

ORCHARD COMMUNITY CHURCH
2022 LENTEN 7-WEEK PRAYER GUIDE
Ash Wednesday, March 2 – Wednesday, April 13
THEME: Jesus is the One Thing

The Invitation of Lent – Do we trust Jesus enough to make Him our One Thing?

If our experience of loss through the COVID pandemic has revealed anything to us, it is that we are interdependent.

The other less obvious reckoning is that our world changed significantly during the last two years. We will not likely be returning to old norms and prior lifestyles as a “new normal,” but more likely with an adjusted sense of “normal.”

As the COVID-19 virus becomes endemic rather than pandemic, Christians have an opportunity to see spiritually what God desires for us in our dis-array and our distraction, our loss of resilience, our trauma, our drift, or feeling like we have been standing still.

This transitional moment in 2022, and this season of Lent offer an opportunity to take stock of what we have lost in the past two years, but also what we have gained, and where we can grow.

Jesus says to his followers: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light” (Matt. 11: 28 – 30.)

When we participate in the season of Lent, we open our hearts in a different way. Jesus is able to point to our spiritual hunger for Him as He did for his follower, Martha. Unlike her sister Mary, Martha got caught up in the needs in front of her. Her stress over food preparation for Jesus and his disciples prevented her from engaging in Jesus' presence. “But the Lord said to her, ‘My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! **There is only one thing worth being concerned about.** Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her’ (Luke 10: 38 – 42.)

May we discover the nature of our spiritual hunger together and apart during this unique season of Lent.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The goal of this guide is to provide a tool for how to structure our time and focus during Lent. Follow the structure only as it aids your spiritual journey. Our desire is to grow closer to God in authentic prayer, exchanging our time and attention for intentional focus on God. We will learn how to integrate God's truth into our inner lives with meditation. At the end of Lent, you will have learned more about the transforming power of fasting and prayer with meditation.

PLAN AHEAD

1. Read through the introductory pages 1 - 5 first before March 1, 2022.
1. Plan how you will fast - either from abstaining from food or an activity that distracts you from spending time with God. See the Fasting Information Sheet on page 10 for types of fasts.
2. Read through the calendar of scheduled fasting for your available dates for fasting or your exchange of time and activity for prayer and meditation.
3. Skim through the prayer guide to see whether you want to jump in, either weekly, every other week, or once or twice. Plan your time with God ahead of time, either at home by yourself, with your family, or during our Ash Wednesday service and guided group prayer gatherings. No prior sign-up is required, but being in tune to the prompting of the Holy Spirit about your best time to fast, to pray and to meditate is important.
4. You will need to gather a few materials: a pen and a supportive chair.
5. If you are participating in the Lenten season as a family with children, you will need to gather a few simple materials ahead of time, as well as read the lesson ahead of time. You will also need a children's Bible or a Bible with an easy-to-read translation.

The New Living Translation is an updated version of the Living Bible which the translator, Ken Taylor, a pastor, developed for his own children. You can find most of these easy-to-read versions online at Biblegateway.com or through a Google search.

LENTEN TOOL KIT TIPS AND RESOURCES

THEME: Jesus is the One Thing

FASTING WITH PRAYER

The Bible does not give direct explanations about the spiritual dynamics of fasting with prayer, but when we turn to I Corinthians 2, we indirectly understand the intertwining of our spirits with the Spirit of God to understand His truths. When we let our resistance in our own spirits from physical weakness, the Spirit of God quickens and has more “space” to enter in.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we speak with words from God’s own Spirit. “It was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets. No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. And we have received God’s Spirit (not the world’s spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us” (I Cor. 2:10,11.)

Tip: It is likely when we are hungry or giving up something we use for solace instead of turning to God, we will notice emotions come up when we feel weak. Take note of how you feel and record it in the pages in this booklet. These emotions may be feelings of fear, abandonment, deprivation, shame, grief, irritability, hurt, loneliness or maybe feelings of joy, lightness, or calm. These feelings are areas where God is awakening in us to commit areas of our lives to bring greater joy, a cause of praise, or peace, a cause of thankfulness.

Another Tip: If you feel really hungry, especially at night, pray for your spiritual hunger to increase or pray for food for those in our County who need their basic needs met.

THE EXCHANGE OF OUR HEARTS FOR GOD’S SPIRIT

When we give our time and attention to Jesus in our weakness, we can trust God to help us. God will strengthen us in our weakest places. King David in his psalm of anguish after he recognized the depth of his sin in Psalm 51: 16 – 17: “You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.”

