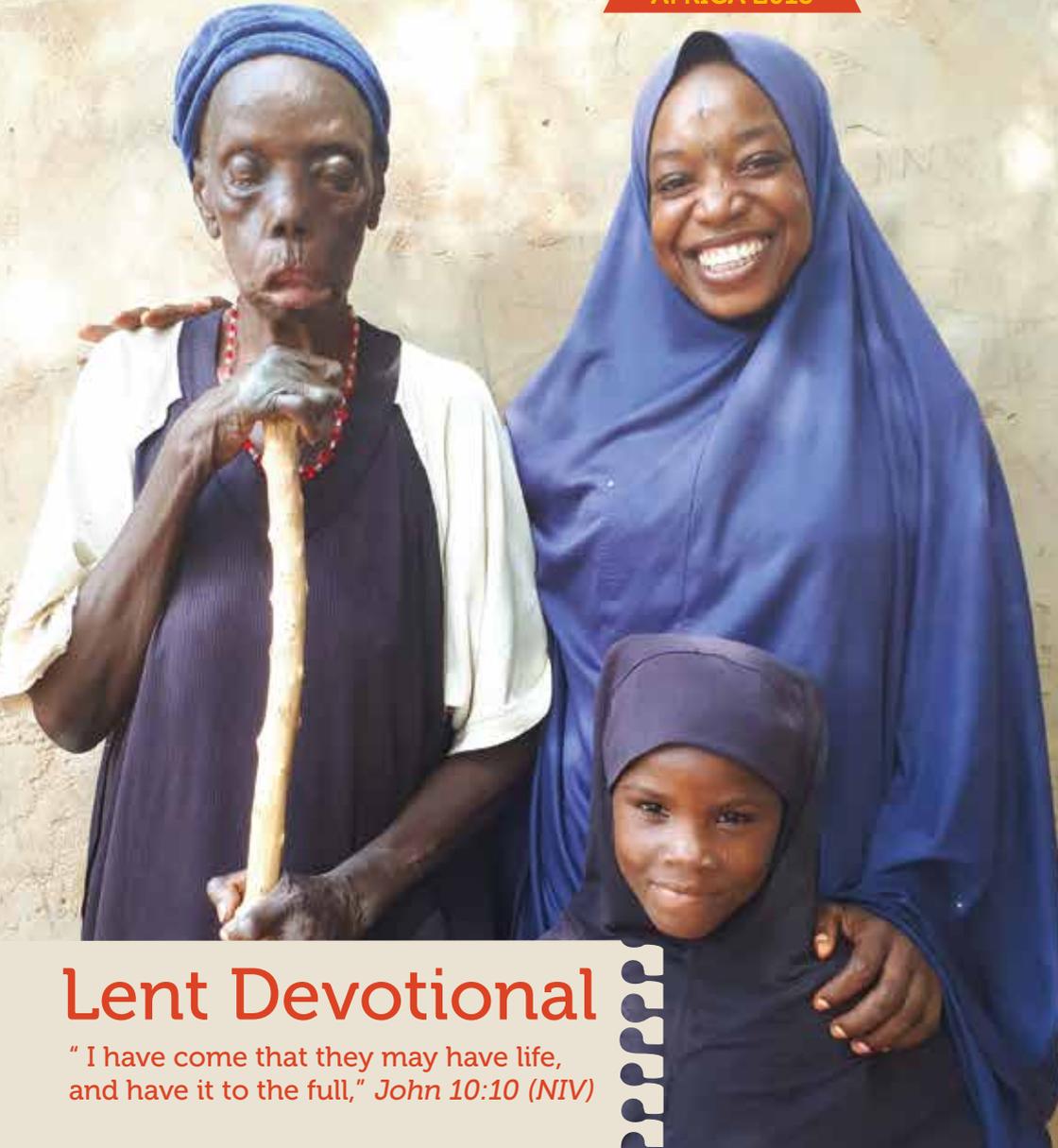




The Leprosy  
Mission  
England and Wales



World Leprosy Sunday  
AFRICA 2018



# Lent Devotional

"I have come that they may have life,  
and have it to the full," *John 10:10 (NIV)*

# Week 1 – Love goes to hard places

'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' *John 1:5 (NIV)*

We praise God that Jesus came into the world to shine a light into the world. Pray that the light of Jesus continues to shine today in Niger, one of the poorest and driest parts of the world. Thank you that Danja Leprosy Mission Hospital is a light to the forgotten and marginalised leprosy-affected people seeking refuge in the remote Southern Maradi region.

