

Citylife

Presbyterian
Church



Prayer & Fasting Guide

November-December 2020

Introduction

Dear Citylife Family,

2020 has undoubtedly been the most challenging year for Citylife Presbyterian Church since its inception. In response to the many trials that we presently face, the leaders of our church family have recently invited us into a season of communal prayer and fasting as an expression of our utter dependence upon God alone. We are praying and--if you choose to and are able to participate--fasting to place our trust wholly in his faithful care and provision for us, his covenant people, during this season of difficulty and uncertainty.

The Elders of Citylife, its Pastors and Ministry Staff and the Boston Congregation Prayer Team have united to lead our church in this season of communal prayer. Though our prayer and fasting has already begun, the final 7 weeks of 2020 are being dedicated to this corporate endeavor of prayer. This 7-week season will begin on Monday, November 16th and conclude on the last day of the year, December 31st. Everyone who is a part of our church family is warmly invited to pray together throughout these 7 weeks, and this guide is designed to unify our prayers by providing weekly scriptures and prayer prompts on which we may focus, individually and communally.

Everyone is also welcomed to participate in the spiritual discipline of fasting during these 7 weeks. If you choose to join in, we will be fasting to focus ourselves wholly upon God. It is crucial to understand that fasting does not earn favor from God. Rather, fasting helps us realign our appetites, brings us freedom, and positions us to gracefully experience the fullness of Christ. Fasting is not so much about what we give up as about what replaces that time and attention. When we skip a meal or fast from other daily activities, such as social media, tv shows, eating dessert, etc., we make space in our day to offer our prayers to God. The hunger or emptiness that we experience when we fast reminds us viscerally that we are utterly dependent upon God for our life and daily strength. As Jesus said when he was tempted in the desert during his own season of fasting, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

All are welcomed to pray, and all are welcomed to fast in these 7 weeks. Please know that fasting is not required for participation in this season of communal prayer. Using this prayer guide to immerse ourselves in Scripture, let us join together as one family, calling out to God...

"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" - 2 Chronicles 20:12b

In this guide, each new week begins on Monday and ends the following Sunday, when we break our collective fasting with Sabbath Feasting and joyful corporate worship to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and our life with him. Following this same pattern, this season of prayer will be a "Week of Weeks" in which each of the 7 weeks is like one day of the week. Participants will sign up on the [Prayer & Fasting Calendar](#) to fast during specific meals throughout the first 6 weeks only. Beginning on Christmas Day, all our fasting will cease and the final week of the year will be a time of Sabbath Feasting in joyful celebration of our LORD's grace and faithfulness.

This prayer guide will serve to unite all of us through weekly themes and a brief passage of Scripture on each theme upon which we may meditate as we pray (and fast, if you choose). Prayer prompts are provided, and, if you desire to pray through other related Scriptures, additional passages are provided for meditation and prayerful response, using Lectio Divina discussed on the next page, as a guide throughout the week.

It is good and right for us to draw near to the Lord. May he bless us all with more of himself and his heart as we join in prayer, seeking God's face together as a church family. Lord, have your way in us.

Your brother,
Isaac Bruning

Lectio Divina

In our world of endless distraction, it is difficult to experience God's presence in a genuine way. To assist you in focusing your times of prayerful engagement with God in his word, consider following Lectio Divina (pronounced "LEHkseeoh dihVEEnah"), the ancient model of prayerfully reading Scripture. The spiritual practice of Lectio Divina invites us into God's presence to listen for his specific, loving word to us at our particular moment in time. This way of devotional reading is intended to lead the reader into an intimate and prayerful dialogue with God.

Lectio Divina is traditionally made up of five movements. Though the following description may seem complex at first, it is simple. As you first experiment with this style of reading and praying, use this page to go step-by-step, taking your time. After a few times through the movements, they will become intuitive and natural for you, like a dance or song that you know by heart.

The Five Movements of Lectio Divina

1. Silencio - Quietly prepare your heart to listen to God.

Find a peaceful, comfortable place to come into God's presence. Remove all distractions. It may be helpful to put your phone or computer out of reach in order to prevent further distractions during your dialogue with God and his word. This is a crucial step in meeting God with humble, worshipful attentiveness. Take a few deep breaths in silence. Become quiet in your whole being and offer yourself to God. You may choose to open the palms of your hands upward in a posture of openness to receive what God has for you. You may also light a candle to serve as a reminder of the Holy Spirit's presence with you. Before you begin to read Scripture, pray a simple prayer. Here are a few suggestions:

- "Here I am, Lord."
- "Speak, Father, your child is listening."
- "God, please open my eyes and heart to see what you desire to reveal to me today."