AUTHENTIC PRAYER

Authentic prayer comes from the place of trust that we can be ourselves freely before the One who created us. Picture the Lord saying to you, “Your heart is safe with me. I just want to take you where I want to take you. And I need you to trust me.” In King David’s great passion for worshipping God amidst his sin, we can learn how to trust God enough to show Him all of ourselves.

Psalm 27: 1 - 8

A psalm of David.

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation—
so why should I be afraid?

The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger,
so why should I tremble?

² When evil people come to devour me,
when my enemies and foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.

³ Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.

Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.

⁴ **The one thing I ask of the LORD—
the thing I seek most—
is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
delighting in the LORD’s perfections
and meditating in his Temple.**

⁵ For he will conceal me there when troubles come;
he will hide me in his sanctuary.
He will place me out of reach on a high rock.

⁶ Then I will hold my head high
above my enemies who surround me.
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy,
singing and praising the LORD with music

⁷ **Hear me as I pray, O LORD.
Be merciful and answer me!**

⁸ **My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me.”
And my heart responds, “LORD, I am coming.**

DAVID THE PSALMIST – A MAN OF ONE THING

To understand the Psalms we are focusing on, it is helpful to understand the writer, David, and his background. 2 Samuel 23: 1 - 2 describe David's last words and gives us a picture of a man of great passion for God, for worship, for life, and for other people, a passion that often confused his family and advisors.

"These are the last words of David: David, the son of Jesse, speaks—David, the man who was raised up so high, David, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. The Spirit of the LORD speaks through me; his words are upon my tongue."

David learned his song-writing craft as a shepherd and his skill as a warrior defending first sheep from predators when lions and wolves roamed freely, his tribe from the Philistines, and later as leader of armies of men who were praised in songs claiming David's victory over ten thousand or more warriors.

David had other enemies aside from his career at war. Within his tribe, Saul, the first King of Israel, sinned against God. God removed him from his powerful position, and instead God anointed David to be the next King. Saul, in his jealousy, wanted to kill David.

Saul was David's personal enemy and David spent 17 years on the run from Saul. David was also passionate about women and children and suffered greatly through the consequences of his sexual sin. David's sexual sin manifest itself in the lives of his children, causing deep pain and betrayal among them. You can read about David's life, marked by great passion, sin and repentance and his desire to serve God, in 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel.

THE BRONZE AGE VIEWPOINT IN THE PSALMS

The era in history that David lived in was much different than ours. David lived about a thousand years earlier than the time of Jesus. He wrote realistically, as a man with many personal and wartime enemies during the Bronze Age in the Near East, when law, writing, architecture, math, astronomy, were just emerging along with city-states and empire building. Because of the blood on David's hands, God chose David's son Solomon to build the temple David envisioned for Israel. In the Hebrew mindset, blood is the source of life. David had cut off many from the source of life as a warrior.

JESUS AND VIOLENCE

Jesus explicitly warned against the use of violence during his last days. Instead, Jesus advocated for a kind of violence that would bring spiritual revolution. Jesus died a violent death on the cross. The cross itself, however, is the pathway away from violence. The cross holds the promise of redemption and freedom from using violence to get our way. Jesus set aside violence for a better way of blessing those who cost us our well-being.

STEPS FOR MEDITATION

You will need to refer to these pages after every lesson.

For the purpose of calming our minds and spirits before God so we are more receptive to His Spirit, we need to grow in our understanding of how our minds and bodies operate at rest.

Preparation

Sit in a chair that is supportive so you can put your feet together comfortable on the floor and let your arms flop to your sides. Close your eyes. Make physical adjustments so you are comfortable. If you experience chronic pain, it may be hard to ignore your pain. Take a moment to ask God to touch your painful areas.

A. Address the “Did I turn off the stove?” thoughts and everything that follows with reminders of what we forgot to do. Our brains have a marvelous feature called working memory. It is function of our brains that maintains information we need to perform certain high-level cognitive tasks and functions.

For the purposes of meditation, it is important to let our minds run through these tasks that may be left over from another part of our day.

Take a moment to let these thoughts filter through and note them on the working memory note page in the booklet on page 18, which will signal that your mind has taken care of remembering to do the task and set it aside.

B. Take a few moments to get comfortable.

- o With your eyes open (if you feel dizzy) or closed, note how your body feels.
- o What is the taste in your mouth?
- o How do your legs feel touching the floor?
- o Is your spine touching the back of the chair?
- o If you feel tense, shake out your arms and legs.
- o What emotions are you feeling?
- o Is the room noisy?
- o Note any sounds, but let go of your focus on them.

