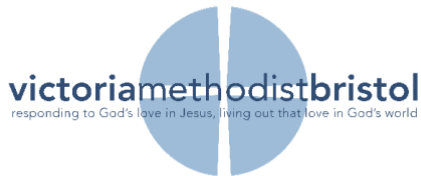

LENT KNIT-ALONG 2026

WEEK 5



Pattern by Lyn Lloyd-Jones
Reflections by Ruth Yorke

Introduction

Our thanks this week go to Ruth Yorke for writing the accompanying reflections for week five of the Lent Knitalong.

Ruth is a Methodist Deacon in the West End of London. She's passionate about justice, creating safe inclusive community, and loves crochet and being by the sea. Sadly she can't knit but enjoys following along and seeing all of your progress photos.

Ruth's reflections this week focus on a passage from Isaiah:

*¹ The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, ² it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendour of our God.*

*³ Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
⁴ say to those with fearful hearts,
'Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you.'*

*⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*

⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.

⁷ The burning sand will become a pool,
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.
In the haunts where jackals once lay,
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

⁸ And a highway will be there;
it will be called the Way of Holiness;
it will be for those who walk on that Way.
The unclean will not journey on it;
wicked fools will not go about on it.

⁹ No lion will be there,
nor any ravenous beast;
they will not be found there.
But only the redeemed will walk there,
¹⁰ and those the Lord has rescued will return.

They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

— Isaiah 35:1-10

Sunday, 15 March

What is the desert?

The word 'desert' can bring up different images in our minds. You may immediately think of swathes of sand dunes, or the image on the U2 album, 'the Joshua tree' (if you're that age?!), or of a waste land.

In a desert, the vastness of it is stunning but also can be a little endless! The Gobi desert is my own image of desert, as it's the one I've been to – it varies a lot. The tourist photos you'll see are usually of the landscape of endless sands. But it's a huge desert and it varies. Some areas are – yes – just sand – you can climb it for hours and it seems endless. But also there are areas of endless mountain ranges, very little vegetation, and it's genuinely exciting when you come across a place where there is water and especially if you come across other people or even a small town. You stay overnight, cook over a camp stove,

candles stuck in the sandy earth, and camp out underneath a billion stars. This desert is all sorts of things – arid, sand, mountains, history, and tourist photo opportunities. There are occasional trees and shrubs – and some flowers have adapted to survive in the desert. They are hardy and flower only when the conditions are right for them.

This passage offers the desert as a blank and isolated place, ‘parched’. If we keep reading, it’s going to become a different place, but at the start of this reading, we are thinking of the desert as a bleak place without fertile ground or beauty in a conventional sense. Isolated, testing, difficult.

Lent mirrors Jesus’ 40 days in the desert, thinking of his time of devotion and preparation. We are in the midst of that now. But I wonder how Lent is feeling for you? Is it desert? And if so, what kind of desert? Endless uninhabited sand? Scrub with occasional plants? Or an area of oasis with a little town? Or are you camping out and enjoying the stars?

What I hope the desert can definitely be for most of us is a place of space. A space we have to keep sacred, lest Lent get shoved out of our priorities in favour of the endless to-do list and demands of life.

Spiritually, Lent-desert can be a time when we make space for God and re-evaluating what matters most, checking our values with Jesus’ values.

I hope this Lent-desert time for you is a time of difference and challenge, and is offering you some space to make room for God.

Questions to reflect on

How are you making space for God this Lent?

What is your Lent-desert like?

In your Lent-desert, what is beautiful and what is challenging?

Listen

[Lord save us from the desert](#)

Monday, 16 March

Finding Hope in the desert

Alec Motyer, in his commentary on Isaiah, says that ‘Hope is the cordial the people of God need to keep them going’! I like that idea – that yes, we need water for pure survival, but Hope is like adding cordial to survival – it makes it sweeter and helps us to carry on.

Verses 1-2 and 5-6b offer sure hope. Where there is desert and emptiness, God will bring not only fruitfulness but flowers – the area will bloom and be beautiful. This isn’t just necessities but over-the-top provision for joy.

