



RETURN TO ME

40 days of imaginative & intercessory prayer

Church of the Redeemer

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Artist Note on Cover Art:

We all face mountains in our life and society that often feel like insurmountable barriers to a life of peace and joy. While there are glimpses of God's presence in those challenges, it often feels much harder to have hope that God will be there in the depths of our own hearts and pain, the parts that aren't visible. I pray that the cover art invites reflection, hope and faith as you journey into deep places of angry, shame, and fear. May you experience God's presence in the midst and in the depths of your inward journey these next 40 days. "I believe; Lord, help my unbelief."

INTRODUCTION

The 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting has been a very important time for our church family. It has been a time where we seek God's will and transformation in our own lives, as well as for our community and city. This year, the Lord has lead us to pray for our country's repentance. We are in some dark days, and we have discussed in our recent teaching times, the Lord's judgment on us has already begun. "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (Joel 2:12) We are heeding that word and will focus this year's 40 Days on praying and fasting for national repentance.

To help us in this prayer effort, included in this year's prayer guide is a weekly intercession guide. Each week we will focus and pray against a specific spirit at work in our country. There will be space for you to write down the ways this spirit has been at work in our history and in our current times. You will be encouraged to write out your own prayer of repentance for our country's sin in this way. And then you will be led to ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about what spirit He wants to give us in exchange. For example, if we are struggling personally with a spirit of fear, the Lord wants to give us his spirit of power, love, and self-control (see 2 Timothy 1:7). We do not just want the absence of evil in our country, but we also want the presence of good. This is why we will ask for God to give us something good in exchange for the evil in our midst. You may want to work through this intercession guide by yourself, or you may want to go through it with your household or family. Lastly, we will come together each Sunday morning at 9 am, before service, to pray together about the previous week's intercession topic. Just as Joel called the people of Israel to come together to fast and pray, it is important that we gather together to pray about these things. Please prioritize coming as you are able.

In addition to the weekly intercession guide, you will also find a weekly imaginative prayer exercise and reflection based on the same Bible passage that we will be studying in our Home Fellowships. Using our imaginations and welcoming God into our imaginations can be so powerful. Often times it can be hard for us to take in the presence and truths of God on a deeper level. Imaginative prayer can help us "enter in" more fully, by engaging our emotions, senses, and thoughts. These imaginative prayer exercises are based on the book, Imaginative Prayer by Jared Patrick Boyd. The prayer exercises in this book have been beneficial to children and adults alike. The exercises in this guide can be used by families with children who are school-age and older. Parents are encouraged to look through the week's exercise beforehand, to gauge whether the material is suitable to your child's development. Some of the imagination exercises are of childhood, while others are not. For those of us who are adults, entering into childhood scenes in prayer can be powerful for healing our own childhood wounds. These imagination exercises can also be used by households of adults and small groups. We encourage you to keep an open mind, and to see how the Lord may want to meet you in some new and unexpected ways through these imaginative prayer exercises.

It is our prayer that God will meet us all in profound and powerful ways through this year's 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting. May we experience God's presence in fresh ways through these imaginative prayer exercises. And may God hear our prayers for national repentance.

CELEBRATING LENT

Many churches celebrate different “seasons” throughout the year. Most of us at Church of the Redeemer are probably familiar with the idea of celebrating Christmas and Easter. Those days are often set aside to honor Jesus Christ’s birth and his coming back to life after dying. Depending on our background, we may be less familiar with the seasons of “Advent” and “Lent.” Or these may be very familiar ideas, if we grew up in more liturgical denominations like the Roman Catholic, Episcopalian or Lutheran Churches.

As a community, we recently observed Advent together as we waited to celebrate Jesus’ birth. Together, we lit candles and thought about the story of Christmas and what the hope of Jesus’ birth means for us today. Advent means “coming.” Taking time to reflect on how long the world had to wait for Jesus’ birth helps us to understand better what it means to wait for Jesus’ coming again.

Lent, the 40 days before Easter, is another time of waiting. Christians have been celebrating this season for hundreds of years. Maybe you already observe Lent by choosing to “give up” something starting on Ash Wednesday, in order to focus on what’s most important: following God. Maybe celebrating Lent is entirely new to you. Whatever your past experience is, this guide will help us to celebrate Lent together as a church family.