C. In both the Old and New Testaments the Spirit of God is pictured as breath or wind.

- o Focus on your breathing to calm down our central nervous systems.
- o Are you breathing slowly? Shallowly?
- o Take in a depth breath and let it out.
- o Is that breath different than the breaths you were taking when you sat down?
- o Place your hand lightly on your stomach.
- o Take a deep breath so that you can feel your breath expand all the way through your lungs.
- o Hold your expanded breath.
- o Now, take in a deep breath and count to 4.
- o Hold that breath for 4 counts.
- o Push out that breath lightly for 4 seconds.

D. Next, add a 3 - word phrase to the prior steps as you count.

Choose from the list or create your own. Try to change your phrase week to week.

- o *Come, Holy Spirit.*
- o *I am free.*
- o *Help me trust.*
- o *Lord, deliver me.*
- o *A clean spirit.*
- o *Open my heart.*
- o *Beauty from ashes.*
- o *Hold me, Lord.*
- o *One Thing, only.*

E. With your 4-count breathing and your 3-word prayer phrase, take 3 breaths in and then out.

F. If you are still feeling particularly stressed, unsettled, anxious, add these 3 simple exercises to your meditation. Research has demonstrated that anxiety may be a mechanical response to an over-activated vagus nerves. The vagus nerves are the longest nerves of the autonomic nervous system and are one of the most important nerves in the body. They play a major role in regulating the heart rate and keeping the gastrointestinal tract in working order. The vagus nerves also carry sensory information from the internal organs back to the brain.

Watch this video: <https://youtu.be/L1HCG3BGK8I> after consulting with your doctor if you have any health concerns.

G. Visualize next a place of safety where you feel protected. Picture yourself talking to Jesus.

H. Thank Jesus for this place of safety.

I. Take note of your feelings and picture yourself placing them into Jesus' open hands.

J. Let any Bible verses or phrases come to mind from the READINGS.

K. Keep breathing slowly until you feel your focus come to an end.

L. END your meditation here.

M. WRITE some notes about how you felt during meditation.

N. REFLECT - How does focusing on the Jesus as our Breath of Life change your perspective on your stress? Emotions? Loss? Levels of trust with God?

FASTING INFORMATION SHEET

What is fasting?

Fasting is a planned choice to abstain from some, or reduced consumption of, food, drink or both, for a period of time. Forgetting to eat is not the same as a planned fast.

How is fasting with prayer different than just praying?

Fasting in our culture is generally thought of as a way to lose weight, detox our bodies, change a habit, or prepare for a medical test.

Fasting and prayer help us humbly access the awesome strength of God. Fasting adds the component of urgency before God and awareness of our defeating self-sufficiency.

Are there different ways to fast?

Yes. Depending on your medical condition, medication requirements, and relationship to food, there are different ways to fast.

1. Bread & water fast – At one meal, eat only bread and drink only water – not to the point of fullness. RECOMMENDED.
2. Daniel fast – At every meal, eat only vegetables and drink water during a 24-hour for 10 days.
3. 12-hour fast – Skipping dinner but drinking water instead and then eating breakfast. Most of the fasting time is while you are sleeping.
4. 24-hour fast – Skipping dinner, but drinking water and not eating until breakfast the second day.
5. 3-day fast – Skipping all meals for 72 hours, but drinking water only during 72 hours.
6. Caffeine fast – Depending on how often and how much caffeine you take in a 24-hour period, abstaining from caffeine for a 24-hour period is a good indication how much you rely on caffeine for strength that might be given by God. You may also get a headache. Proceed with caution.

What do I do if I cannot fast from eating because of my medical condition?

You can maintain your normal eating patterns, but exchange another hour of activity for prayer and meditation. Some suggestions are trading out screen time spent on Netflix, video games, online shopping, social media, overwork (even for ministry), worry, coffee drinking, cards, sports talk, reading the news.

Why do we fast?

We fast to bring awareness in the areas of lives where we seek dependence on food, drink or activities that we use as solace instead of seeking God.

How do we fast?

We fast in private with humility and not with an attitude of sacrifice that will get us something out of God.

We also fast with understanding that spiritual fasting is not for weight loss, for intermittent fasting for medical reasons, or necessarily to change an eating habit.

We fast with the recognition that giving up food to pray is not a performance or an attempt to attain anything on our own merit.

What is the particular reason OCC Worship Team is extending this invitation to you at this time?

To grow deeper with God in 2022 after two years of loss during the COVID pandemic.

What do I do during a fast?

Instead of spending time preparing and eating food, we turn our time and attention to prayer and meditation with guidance from the Holy Spirit and our reading through our trusty prayer guide to help structure our hour of reduced time eating.

When do I fast?