We are to take strength from the vision of God, to not fear, for God will come. in hope we are to:

³ *Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;*
⁴ *say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come...”*

When things are transformed, as in verses 5-6, the ‘weaknesses of the present (v.3) will be gone, and what is now hope (v4) will be experience’ (Motyer).

To a people in exile, these words about the desert are a promise of a different time to come, when they will not be in a desert which is unfertile and empty, but will be in a land which has been transformed, and there will be joy again.

But how do we keep going in the spiritual desert? Hope.

As people of God, we have sure ground for hope. Hope can be ‘the cordial’ of our living. Hope in God is not about optimism or crossing our fingers (‘I hope my team win today’, ‘I hope it doesn’t rain with the washing out on the line’, ‘I hope I win the lottery’). Christian hope is about a sure and certain knowledge that with God, the light is always there, God is always there, and love will win – and if at the moment it is dark, feels lonely or loveless, we keep holding on (that’s where the strong hope comes in...)... we keep holding on until we can see and feel those things again. We know they have not disappeared, that is why we hope.

The people of God were, and are, called to believe that transformation was possible, even when they found themselves in a desert place.

Questions to reflect on

What does hope feel like to you?

At the moment, what gives you hope?

If you are struggling to think of something, these verses are your gift today.

What do you ask God to transform with Hope?

Listen

[Taizé – Within our darkest night, you kindle a light that never dies away](#)

Tuesday, 17 March

The desert will bloom

The picture of crocus'* blooming in the desert is a picture of excess. Most of us love flowers, but we do not *need* them in a desert. Surely we would most desire water and food, rather than crocuses? This is a phrase about excess and beauty and more than just need. This is a place that has been empty and is now lush and beautiful and is blooming.

Desert flowers only exist and survive because they tend to have low water requirements and are very hardy. They can also 'spring up' quite quickly when it rains!

This is a desert in Chile, but a great illustration of what Isaiah is talking about:

- a short flashy video
<https://youtube.com/shorts/yL12ftFAbGA?si=a1a0Vbn0t2K6g3U>
- a short news report on the phenomenon
<https://youtu.be/RKy9k8LJAWU?si=lpDtuveziTw4JRUX>

These videos show the Atacama desert in Chile, which has a phenomenon which may happen only once a decade – it is hard to predict – when the empty, parched desert, suddenly blooms with wildflowers (including some types of crocus!).

What is a place of dry, empty, predictable landscapes, suddenly is transformed by a sudden rainfall and the humidity and temperature working with that.

People travel from all over the world to see this desert in Chile when it blooms. The President has declared an area of this desert a wildflower sanctuary – even though they may flower only once in a decade. That's how special and amazing it is.

I wonder if the desert Isaiah is thinking of has a similar phenomenon? The visual image is very strong – the parched dry place, suddenly blooming with flowers. What a picture for transformation!

**in the King James version it said 'rose' but the closest flower to the one intended is a desert crocus or narcissus, which could survive in desert conditions. There is such a thing as a 'desert rose' but this is not what the KJV wrote.*

Questions to reflect on

If the desert flowers require sudden rainfall and the correct humidity and temperature, what is the equivalent your soul needs to bloom?

How can we treasure the 'bloom' moments of life, knowing they may not last forever, but may contribute to our lives?

How can we be part of creating circumstances and conditions where other people can 'bloom'?

Listen

[Eddie Vedder – Rose of Jericho](#)

Wednesday, 18 March

Transformation

The idea of transformation is very strong in this passage. The parched desert becomes a place of blooming and flourishing and fruitfulness. The weak find strength in God. Those who sorrow become people of everlasting joy.

Whilst some people have a 'Damascus' moment (as in Acts 9), and some communities have a huge event which effects a miraculous transformation, for many of us, the transformation is slower, less dramatic, and we may not even realise things have changed until we look back.