In 2018, as in other years, our church community will spend 40 days fasting and praying together. Most of us will choose one day a week to fast all day. We are all invited to pray daily. Perhaps you are excited about fasting or you might be a bit nervous—or both! This guide will explain more about what fasting looks like.

FASTING

Fasting is intentionally denying oneself basic necessities or comforts as a reminder that it is God alone who can truly satisfy us.*

The practice includes:

- abstaining from food in order to be with God
- surrendering addictions, compulsions, whims and cravings to God
- repenting and waiting on God

The fruit of this practice includes:

- having more space to pray
- turning from addictive or compulsive behaviors
- identifying with Jesus in finding strength in God to be obedient and to love others

“The purpose of fasting is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things.”

- Ole Hallesby

GUIDELINES FOR FASTING FROM FOOD:

- Don't fast when you are sick, traveling, pregnant or nursing. People with diabetes, gout, liver disease, kidney disease, ulcers, hypoglycemia, cancer and blood diseases should not fast.
- Stay hydrated. Always drink plenty of water and fluids.
- If you are new to fasting, begin by fasting for one meal. Spend the time with God when you would normally be eating.
- Work up to longer fasts. Don't attempt prolonged fasts without guidance. Check with your doctor before attempting long periods of fasting.
- If you decide to fast regularly, give your body time to adjust to new rhythms of eating. You may feel more tired on days you fast. Adjust your responsibilities appropriately. (Expect your tongue to feel coated, and expect to have bad breath.)
- If you are doing a 24-hr fast, begin your fast after dinner. Fast until dinner the next day. This way you miss two, rather than three meals.
- Don't break your fast with a huge meal. Eat small portions of food. The longer the fast, the more you need to break the fast gently.

THINGS YOU CAN DO IN THE TIME SET APART FOR FASTING:

- Bring your Bible, a journal, and a glass of water during your fast.
- Relax and breathe deeply. Place yourself in the presence of God. Offer yourself and your time to God by repeating Samuel's words, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Or simply say, "Here I am."
- Spend some time worshipping God for his faithfulness. Thank him for where he has come through for you. Psalm 103:1-5 gives a helpful starting point for thanking God.
- Work through the intercession guide or the imaginative prayer exercise and reflection for the week.
- Spend some time journaling about one of the following reflection questions about fasting.
- Spend a few minutes in silence, not just silence with your mouth, but also silence in your thoughts. Ask God to help you be aware of his presence with you throughout your fasting time.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT FASTING

1. When you feel empty or restless, what do you do to try to fill the emptiness? What does this tell you about your heart?
2. What is your attitude toward fasting or self-denial?
3. In what ways do you currently deny yourself?
4. When has self-denial brought you something good?
5. What has the experience of fasting been like for you?
6. Entitlement is the opposite of self-denial. An entitlement mentality tells us that we should give ourselves whatever we want, that all appetites should be satisfied. Where in your life do you operate from an entitlement mentality? How can you wean yourself from this way of living?

GOING DEEPER IN FASTING

For some of us, fasting may be a new discipline. For others, this may already be a part of our regular routine. There is flexibility in how to practice all spiritual disciplines, including fasting. Below are some examples of how you might consider introducing or deepening the practice of fasting in your life.

1. Commit to a 40-day fast from a certain item (e.g., dessert, bread, meat, caffeine, etc.) OR a weekly 24-hour fast (dinner to dinner)
2. Commit to a 40-day fast from a certain item and a weekly 24-hour fast
3. Participate in an extended fast (talk to a home fellowship leader or someone on the pastoral staff team to discuss how to do this safely)

* Much of the information in this section is taken directly from: Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, InterVarsity Press: 2005, p. 218-222

WHY FAST

In his ministry on earth, Jesus pointed out the need for prayer and fasting through both his words and his actions. So, as we seek God together as a church, we pray and fast because we need both in our life and ministry together. Some of us may be more or less familiar with the practice of fasting. Here are some notes that may help us to think rightly about fasting as we pray together.

Why fast? There is not just one answer. Here are a few that have been helpful to people in our church and to Jesus' followers for many years.