2. Lectio - Read the word.

Read a passage of Scripture slowly, perhaps even out loud. Linger over any word or phrase that catches your attention or resonates with your heart. Sit with this word or phrase and savor

it as a word from God to you. If you are reading a physical Bible, you may want to underline the word or phrase or circle the number of the verse that lights up for you. If you're reading a Bible app, you may highlight the verse.

3. Meditatio - Meditate on the word.

Read the scripture slowly a second time out loud, and listen to where the word connects with your life right now. Allow your curiosity to form questions in your mind about what you are reading and receiving from God in the passage. Reflect on the importance of the words that light up to you.

4. Oratio - Respond to God in prayer.

Read the scripture a third time, listening carefully to discern how the whole passage informs what has caught your attention. Now is the moment to enter into a personal dialogue with God. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The important thing is to respond to God genuinely. Tell God what words have illuminated for you, and share any thoughts or feelings about the text with him. Use the language of the scripture in your response to God. Tell him where you feel resistant or confused by the text. Ask him your questions. If you struggle to focus or notice anything

in the scripture, ask God to give you a response to his word. Do not censure your thoughts or requests to God. Let them flow out spontaneously and freely to the Lord who loves you. Hold nothing back. Respond to God's invitation to connect with you intimately. If you find it difficult to converse with God silently in your mind, you may want to pray out loud or write your prayer in a journal or a note-taking app.

5. Contemplatio - Peacefully contemplate God's specific word to you.

Before you close your time with God, allow some time for the word to sink deeply into your soul. Engage your imagination in your contemplation of how God's word could change the way you understand and live with God. Deeply receive God's word to you and rest in his presence and love. Make a note or set a reminder so that you may take God's word with you to remember it throughout your day. Thank God for speaking to you through his word and by his Holy Spirit.

Week 1: Humility & Dependence on God

November 16-22

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." - John 15:5

Prayer Prompts

- Pray that the Lord would grant the leaders and members of our church humility to abide in Jesus and trust in him to bear fruit in our community for his kingdom.
- Pray that the work of our church will be for God's glory and not our own.
- Pray that the Lord would be our strength when we are weak and that in these difficult times he would work all things for our good.
- Share your weaknesses and fears with God and take refuge in him.
- Praise Jesus for his incredible humility that led him to empty himself, taking the form of a human servant and dying in our place on the cross.

On different days of the week, use the following three passages of Scripture to guide your prayers for our church's heart of humility and dependence upon the Lord. You may choose to prayerfully meditate using Lectio.

James 4:6-10

6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Deuteronomy 8:1-3

1 The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. 2 And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Philippians 2:3-11

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Week 2: Repentance

November 23-29

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” - Luke 15:7

Prayer Prompts

- Pray that we may experience the joy of heaven when we turn away from our sin and return to the loving embrace of God, our graceful Father.
- Pray that, in the Lord, we would bear fruit in our private and communal lives as we continually repent of our brokenness and sin.
- Ask God to illuminate secret sins that have been allowed to grow in the darkness of concealment, ignorance or denial. Pray for the courage to bring shameful sins into the light so that we may be forgiven, healed and restored.
- If you are struggling with habitual sin and find repentance to be difficult, use Psalm 51 as a guide for your heartfelt prayer to God. Ask God to give you a broken heart like David, who grieved his sin and pleaded with God for cleansing grace and deliverance.
- Pray that our church will become a safe and winsome place for all to confessionally share our stories and receive the encouraging support of others who have experienced God’s love and received his grace.

On different days of the week, use the following three passages of Scripture to guide your prayers for our church’s continual heart of repentance. You may choose to prayerfully meditate using Lectio.

Luke 5:27-32: 27

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” 28 And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. 29 And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. 30 And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” 31 And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

2 Corinthians 7:9-10

9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

2 Timothy 2:22-26

22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 23 Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. 24 And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Week 3: Unity & Reconciliation

November 20-December 6

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” - 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Prayer Prompts

- Thank God for forming every human in his image and drawing us to himself from every nation to form a new family in Christ.
- Pray for the unity of our church. Enter into Jesus’ prayer in John 17.
- Pray for all those who have been wounded by sin and strife within our church.
- Pray that our church may become a multiethnic community that reflects Jesus’ kingdom--in which all feel welcomed and loved and are able to flourish as we grow in Christ together.
- Pray that God would give us empathetic hearts and Christlike compassion for people who are different from us.