Niger is a tough place, the heat is intense and the desert land barren. Landlocked and with many of its river beds dried up, I wondered how and why early populations ever settled amid the arid Sub-Saharan landscape. It is of no surprise that Niger is one of the world's poorest countries - food is scarce and there is little healthcare or education available to most.

Tiny villages pepper the vast desert lands. In the Bible we can read much about life in the desert. God's people escaped Egypt and crossed the Red Sea only to spend 40 years in the desert. Jesus was sent to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.

Although there is undoubtedly hardship in the desert, it is also a place where miracles happen. God told Moses he would rain down manna from heaven in the wilderness and He did; sustaining his people in a hostile environment.

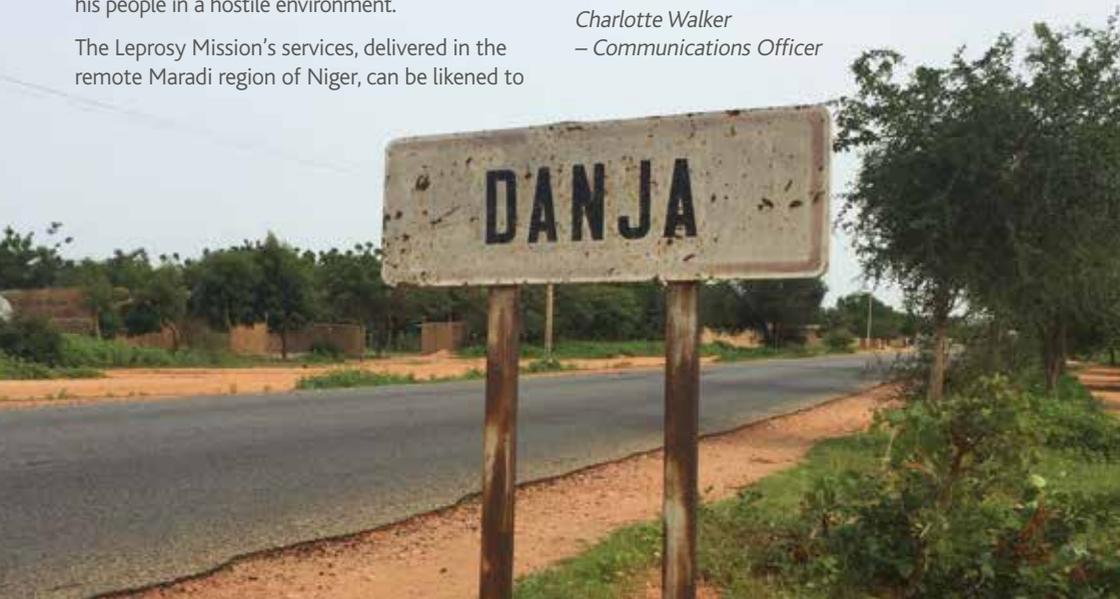
The Leprosy Mission's services, delivered in the remote Maradi region of Niger, can be likened to

manna from heaven. There is incredible prejudice surrounding leprosy and people believe it is a curse. If a person is thought to have leprosy they are often outcast from society.

Despite struggling to admit even to themselves that they have leprosy, they make their way to Danja Hospital. It is here that they are given the cure for leprosy and exemplary medical care for their wounds, free of charge. Most importantly, they are loved, cared for and receive the compassion of Jesus. This is a light in the darkness and a miraculous turning point for many of these downcast people who God loves so very dearly.

