed your life?
- ❖ How does his kingship change our response to the evils and crises of our time?

PRAYER: *Lord Jesus, you are my Shepherd. You lead me beside still waters. You restore my soul. I will not fear for you are with me. Give me the security of knowing that even if I pass through the valley of the shadow of death you are still with me.*

---

### **Week 10: Rescuing the Prophet from the Pit (37:11-38:13)**

*"They pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern."*

SUMMARY: Fulfilling God's call on our life includes setbacks and rejection. Sometimes good leaders are punished for their integrity. Yet because of God's faithful character, working through his courageous people, he will vindicate his leaders and his message.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

- ❖ Summarize this story in your own words.
- ❖ Why does Jeremiah include this story in this book? Why is this story to the overall narrative and themes of Jeremiah?
- ❖ What does this story teach us about God's character, especially when we face setbacks in pursuit of his call?

#### PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

- ❖ How do you feel when you face rejection or setback because of your obedience to God?
- ❖ Does Jeremiah's experience resonate with you or your current circumstances?
- ❖ How can you pray in these moments of setback?
- ❖ How can you support leaders in your church or your community when they face rejection or misunderstanding in their pursuit of obedience or integrity?

PRAYER: *Faithful God, look upon your servants who daily face trial or rejection in their pursuit of your call, even as Christ was despised and rejected that your will might be done; vindicate them, Lord, in your mercy, that they may faithfully proclaim your Word and live according to your commandments, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

---

## Go Deeper

- Watch this video from The Bible Project outlining the structure and message of the book:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSK36cHbrk0&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSK36cHbrk0&feature=emb_title).
  - Download a poster of their outline for reference [here](#).
  - Watch one of their theme videos on themes that are prominent in the book of Jeremiah, such as "[The Water of Life](#)", or "[Exile](#)".
- Make reading the whole book more accessible by reading it in [the Message](#), [The Living Bible](#), or the [New Living Translation](#). Or listen to it with [our church's free subscription](#) to the Dwell App (available till 8/31).
- Read Jeremiah along with other biblical books written in the same time period.
  - For some historical literature: 2 Kings 21-25; 2 Chronicles 34-36.
  - For other prophetic texts: Zephaniah and Habakkuk.
  - For the psalms and other poetry: Lamentations and Psalms 74, 79, 83, 94, 115.
- Study the book of Jeremiah using one of these commentaries as a guide:
  - [The Message of Jeremiah by Christopher J.H. Wright](#)
  - [The Book of Jeremiah by J.A. Thompson](#)
  - [The Old Testament Bible Background Commentary by Walton, Matthews, Chavalas](#) (PDF [here](#))

Find more resources for study at [www.cityoflightanglican.org/events/jeremiah](http://www.cityoflightanglican.org/events/jeremiah)

---

Copyright Anglican Diocese of the Upper Midwest, 2020

Author: Fr. Trevor McMaken, City of Light Anglican  
Editors: Fr. Matt Woodley, Bethany McLellan, Church of the Resurrection  
Design: Jill Fager, in partnership with Immanuel Anglican