Fasting can intensify the power of our prayers. This is not because fasting is a way of manipulating God or proving to him how holy we are. Rather, fasting can help us to focus and improve our ability to listen to him. And, in a way we do not completely understand, fasting and prayer together are a spiritually powerful combination. Once, Jesus' disciples were confused about why they could not cast out an evil spirit. When they asked Jesus about this, he explained to them that some evil spirits cannot be cast out except by prayer and fasting (see Matthew 17:21 & Mark 9:29, NKJV).

Fasting is an important part of our lives of faith, even when we aren't trying to "cast out an evil spirit," like Jesus' disciples were. Just like eating balanced meals helps our physical health, adding fasting to our prayer lives and our attempts to walk in faith can help our spiritual health. Many of us struggle to maintain physical disciplines like exercise or drinking enough water in our daily lives. In the same way, fasting is a discipline — a discipline for our spiritual health.

Fasting brings spiritual growth. Fasting is a tool to help us grow spiritual roots. Over the years, God has grown our faith lives through our times of fasting. As we have fasted as a church, there have been many breakthroughs in our lives individually and as a community. God provided jobs for many who had been long-term unemployed. He brought emotional healing to several individuals and in several families. He gave some the strength and courage needed to make good decisions to start a new life with him. And he has grown us, as a church, in hope and faith.

Fasting helps us experience God's power in our weakness. As our bodies become weak from hunger, we are able to feel the spiritual reality that we are weak people, unable to do anything without God's strength. It is in that place of weakness that we can live in the truth of scripture, which says, "My grace is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak" (2 Corinthians 12:9a).

Fasting moves us from focusing on our own needs to hearing God's voice and considering the needs of others. Through fasting, we learn that God's words and scriptures are life giving — that it is not food alone that gives life, but also the words that come from the mouth of God (see Matthew 4:4). We learn that just like Jesus, we too have food to eat even when we are fasting. This food is God's word, which gives us strength and helps us to live for him.

Fasting requires repentance. When the Israelites fasted without truly repenting, God refused to accept or be moved by their fast (see Isaiah 58:1-4). So, when you fast and pray, also repent from sin! Ask God to show you if there is anything you need to confess or repent from. When you pray, ask God for forgiveness. You can confess straight to God or you can share with another person of the same gender and ask them to pray for you. When we confess our sins, God forgives us and makes us new again so we can turn from our sinful ways.

WEEK 0: FEBRUARY 24TH - MARCH 2ND PRE-FASTING REFLECTION

How are you doing personally as you are coming into this year's 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting?

How are you feeling physically?

How are you feeling emotionally?

Is there any area of your life where you are needing God to bring a breakthrough?
How are you needing God to meet you?

How are you feeling about fasting from food?

What is your fasting commitment going to be (look back at the fasting guidelines if needed)? If you should not fast from meals, what is your modified fasting commitment going to be?

WEEK 1: MARCH 3RD - 9TH

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(pause 8-10 seconds)

Come, Holy Spirit.

Imagine that you cannot see, that you have been blind for as long as you can remember. When you wake up in the morning, you feel your way out of your bed. Your feet find your slippers on the floor next to your bed, where you left them the night before. You stand up and put your left arm out, finding the wall and door frame in front of you. You walk through the door down the hall, feeling the wall with your arms. You feel the bathroom door with your left shoulder, knock to see if anyone is inside, and go inside. You put your right hand on the sink to your right, and you turn on the water to splash some cool water onto your face. You go through your morning routine that your mother has trained you in.

As you're in the bathroom, you start to smell breakfast cooking. You hear the sizzle of eggs hitting the frying pan. You smell your father's coffee brewing. You hear your little brother running down the hallway pretending to be an airplane. Yesterday he was pretending to be a dinosaur. You slowly shake your head and smile. You take comfort from all of the familiar sounds of home and your family. As you are opening the bathroom door, you hear your mother's voice greeting you from the hallway. You reach out with your arms and feel her warm good-morning hug. You take a deep breath and smell her familiar smell. She smells fresh and clean.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