Sadly we all experience 'wilderness' periods in our life, periods of ill health, grief, loneliness or financial crisis. But in the barren desert if we turn to God we will be able to personally experience His glory and provision for us.

*Charlotte Walker*  
– *Communications Officer*



# Week 2 – Stigma and Exclusion

**‘Then Jesus moved with compassion... said “I am willing be cleansed”’ *Mark 1:41 (NIV)***

The terrible consequence of having leprosy is not just the patch and deformity that it brings, but the social exclusion and stigma associated with it; the victims of leprosy are broken-hearted and deprived of every opportunity to live a normal life. We see in Jesus’ day as recorded in Mark 1: 40–41, how in desperation the man with leprosy implored Jesus, kneeling down to Him and pleading for healing. We can perceive from his desperation for help the heavy weight of leprosy burden he is carrying which makes him express his desire is to be clean ‘if you are willing, You can make me clean’. If Jesus will not do something to his request the effect of stigma and exclusion he is experiencing from the world around him will make his case hopeless. The man received rays of hope when Jesus responded with compassion and said ‘I am willing, be cleansed’. This is the reason Jesus came; to give life and life in abundance (John 10:10), to set the captives free, to heal the broken-hearted and to set at liberty those who are oppressed (including those who are ostracised and carrying the stigma of diseases like leprosy) Luke 4:18. Following Jesus, The Leprosy Mission is committed to the ministry of setting

at liberty those who are oppressed, and healing the broken hearted. This compassion is being fully played at CSL Danja, the only leprosy hospital in Niger Republic. Staff are always willing to care for people affected by leprosy, empowering them and educating their communities to break the chain of stigma and exclusion. It takes a compassionate and willing heart like Jesus to care. Today would you hear the voice of a person affected by leprosy saying ‘if you are willing you can make me clean?’ Are you willing?

*Bunmi Oluloto – Country Leader  
– The Leprosy Mission Niger*

Thank you that Jesus did not care about stigma and isolating social boundaries and showed real compassion to all those in need. We pray that all leprosy-affected people in today’s age will find the same acceptance. We give you thanks for the small dedicated Leprosy Mission team working with leprosy-affected people in Danja. This week please open our eyes and hearts to all who need a kind touch and help us to share the love of Jesus.



Lord create in me a compassionate heart that will always move me to act just as you do so that I can always say to the oppressed and broken hearted, ‘I am willing be cleansed’



# Week 3 – Being Found

**‘Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.’ Mark 5:33 (NIV)**

I arrive in a remote village. It’s 1 o’clock. It’s hot... very hot... 40°C or more. I’m sweating, tired and thirsty... yet expectant of what the afternoon is about to bring.

I am with a Leprosy Mission team in Hawan Dawaki, a village 5-6 hours drive from Danja Hospital in Tessaoua district, Niger. We phoned ahead to inform the Imam, who is also the village leader, to let him know of our visit. We had a tip-off that 10 people affected by leprosy are living here and are waiting to meet them at the village health post. Villagers start to arrive – people affected by disability – one losing their sight and another on crutches ... finally, an old man makes himself known and is affected by leprosy. Yohanna, (The Leprosy Mission Niger’s Head of Programmes), greets him with a hug, because he is already known to The Leprosy Mission team.

The team has group discussions to hear the community needs – water, food, medication.

Not one of the 10 ‘new’ people affected by leprosy arrives. Not one. Our team is disappointed, but not surprised. I am disappointed and confused. Why? We are here to help? Why don’t the people we want to help come and see us?

Yohanna explains that the fear, stigma and rejection associated with leprosy is so strong here in Niger that it has prevented them from leaving their homes. It’s astonishing that in close knit community life, even the neighbours of people affected by leprosy do not know of their

condition or plight – such is the depth of fear of the consequences of being labelled ‘unclean’.