Once a week with prayer for seven weeks or whatever fits your own journey at this time.

Do I have to fast every week?

No. Do what you can. Fasting this Lenten season may not be a good fit.

How long should I fast?

Either one for meal only (preferably dinner), 12 hours (skipping dinner and eating breakfast) or 24 hours (skipping dinner to dinner), depending on your health status.

Do I have to fast during the schedule listed in this booklet?

No. The schedule is only a guide. Feel free to pray and fast according to your own time frame.

What are the pros of choosing to fast?

The pros of fasting are to experience the love described in I John 4:10 fully.

“This is real love – not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”

What are the pitfalls of choosing to fast?

Becoming self-righteousness before others or God that we are extra spiritual or feeling that we can earn something from God when we fast.

Should kids learn to fast?

No. We are not recommending at this time that children participate in fasting during Lent but please use the prayer guide section for families. As you lead them, your kids will be able to learn more about fasting and how God helps us and others.

7-WEEK LENTEN SCHEDULE OF FASTING AND PRAYER WITH MEDITATION

After Ash Wednesday, this seven-week program alternates between solo, at-home readings with reflection, prayer and meditation one week and on-site church group activity the following week (with the exception of April, as we get closer to Good Friday).

It is recommended that you pick a consistent time each week to complete the prayer and fasting.

Note: For families with children, there is a Family prayer guide at the end of this section.

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

- o **Complete READING #1** from the Prayer Guide beforehand (fasting/reading/prayer) in preparation for Ash Wednesday.
- o **Attend Ash Wednesday service** from 7 - 8 p.m. at Orchard Community Church to begin Lent in community.

Tuesday, March 8, 2022 (2nd week of Lent)

- o **Attend Fasting Group Time** at Orchard Community Church library from 6 - 7 p.m. Guided prayer and meditation with Worship Elder. (No sign-up required.)

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 (3rd week of Lent)

- o **Complete READING #2** from the Prayer Guide (fasting/reading/prayer) solo, at home.

Tuesday, March 22, 2022 (4th week of Lent)

- o **Attend Fasting Group Time** at Orchard Community Church library from 6 - 7 p.m. Guided prayer and meditation with Worship Elder. (No sign-up required.)

Tuesday, March 29, 2022 (5th week of Lent)

- o **Complete READING #3** from the Prayer Guide (fasting/reading/prayer) solo, at home.

Tuesday, April 5, 2022 (6th week of Lent)

- o **Attend Fasting Group Time** at Orchard Community Church library from 6 - 7 p.m. Guided prayer and meditation with Worship Elder. (No sign-up required.)

Tuesday, April 12, 2022 (7th week of Lent)

- o **Attend Fasting Group Time** at Orchard Community Church library from 6 - 7 p.m. Guided prayer and meditation with Worship Elder. (No sign-up required.)

HOLY WEEK

Thursday, April 14, 2022 (7th week of Lent)

- o **Attend Maundy Thursday Service** at Orchard Community Church at 7 p.m.
(Check weekly bulletin for details.)

Friday, April 15, 2022 (7th week of Lent)

- o **GOOD FRIDAY. Complete** guided journal exercise from **READING #4** from the Prayer Guide solo, at home.

Sunday, April 17, 2022 (Easter Sunday)

- o **Attend Easter Sunday celebration** at Orchard Community Church.
(Check weekly bulletin for service times/online streaming options/childcare)

READING #1 - ASH WEDNESDAY PREPARATION

A. ***Before March 2, 2022, set aside an hour*** (recommended time: 5 - 6 p.m., or whichever time works best for you) to pray and fast (with whichever fasting choice you have made -- see page _____ in preparation for the Ash Wednesday service at 7 p.m. at Orchard Community Church.

B. ***On March 2, 2022, as you fast:***

- a. **READ** the following summary about Lent
- b. **READ** the Scripture which follows the Lent summary
- c. **PRAY** with contemplation before Ash Wednesday service **OR**
- d. **WRITE** on pages provided in response to the Question for Reflection

What is Lent?

Lent is a spiritual season of the church observed for 40 days beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on the Saturday midnight before Easter Sunday, a day a day that moves each year. The actual date of Easter moves year to year because it is derived from movements marked in of the Hebrew solar and lunar calendar.

Just as we celebrate Advent as a season of anticipation for the coming of the birth of Jesus and exchange gifts in remembrance of the gift of baby Jesus to us all for new life, we celebrate Lent as well with the anticipation of the coming of Christ's death on the cross.

We exchange our time for food gathering, preparation, and eating for the gift of God's strength and trust growing in us as a result of giving up to God in prayer our physical weakness.