On different days of the week, use the following three passages of Scripture to guide your prayers for our church’s reconciliatory unity in Christ. You may choose to prayerfully meditate using Lectio.

Ephesians 2:13-22

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Matthew 5:21-24

21 You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Week 4: Love

December 7-13

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” - John 3:16-17

Prayer Prompts

- Thank God for his selfless love that saves us from death and gives us eternal life with him.
- Pray that our church would become a place where everyone experiences God’s love in community and becomes a conduit of his love to one another.
- Pray for the courage and opportunity to reach out to friends, colleagues and neighbors with the love of Christ.
- Prayerfully express your own love for God in response to the specific love that he has shown you.
- If you struggle to experience God’s love or feel love for God, share this with him honestly and ask him to fill you with love where you lack.

On different days of the week, use the following three passages of Scripture to guide your prayers for our church’s love for God and neighbor to emulate Christ’s love. You may choose to prayerfully meditate using Lectio.

John 15:9-14

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Matthew 22:36-40

36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Psalms 136

1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.

3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever;

4 to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever;

5 to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever;

6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever;

7 to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever;

8 the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever; ...

Continue with the rest of Psalm 136.

Week 5: Holiness

December 14-20

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” - 1 Peter 1:14-16

Prayer Prompts

- Thank the Lord for calling us to be his church and for making us holy by the blood of Jesus Christ.
- Pray that the Lord will pour his Holy Spirit out on our church in full measure so that we may be his light in Boston.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to teach our church all that we need to learn during this season, that he would remind us of all Jesus said and did and that he would convict us of our sins.
- Confess to God areas of unholiness in your private life, as well as the sins of our church, where we have failed to be his holy and faithful witnesses. Receive the grace of God and praise him for his steadfast love.
- Ask God to grant our church a passionate desire to live holy lives together and pray that our enemy’s attempt to lead us into sin, apathy and prideful selfishness would be thwarted.

On different days of the week, use the following three passages of Scripture to guide your prayers for our church’s growth in holiness in Christ. You may choose to prayerfully meditate using Lectio.

Ezekiel 36:22-29

22 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23 And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. 24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. 29 And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Romans 12:1-2

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Week 6: Hopeful Waiting

December 21-24

Note that this “week” is abbreviated with the next week beginning on Friday, 12/25, Christmas Day.

“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.” - Psalm 130:5-7

Prayer Prompts

- Pray that our church would trust in the Lord with all our hearts, that we would not lean on our own understanding, that we would acknowledge him in all our ways and trust him to lead us on his straight path.
- Pray that God would restore hope where we as a church are feeling hopeless. Share with God specific areas of your life where you are discouraged and struggle to hope for healthy change.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would remind us of all the ways in which God has remained faithful to his people and his promises.

On different days of the week, use the following two passages of Scripture to guide your hopeful prayers as we wait upon the Lord together. You may choose to prayerfully meditate using Lectio.

1 Peter 1:3-9

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Romans 8:18-25

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Week 7: Joyful Feasting

December 25-31

Note that this “week” begins on Friday, Christmas Day, instead of on the following Sunday. If you have been fasting throughout this season, cease your fast and celebrate God’s faithfulness and presence with us in Christ Jesus.

“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” - Luke 2:10-11

Prayer Prompts

- Thank God for what he has done for us in this season of communal prayer. Thank him specifically for any words or experiences that he gave to you in your times of focused prayer with him. Rejoice in his goodness.
- Praise God for giving us his Word to feast upon and his Spirit to sustain us daily.
- Thank God for all the ways in which he has abundantly provided for us.
- Thank God for what he will do for our church in the future, even in 2021. Trust that he will lead us and renew us. Rejoice in his faithfulness and steadfast love.
- Thank God for Jesus, who is God with us! Marvel at the Christmas story and rejoice in his promise to return again. Pray with all the saints, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

On different days of the week, use the following three passages of Scripture to guide your joyful prayers as we feast upon the goodness of God together. You may choose to prayerfully meditate using Lectio.

Isaiah 25:6-9

6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. 7 And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. 9 It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Psalms 16:5-11

5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. 6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. 7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. 8 I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. 10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. 11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Revelation 19:6-9

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”