Jesus met the woman affected by bleeding in her place of rejection. She had suffered for 12 years and spent all she had on doctors’ treatments and yet her health was deteriorating. She too was an outcast from her community because of her condition. On hearing that Jesus is in town, she digs deep to find the courage to step out of the safety of her home, to confront the crowds. All she can do is touch Jesus’ cloak and immediately she is healed. Jesus wants to know who had touched him. Why does Jesus want to draw attention to this woman and her shameful condition? Surely Jesus knows that this could cause more pain and rejection – or at least embarrassment. By asking the woman to share her story publicly, Jesus is saying to her and the community at the same time “I have found you”. Jesus is including the woman, saying to her community to accept her back into societal life, irrespective of the illness that she has just been healed from. Jesus too longs to find the 10 people affected by leprosy in Hawan Dawaki, if only they had the woman’s courage to step out of their front door.

I am reminded during Lent that Jesus’ phenomenal love for each one of us means that He accepts us just as we are, wherever we are at in our lives, and says to us ... “I have found you”.

*Steve Besford – Programmes and Advocacy Officer – Africa*

Jesus healed leprosy-affected people as a demonstration of His love and care. Give thanks that today, with modern drugs, leprosy can be cured and people do not need to become blind and disabled. Pray that all those in need will come forward for healing for leprosy.



# Week 4 – Healing

## Jesus Heals Ten Men with Leprosy

**'Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.'** *Luke 17:11-14 (NIV)*

Leprosy has an effective cure and is the least contagious communicable disease. Treated early, it does not have to cause disability or impairment. And yet it is one of the most feared and misunderstood diseases in the world. Stigma and rejection are sadly still common today, but in Jesus' time people affected by leprosy were cast out and left to fend for themselves with no hope of cure or acceptance. But Jesus had no fear of the disease, and when the ten men with leprosy met him that day, he showed compassion and cured them. This is a simple story, but it can teach us so much about how we can know Jesus' love and healing in our own lives.

The first thing the ten men did was simply to recognise Jesus. They met him as he was going into their village; they didn't know Jesus was coming but recognised him at once. In the same way, we have to be on the lookout for Jesus in our daily lives.

Then, unlike the woman cured of a lifetime of bleeding, the men didn't approach Jesus but stood at a distance. Sometimes we feel distant from God. Sometimes we deliberately hold ourselves back; feelings of guilt or unworthiness make us hesitate. But we can still raise our voices to him – even if we're not brave enough to grasp the hem of his cloak, Jesus will still hear, stop and respond.

Jesus saw the men and immediately told them what to do. He didn't ask what was wrong. In the same way, we don't have to talk at length to God about our worries. A simple, "Help me, Father," is more than enough.

And lastly, we need to ensure that we're the 'One' and not the 'Nine.' Only one of the men came back to thank Jesus, who asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" It can be easy to overlook our blessings and answered prayers, because we're caught up in the joy of our new circumstance or simply forget to stop and pay attention.

*Becky Calcraft – Programmes Funding Coordinator*



Father God, we give thanks that most of us in the Western world never need to worry about water, food and basic provisions. We pray that as well as healing leprosy-affected people in Niger, people there will understand and see that Jesus wants the whole world to enjoy fullness of life.

# Week 5 – Disability and Dignity

*“In his name the nations will put their hope.” Matthew 12:21 NIV  
(quoting Isaiah of Jesus the Messiah)*

I sat a little precariously in the large open canoe. The wooden vessel had seen better days but it was the only way to cross the broad free-flowing Niger river to the island. This island is the home of a large community of people affected by leprosy. I noticed the young woman smiling. She exchanged a few obviously pleasant words with the canoe owner, and boarded to cross over with us. Her name was Maimouna. She came to live on the island when she was pregnant with her youngest daughter.

Maimouna sought medical help when she noticed she could not grip things around her home. She was diagnosed and belatedly treated for leprosy. As a result of nerve damage, she sadly lost the use of her right hand.