Although Lent is not mentioned specifically in the Bible, the 40-day period of Lent is based on two episodes of spiritual testing in the Bible.

First, Lent is based on the 40 years of wilderness wanderings by the Israelites after the exodus from Egypt (Numbers 33:38, Deuteronomy 1:3) and secondly, the Temptation of Jesus after he spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13.)

The Bible illustrates that the ancient Hebrews fasted for different reasons. They consecrated fasts for national, solemn gatherings to ask for God's guidance. (Jer. 36:9, Neh.9:1)

The Hebrews also practiced fasting and mourning with ashes to offer repentance to God for straying from God's purpose for them (2 Samuel 13:19, Esther 4:3, Job 2:8, Daniel 9:3, I Kings 21:25 -27.) David fasted and prayed for healing of his sick child (2 Samuel 12: 16 -22.) Moses and the prophets fasted and prayed for spiritual preparation for leadership and intervention for God's fallen away people (Deut. 9:18, I Kings 19:8.)

Jesus, in keeping with Jewish practice, also fasted during his ministry for spiritual guidance from the Spirit. Jesus' followers continued this practice as a group especially before they sent out disciples to minister as missionaries (Luke 5:33-35, Acts 13: 1 – 3).

The early church continued the practice of fasting as regular spiritual discipline along with prayer, gathering in groups to worship and to understand the teachings of Jesus and Hebrew Scriptures. Their observance was strict. Over time, the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have practiced Lent with less strict observance, choosing to follow the pattern of identifying with Christ's sacrifice and death, symbolized by placing ash on Christians foreheads on Ash Wednesday.

At Orchard Community Church, we have traditionally entered into the season of Lent with intentional times of prayer. The Session of Orchard Community Church is seeking the Lord's purpose for deeper growth in 2022 after the severe disruptions and loss to our daily and spiritual rhythms from the COVID-19 pandemic. Session and the Worship Committee are inviting the people of Orchard Community Church to walk the season of Lent with a deeper focus on inner change through fasting, prayer and meditation.

When our spirits are quickened to God through offering up to God our weakness, God is quick to enter in.

Lent is an invitation for a grand adventure into the unexpected outcomes of God, then, to trade out COVID weariness, loss and disruption for renewal, keen spiritual vision and receptivity for God's transformation for ourselves and our community.

C. Read Psalms 62: 5 – 8:

⁵ Let all that I am wait quietly before God,
for my hope is in him.

⁶ He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will not be shaken.

⁷ My victory and honor come from God alone.
He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me.

⁸ O my people, trust in him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him,
for God is our refuge.

D. A prayer for Lent:

Following Jesus' example for prayer and fasting, contemplate this question: *Do I trust God enough to pour out my heart to Him? If my trust in God were a bucket, how full of water would it be?*

Lack of trust sometimes stems from disappointment and hurt. Where have you felt disappointed during COVID with God? Take some time to write your response on the reflection page and then offer your disappointment to God in prayer.

- a. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you, to protect you, and to strengthen you during the fasting season.
- b. Ask the Holy Spirit for help to increase your dependence on Jesus in your decision-making about work, priorities, time and in relationships to others.
- c. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you increase your desire to make Jesus the One Thing in your decision-making and interactions with others.
- d. Ask the Holy Spirit to nudge you in areas of your life where you are bogged down, weary from old behavior patterns, illness, grief, any family issues, and seek solace in comfort measures instead of asking God for help and peace (Matt 4 1:2, John 16:33).

E. *Spiritually begin Lent with our Orchard community* -- attend the Ash Wednesday Service at 7 p.m. on March 2, 2022.

The Orchard Community Church Prayer Team will be available after the service for one-on-one prayer. Check the bulletin for information about worship details, streaming options and childcare sign-ups in the office the Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

Putting Working Memory Tasks to Rest (aka Busy Brain Unload Page)

o Calm your mind by writing here in preparation for meditating:

(Use with Meditation steps on pp. 7 – 9.)

Reflection Page for Reading #1

READING #2 – Psalm 13 – A Psalm of personal lament

Deeper Dive: Read *How to Read the Psalms*, by Tremper Longman III, IVP Academic: 1988.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

o To be completed at home, solo.

There are five books within Psalms in the Bible. About 75 psalms are credited to David. There are more psalms of lament than any other kind of psalms.

What is lament? Is it different than regret? Grieving? Depression?

In our culture, we have no traditions for expressing the very human emotion of lament. There is no Day of Lament (except if your team lost the Super Bowl.)