This prophecy writes of crocuses in the desert, which could well have been sudden, after a big rainfall, giving a dramatic, quick change. But whilst God can do miracles, I'm guessing that for most of us, the transformation of ourselves, our communities of faith and our wider communities, is a slower process.

What does it feel like to wait?

Well, maybe the crocus can help us after all! Crocuses as many of us know them, and the desert lily (apparently also known as *Hesperocallis undulata* or *Zephyranthes drummondii*), for example, come from bulbs. As we know about bulbs, they and the seeds of other desert flowers may wait in the ground for a long time. In the case of the Atacama desert, as we saw yesterday, this may even be for a decade or longer.

The sudden blooming is what we see... it's not all that's going on. What's going on is patience and waiting, preparation and readiness...

If we want to see transformation in our lives and in our communities, yes, there may be a sudden big event or a dramatic miracle, but in many cases, it will be the work of many accumulated moments of patience, kindness and grace. The effort made to invite someone, the waiting for the person who is always late, the kindness to someone who may be annoying, the bothering and treating people with the knowledge that they matter. To pray for anyone God puts on our hearts. In short, the 'being like Jesus' to people. This is what slowly and surely can build community and bring transformation.

It seems sudden that someone offers to volunteer when they've been a guest for so long, or that someone finds the confidence to share their story, or start a new project, or speak up for others and themselves, or finally get funding for a community resource... but these

things all happen because of the people who are prepared to plod and keep going and wait, prepare, be ready, and keep hoping and praying.

Transformation is usually a process.

Questions to reflect on

Can you think of anything that has been transformed where it seemed sudden but a lot of work and time had gone into it which many people did not know about?

How has God put that time into your life? Where can you see the signs of transformation – completed and ongoing?

What signs of hope and transformation do you see in your community? How can you encourage them?

Listen

[Let us build a place where love can dwell](#)

Thursday, 19 March

Blooming

We started thinking about blooming yesterday, and specifically what conditions are needed for blooming to occur.

In verse 2 we read:

*“The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;...”*

These places – Lebanon, Carmel and Sharon – were well known places of established fertility. Specifically, Lebanon was known for long-standing natural fertility, Carmel, for ordered cultivation, and Sharon for innate attractiveness.

Whilst Isaiah is saying that the crocus will bloom – which may be a sudden event, excitingly having reached conditions where the flowers can bloom – it will go further than this.

In God’s promise, the ‘desert and the parched land’ will not only suddenly bloom with unexpected beauty, but will become like the places of established fertile lands, verdant, established, ordered, cultivated, beautiful. Not just a fleeting beauty, but able to sustain real growth and life.

The glory of these established fruitful cultivated places will be given to this currently parched desert land.

What would this kind of transformation be like?

It may put us in mind of so many bible references where lives and places are transformed (I suggest a search on the internet for 'bible place becoming fruitful' and you'll have a lot to look at!).

It reminds us that whilst the dry, parched nature of the desert is real, it is not all there is. The dry, parched desert, as our metaphor and in reality, is tough. It is inhospitable. It is difficult.

But not only will this be a place that blooms with sudden beauty, but under God's promise, will become a place completely transformed. No longer dry and parched. Fruitful, abundant, verdant, lush, cultivated, ordered, beautiful. A place that supports life – not just for the hardiest and strongest, but for everyone.

For a modern-day example of this miracle, see the Green Wall of Africa, for example here:

https://youtu.be/4xls7K_xFBQ?si=tJRL-T62f9IDbpKU

(You may find the website www.treeaid.org interesting – they are helping to provide trees for the Green Wall and explain more on how it is working.)

Questions to reflect on

What would it take to make the dry, parched places in your life become verdant and lush and fruitful?

What would it take to make the dry, parched places in your community become verdant and lush and fruitful? How could you be part of that?

Listen

[Streams in the Desert, Abigail Miller](#)

Friday, 20 March

Flourishing as community

Yesterday, we finished with this question:

What would it take to make the dry, parched places in your community become verdant and lush and fruitful? How could you be part of that?