This was more than a physical setback for Maimouna. Her clawed hand became an outward sign that she was leprosy-affected. The stigma was great. Her husband and mother-in-law forced her to leave their home and village and a heartbroken Maimouna had to leave her three children behind.

So how did this lady, with so much tragedy in her life, get into the canoe smiling?

The Leprosy Mission has helped Maimouna regain hope in her life. With reconstructive surgery she will be able to grip objects again and she received agricultural training so that she now grows and sells yams for a living.

Although Maimouna still desperately misses her three older children, she is able to smile and demonstrates the power of hope.

As we approach this Easter, we too have a hope. Our hope in Christ gives us an assurance for our future.

*Peter Walker visited Niger in November 2014. Maimouna is a pseudonym and this story appeared in January 2015 'New Day'*

*Peter Walker – Previous National Director at The Leprosy Mission England and Wales*



Heavenly Father, it is because of Christ and His finished work on the cross that we have a hope and in that hope we can smile. We pray that families, like that of Maimouna, will receive all the help they need to escape the chains of leprosy.

# Week 6 – Restoration and Peace

**'Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' *Romans 5:1 (Good News)***

I hate hospitals. I'm squeamish at the best of times, but being in Danja hospital in Niger, with an operation going on across the ward was really testing me. But I was there to meet leprosy patients and to take case studies so I took a deep breath and went to meet the man in the first bed.

Boukary had the warmest smile, and eyes that lit up when I talked to him. Even as he told me

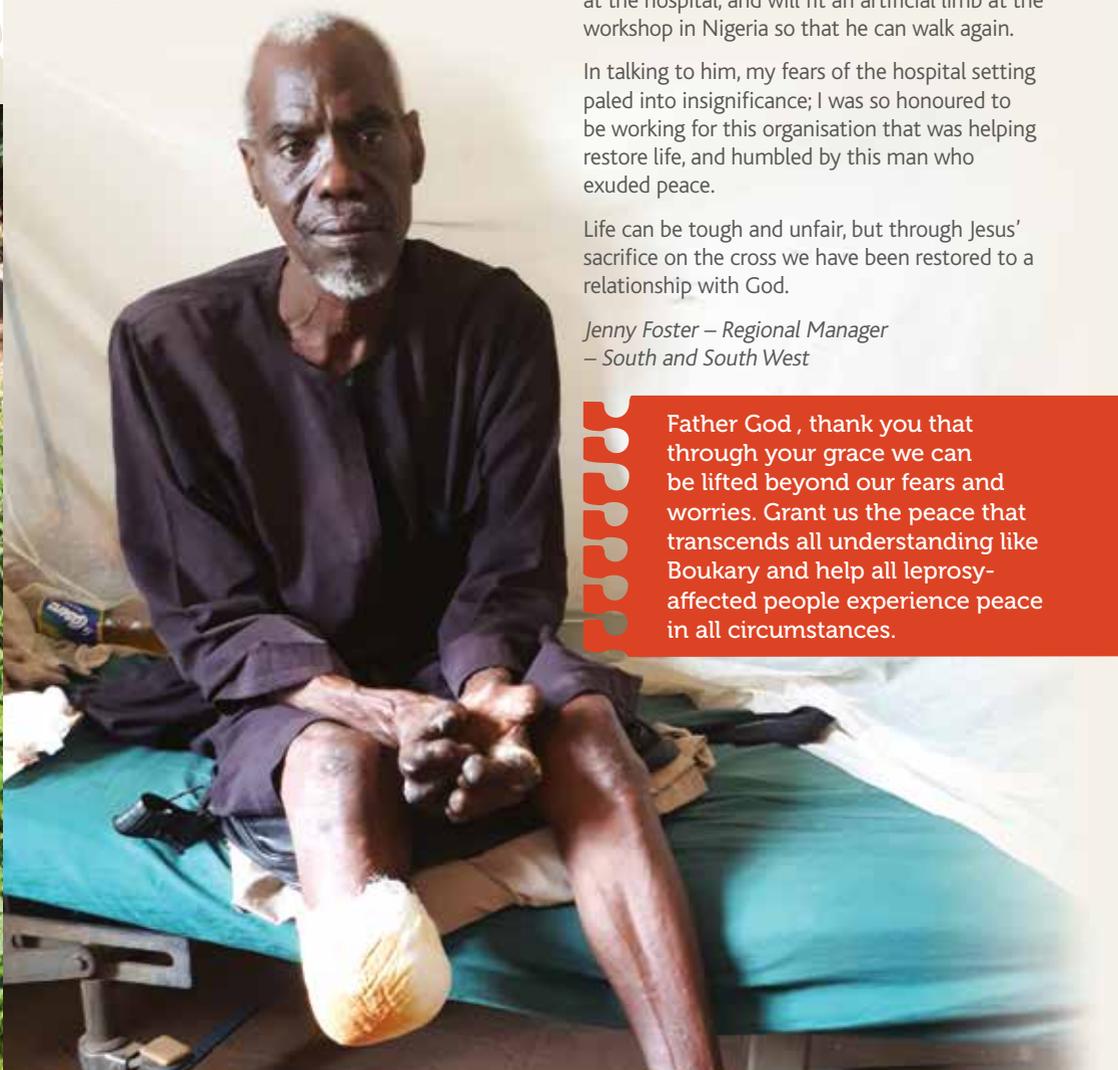
his story, there was no hint of self-pity, he just wanted supporters to know that they've saved his life. Boukary developed skin patches all over his body at age nine. In his 20s his fingers had to be amputated because of the severe effects of leprosy. He had a wound on his leg for 30 years and finally, the day before I met him, he had to have it amputated. The Mission paid for all his care at the hospital, and will fit an artificial limb at the workshop in Nigeria so that he can walk again.