In ancient Israel, the accepted custom to express lament for sin, political oppression, and loss was through tearing their clothes, wearing sackcloth and ashes, and publicly weeping and wailing.

Israel also lamented as a group. It is hard to place, then, in 2022, what lament looks and sounds like in our culture, even after the COVID pandemic has created a season for lament as a community.

It is fitting, then, that we can turn to the poetic tradition in the Psalms to find a gateway to God for our personal and corporate grief. Psalms hold a particular type of poem of lament which follows a basic structure of complaint:

1. An address to God.
2. Details of the complaint.
3. Request for God's help.
4. Expression of trust in God.

Read Psalm 13.

Psalm 13

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

- ¹ O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever?
How long will you look the other way?
- ² How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,
with sorrow in my heart every day?
How long will my enemy have the upper hand?
- ³ Turn and answer me, O Lord my God!
Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.
- ⁴ Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!"
Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.
- ⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love.
I will rejoice because you have rescued me.
- ⁶ I will sing to the Lord
because he is good to me.

o **Circle** the verses in the Psalm which are addressed to God.

On the reflection page:

1. **List** David's complaint.
2. **Write out** the verse where David asks for God's help.
3. **Summarize** in your own words how David expresses his trust in God.
4. **Reflect on** what do you think happened to David between his complaining to God and his ending on the high note of trusting God? Is David trusting God for something specific? What does David imply about God's character that makes God trustworthy? How do you think David know this aspect of God's character? (Refer back to Psalms 27 in the booklet introduction.)
5. **Write out** your own personal complaint to God about the last two years or anything else of long-term concern in your life. Lift your complaint to God. Note if you feel more poised to be grateful to God or to others in your life you may have not expressed gratitude toward.
6. **Ponder** the bucket image again. If trust in God were water in the bucket, what is your level of trust? Is anything holding you back? Name that pain on the reflection page.
7. **Pray** briefly and lift that pain to God.
8. **Meditate** following the steps on Meditation on pages 7-9.

Reflection Page for Reading #2

READING #3 – Psalms 12 & 73 – Psalms of communal lament

o To be completed at home, solo.

According to Old Testament scholar, T. Longman, communal psalms were sung during times of national crisis and sung during times of festival gatherings. The precipitating event for national laments were the destruction of the Temple in 587 B.C. Communal psalms were generally a recitation of God’s mighty deeds performed on behalf of his people so as to “arouse” God from his sleep to intervene for his people.

Psalm 12

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by an eight-stringed instrument.

- ¹ Help, O Lord, for the godly are fast disappearing!
The faithful have vanished from the earth!
- ² Neighbors lie to each other,
speaking with flattering lips and deceitful hearts.
- ³ May the Lord cut off their flattering lips
and silence their boastful tongues.
- ⁴ They say, “We will lie to our hearts’ content.
Our lips are our own—who can stop us?”
- ⁵ The Lord replies, “I have seen violence done to the helpless,
and I have heard the groans of the poor.
Now I will rise up to rescue them,
as they have longed for me to do.”
- ⁶ The Lord’s promises are pure,
like silver refined in a furnace,
purified seven times over.
- ⁷ Therefore, Lord, we know you will protect the oppressed,
preserving them forever from this lying generation,
- ⁸ even though the wicked strut about,
and evil is praised throughout the land.

Ponder where you think we are as a nation after COVID. What did COVID show us about ourselves? Selfishness, pride, division, oppressive structures that hurt, the character of our leaders and influencers like celebrities, billionaires, sports figures, technology innovators, economic fore-casters, religious thinkers, our media?

Maybe we saw some rise up nationally to address a confusing time with integrity or wisdom?

Is the behavior of our national leaders and institutions the real picture of the state of our nation?

Answer each of the following questions below:

a. What was David's complaint about his culture and developing nation state?

b. What did David suggest to God for a solution?

c. What does David hear from God instead?

d. What was David's response to God's answer?

e. What conclusion about God's character does David make?

f. What shifted in David's spirit according to this Psalm?

Write on the reflection page your own lament to God about the state of our nation. **Start with:**

1. **God**, what I see in our nation is..... Make a list.
2. **Tell** God in one sentence where you would like to see Him intervene specifically in our nation.
3. **Write** one sentence about what God's promise is to us as His people during a nation in transition after COVID.
4. **Check** Authentic Prayer Tips from page _ about how to feel confident before God.
5. **Pray** a prayer of lament patterned after Psalms 73: 1 – 12, 16 – 20, 21 – 26

Meditate on Psalm 73 using the meditation guide.

Deeper Dive: Read Psalm 73 in its entirety (read from your own Bible or on biblegateway.com).

Psalm 73

A psalm of Asaph.