What does it mean to flourish as a community? As a 'people'?

The promises in these verses, although we can apply them to our own lives, were made to a people. A people in exile, everything feeling out of place and divorced from who they really were, unable to truly be themselves, under rule, not in their own land, like being a country where all the people were together elsewhere in refugee status. They were

outsiders, not 'home', and they had more in common with a parched desert than a fruitful place.

What does it take to get them from that to home and fruitfulness?

God promised them that he would restore them to their home and that their dry, parched desert lives would not only bloom and rejoice, but become established in being fruitful and verdant.

What does that mean for our communities?

Who in your community feels like an outsider who is not really 'home' and can't bloom or rejoice, let alone flourish and relax into where they are?

The media in Britain at least seems to be obsessed with telling us that the main problems we have are people seeking asylum and refuge, people who are transgender, and people who need support from the welfare system. I won't start on who I believe the real problems are but whatever our initial thoughts, looking at how these people are being treated makes them a gospel priority.

When we look at Jesus' ministry, we notice how much of his time he spent restoring people to community. Whilst yes, he healed people from physical conditions, the outcome of that was not only body-changes, but that they could now be restored to community, to being fruitful and taking part in relationships and fellowship like everyone else. He spent time and gave to people of different faith understandings and to people who were supposed to be untouchable. He had friendships with people across class and financial and social and religious divides.

Can our ministry include this wonderful restoration and lack of discrimination? Maybe we can't (maybe you can?) do amazing miracles which will have people stunned and shocked. But maybe this type of restoration is a miracle in itself.

But you don't have to start a new initiative or charity (unless God is calling you to that?). You could research what's happening locally with this Godly agenda, whoever is doing it, and find ways to support it? Maybe you can donate time or energy and also pray for them? Maybe you can help them to advertise their work? Maybe you can join in some of their community events? (It is very depressing when no one comes! Attending can be a great gift, especially to a new project.)

How can you be part of God's people all knowing they are loved and welcome in Community for flourishing?

Questions to reflect on

What does it feel like to be an outsider and feel that everyone else is included?

Who are the 'outsiders' in your community/area? Who is making ways to reduce exclusion and divisions? How could you offer some kind of support?

Listen

[There's a spirit in the air](#)

Saturday, 21 March

The ransomed of the Lord will return with Joy

On our final day together, we'll rejoice! I hope the pattern coming through in your knitting is bringing you joy!

In this reading, there is the celebration of transformation. The promise that:

“the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come to Zion with singing, everlasting joy shall be on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”. (v10)

Isaiah shares God's promise that they will indeed return to their home, Zion, again, and that there will be endless joy and singing.

Who? The redeemed of the lord, or the 'ransomed'. Motyer explains that the word used here for redeemer is 'ga'al'. And the participle 'go'el' is the technical term for the next-of-kin and has the right (not the obligation, but the right) to take the needs of the helpless person as their own. God is being clear that God is *choosing* to take the needs of the people into Godself – God is naming themselves as next-of-kin and choosing to be responsible for you. This is an intervention, and it's God's.

God here is telling the people that God is making an intervention for them – not because God has to – the term used gives God that right, but only if they are willing. God is willing. God *will* step in, like the next-of-kin steps in for you. In our times, effectively like someone who chooses to take on Power of Attorney. They don't have to. But with it, the vulnerable person has someone on their side.

The translation of 'they shall obtain gladness and joy' also is translated as 'they shall overtake gladness and joy', as if it were always just ahead of them, and now they have not only caught it up, but overtaken it (Motyer). Such is the overwhelm of God's joy.

Questions to reflect on

What does it mean for God to claim you as next-of-kin and intervene for you?

What does it mean for us as a community for God to claim us as next-of-kin, even the people we struggle with and all our 'interesting' interconnections, and take responsibility for us?

Have you ever felt like you've overtaken joy? What gestures, colours or words do you associate with that feeling?

Listen

[Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return](#)

Cited: Alec Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah, IVP, 1994

Compiled by Vicky Davies