In talking to him, my fears of the hospital setting paled into insignificance; I was so honoured to be working for this organisation that was helping restore life, and humbled by this man who exuded peace.

Life can be tough and unfair, but through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we have been restored to a relationship with God.

*Jenny Foster – Regional Manager  
– South and South West*

Father God , thank you that through your grace we can be lifted beyond our fears and worries. Grant us the peace that transcends all understanding like Boukary and help all leprosy-affected people experience peace in all circumstances.



# Week 7 – Hope and a Future

'He saves the needy from the sword in their mouth; he saves them from the clutches of the powerful. So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.' *Job 5:15-16 (NIV)*

When I met Aisha in Danja village in Niger in August, I was struck by her wonderful smile. Her circumstances can only be described by a Westerner as 'poor', but here was a woman who was happy in what she was doing and had hope for the future. As she told me about the TLM funded vocational training course she had attended, proudly demonstrating her skill on the sewing machine she had been given to start her business, and parading her beautiful little daughter in her own handmade finery, she glowed with pride.

Yet her life could have been so different. A child of leprosy-affected parents, she was married young and has to care for both parents, her father is now blind due to his leprosy. But Aisha was offered an opportunity to train as a

Dear Lord, how challenging to know that almost half of the people in Niger live on less than £1.42 a day and many will never go to school. We pray that through the work of The Leprosy Mission there, the poor will know good news and many more people like Aisha will be given the chance to work their way out of poverty.

seamstress at our Training Centre and this has given her the means to work her way out of poverty, support her family and her parents, and give her a sense of self-worth.

Having leprosy or leprosy-affected parents blights the lives of so many in Niger, leaving them destitute and rejected, an injustice that is hard to overcome. Seeing the hope that has come from such a small investment is a glimpse of real kingdom work – overturning injustice and bringing opportunity to the poorest and most needy in our world.

When I asked Aisha about her hopes for the future she said, *'I hope my business will grow and my children can have a good education, get good jobs and work hard'*. This is a woman who is determined not to live in the shadows of leprosy and, with the assistance of our TLM Niger staff and our supporters, is now living in hope.

*Jenny Foster – Regional Manager  
– South and South West*



**The Leprosy  
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