- ¹ Truly God is good to Israel,
to those whose hearts are pure.
- ² But as for me, I almost lost my footing.
My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.
- ³ For I envied the proud
when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.
- ⁴ They seem to live such painless lives;
their bodies are so healthy and strong.
- ⁵ They don't have troubles like other people;
they're not plagued with problems like everyone else.
- ⁹ They boast against the very heavens,
and their words strut throughout the earth.
- ¹⁰ And so the people are dismayed and confused,
drinking in all their words.
- ¹¹ "What does God know?" they ask.
"Does the Most High even know what's happening?"
- ¹² Look at these wicked people—
enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.

- ¹⁶ So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper.
But what a difficult task it is!
- ¹⁷ Then I went into your sanctuary, O God,
and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.
- ²⁰ When you arise, O Lord,
you will laugh at their silly ideas
as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.
- ²¹ Then I realized that my heart was bitter,
and I was all torn up inside.
- ²² I was so foolish and ignorant—
I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.
- ²³ Yet I still belong to you;
you hold my right hand.
- ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
leading me to a glorious destiny.
- ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
I desire you more than anything on earth.
- ²⁶ My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,
but God remains the strength of my heart;
he is mine forever.

Reflection Page for Reading #3

READING #4 – Psalm 22 – David's lament/Jesus' lament

o To be completed at home, solo.

Psalm 22 may be the most unique of the Psalms. Psalm 22, read as a whole psalm, expands the whole pattern of complaint, trust and praise that other Psalms follow. Psalm 22 is unique also because it is quoted by Jesus from the cross.

Psalm 22 not only explodes through the limits of both the usual psalm format, expanding the complaint and praise sections, but also expands the limits of Israel's traditional understanding of God, and of life and death.

David the Psalmist, in the second section of praise, draws everyone, the living and the dead, into the sphere of God's reign. The revolutionary picture David draws sets the stage for Jesus' own suffering and death, which Jesus experienced, broken and alone, but for the rescue of the entire, afflicted world, for all times and all places.

When Jesus quotes from David's psalm, in his suffering and exclusion from his heavenly Father, Jesus is also affirming, for the world, for all time, like David affirmed prophetically to his own community, that God shares the suffering of the afflicted.

We can accept our own suffering in a meaningful way as we depend on God who is quick to answer the afflicted. God is not absent from our suffering or inflicts suffering on people. Instead, because Jesus suffered and died as a "lowly" one, we can celebrate the passion and resurrection of Jesus, that God has heard our cries for help.

If we read Psalms 22 in the light of Jesus telling us His story on the cross, we hear the voice of the living Lord who tells of His anguish and dying, and as well, the crucified One who lives.

Psalm 22: 1 - 11

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune "Doe of the Dawn."

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
- ² Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.
- ³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- ⁴ Our ancestors trusted in you,
and you rescued them.
- ⁵ They cried out to you and were saved.
They trusted in you and were never disgraced.
- ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man.
I am scorned and despised by all!
- ⁷ Everyone who sees me mocks me.
They sneer and shake their heads, saying,
- ⁸ "Is this the one who relies on the Lord?
Then let the Lord save him!
If the Lord loves him so much,
let the Lord rescue him!"
- ⁹ Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb
and led me to trust you at my mother's breast.
- ¹⁰ I was thrust into your arms at my birth.
You have been my God from the moment I was born.
- ¹¹ Do not stay so far from me,
for trouble is near,
and no one else can help me.

On the reflection page:

1. Psalms 22 is a long psalm of alternating complaint and praise even though the psalmist feels like a worm. The psalm begins, however, with “My God.” What does the word, “My” imply from the outset of the poem? **Write** your thoughts on the reflection page.
2. **Circle** the two “yets.” What do each of the “yets” signal about David's relationship with God?
3. **Consider** Psalm 22 from Jesus' perspective. How might this influence your own ideas about suffering?
4. **Write honestly** about a time when you prayed and felt God did not help you.
5. **Write honestly** about a time when you prayed and felt God did help you.
6. **Write honestly** about how these times influenced your trust in God.

Jesus's death eliminated our separation from God. Consider the Apostle Paul's words:

Romans 8:38-39 (New Living Translation)

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pray with the expectation of help:

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you with suffering you experience as well for help as with a family member, friend or community member at Orchard who is suffering and might feel there is no help from God.

Meditate:

1. Take your new perspective on trust with an image of water. Are you filling the bucket? Are you calm in a boat on the ocean.? Are you floating down an easy river? Are you drinking a clear glass of water?
2. Follow the guidelines for Meditation on pages 7 through 9.

Deeper Dive: Read all of Psalm 22 and Jesus' lament on the cross in Mark 15: 33-40.

Reflection Page for Reading #4

“Prayer is suffering’s best result.” - Eugene Peterson

FAMILY TIME - LESSONS FOR LENT

Lesson #1: Daniel's fasting helps him show who God is to people.

1. ***Take a trip to the Ventura Farmer's Market*** on Saturday morning. Gather fresh vegetables.

(For younger children: At home, take an opportunity to talk about where vegetables come from, the difference between root vegetables and vegetables that grow from a seed. Talk about the different colors of vegetables.)

2. ***Ask your children*** what it means to have a special food. Is there a holiday food they enjoy that is special to them?

3. ***Go over the story of Daniel with your children:***

In your own words, talk about how people long ago in the Bible were called Israelites. They were God's special people. God asked them to follow special rules about what they ate so that they would stand out from the way other people around them ate. They offered their food to idols, or false gods.

There was a young Israelite man named Daniel who was sent with his friends to the King's palace to go to the King's school and learn the King's language.

While Daniel was at the King's school, the King wanted to eat food Daniel knew was not the way God wanted him to eat.

Daniel chose not to eat the King's food, but chose to eat vegetables for 10 days.

Ask: Can you guess what happened next?

Read out loud Daniel 1: 11 – 17 from a Children's Bible or an easy to read version of the Bible.

Say: The way Daniel ate is called fasting. Fasting means eating a special way to give our hearts to God. We pray when we fast. Fasting also means eating less or not at all to give God more room in our hearts. Lent is coming up. For seven weeks, our church will be fasting and praying before Easter to give God more attention and less attention to things we do every day – like eating, and doing the dishes afterward.

Lesson #2 – David writes songs while he watches over sheep.

Watch this video of Australia cattle dogs being trained to herd sheep.

<https://youtu.be/hLLwbV0Vz6A>

Why would it be a good for a sheep rancher to have a dog like an Australian sheep dog?

Before people used dogs to help herd sheep, people called shepherds look after sheep in the fields where they lived.

In your own words, talk about: Long ago, there was a young shepherd boy, an Israelite, named David who had many big brothers. His brothers were taller and stronger than he was. Because he was younger and smaller, David's job was to watch over the sheep in the fields day and night to keep the sheep safe from lions and bears. David spent a lot of time by himself in the fields.

David was good at singing and playing instruments. He wrote a lot of songs while he was alone in the fields with his sheep. David wrote about how much he loved God.

When you are alone, do you feel like singing? What kind of song would you sing?

David also wrote about all of his troubles. David grew up to be a great warrior for his people. But David had enemies. David sometimes got off track. He confessed to God when he went wrong.

These songs David wrote are called psalms. His sad songs are called laments. Many of David's psalms and laments are in the Bible still today. We read and sing them in church. Some other song writers today have used David's words and made their own songs from them.

(If you have a music streaming service, you can play for your family a contemporary version of a psalm of David. To play a portion of Psalms 23 look for artists Paul Zach, The Corner Room, Shane and Shane, Mission House, Matt Maher, and Teresa Mahoney.)

Say: During Lent, we read David's lament songs to remind us to tell God where we go wrong. During Lent, we remember the wrong things that people did to Jesus before he died on the cross to take away the wrong things we have done.

Lesson #3 – Jesus weeps over his hometown, Jerusalem.

Visit an overlook in Ventura to see the city at a distance. Arroyo Verde Park on a clear day has a view of the ocean and part of the city. Grant Park has a stunning view of Ventura and the ocean. Cemetery Park also a view of downtown Ventura and the ocean.

1. **Talk about** everything you can see from your vantage point. What trees can you see? How far away do you think Anacapa Island and Santa Cruz Island are from where we are. What color is the ocean? What buildings can you see?
2. **Talk about** everything you like about Ventura.
3. **Talk about** what peace means – a feeling of calm, not being scared, unhappy, no feeling “jumpy” inside.

In your own words, relate the following: Jesus, God’s son, lived thousands of years ago. His hometown was Jerusalem, which is in Israel.

He taught his friends and family about how to live a life of peace. Sometimes, Jesus talked about peace is something we get as a gift from God when we walk and talk with him. We get peace when we keeping from following people who do wrong things.

Jesus wanted peace for his hometown. But the people who once really liked him turned into his enemies. He was very sad for his friends who lived in Jerusalem because they did not want his gift of peace.

Read out loud: Luke 19:41-43

⁴¹ But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. ⁴² “How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes.

Pray as a family. Ask God for his gift of peace for your family, friends and for Ventura.