After the bathroom, you head back to your room to get dressed for the day. Your mom laid out your clothes on your bed in their usual place. You pick up your walking stick, and head back down the hallway to the dining table. As you sit down at your place, you say a quick prayer and feel the warm bowl of oatmeal in your hands. You find the spoon and start to stir and blow your oatmeal to cool it off. You hear your Dad walk down the hallway, with your little brother wrapped around his leg pretending to be a snake now. You feel your Dad place his arm around your shoulder and hear his greeting to you. You lean to your right and lean your head onto his body. He gives you a kiss on the top of your head and tells you to have a great day at school. He picks up your little brother, throws him over his shoulder, and carries him out the door. Your Dad drops your little brother off to preschool on his way to work. And your Mom takes you to school. Once your Dad leaves, you know that in about 5 minutes, it will be your turn to leave. So you quickly eat your oatmeal and feel the warm oatmeal fill your stomach and warm up your body.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

As your mom drives you to school, she tells you about the neighbors you drive by, and the birthday party you got invited to. You are silent because you aren't sure if you want to go to this party. It's for a new kid in your class, and you're never been to her home before. You've never met her parents either. You generally don't like going to new places and being with new people. Your mom tells you that you can think about and let her know tomorrow if you want to go.

As you pull up to school, you hear the sound of a large crowd of people. Your mom says, "This is strange. I'm not sure why all these people are here. Let me find a parking spot over on the side."

You get out of the car, and you reach for your mom's arm. You link your arm into hers, and she leads you through the crowds.

You hear people saying all kinds of things around you.

"Did you see what that guy just did? He touched that little girl's legs, the one in the walker, and her legs straightened out. She's over there walking now!"

"Did you see what he did to Frankie in the wheelchair? Frankie has never taken a step in his life, but the man gave him his hand, and Frankie stood up!!"

You hear your mother mutter under her breath, "What in the world?"

You think about the little girl with the walker, Sandra is her name. She's in your class. You want to find her and ask her what happened.

Before you and your mom get to the front door, you hear Sandra's voice. She's calling your name.

"Jessie, Jessie!! You're never going to believe it!! My legs are straight! Put your hand on my leg. Do you feel it? Do you feel how it's straight now? I can walk now. I can jump now! Oh my God, I can't believe it!"

(pause 5 seconds)

As Sandra's words sink in, what are you thinking?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

You hear your own voice speaking, "Sandra! That's incredible! Who did this to your legs? How did this happen?"

Sandra says back to you, "This man. Oh, he had the kindest eyes I've ever seen. He's over there! Do you want me to take you over to him?"

Before you know it, she's dragging you by the arm. You hear yourself say, "Sure... I guess so..."

As Sandra pulls you, you pull your mom. And before you know it, you are standing over in the grass over by the building. The sun has come out, and you feel the sunlight warming your face. You hear people calling out, "Me next! Me next!"

Sandra has snaked her way through the crowds and has come up behind the man, on his left. She takes your hand and places it on the man's arm. She says, "Mister, mister! You've got to help my friend, Jessie."

You hear a deep voice say, "Why hello, Jessie. Is there something you are wanting?"

You feel him hold your hand between his 2 warm hands. From the sound of his voice, you can tell that he has stooped down to talk to you.

Is there something you want?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Even though the crowds are still around and people are still calling out, it's like all of a sudden, all the noises fade in the background.

All you can do is feel the warmth of the man's hands, holding your hand.

You take a deep breath, and you say, "Could you heal my eyes?"

(pause 3 seconds)

You hear him say, "I would love to."

You feel him place his warm hands on your head, covering your eyes. And as he takes his hands off, you start to see some light. At first, it's too bright, almost blinding. But after you keep blinking, you realize you are seeing sunlight for the first time. And in the sunlight, you see the man's face, at eye level with you. And you look in this eyes, and you think to yourself, his eyes really are the kindest eyes I have ever seen.

You throw yourself into your mother's arms, saying, "Mom, mom, I can see!!!"

You gaze up at the sky. It's a clear day with bright blue skies. You look up at the trees to the side of the school. You never realized they were so tall. Sandra is jumping up and down next to you screaming and laughing. You see her dark curly hair and realize you never knew her hair looked like that.

Your heart feels like it's beating a mile a minute. Tears are streaming down your cheek.

The man stands up and takes your hand in his. He says, "Well, what do you think?"

(pause 3 seconds)

What do you think?

(pause 5 seconds)

How does it feel?

(pause 5 seconds)

You look up at the man's face, and you look into his eyes. He has tears in his eyes too. And his eyes are sparkling with joy. You want to tell him something. What do you want to tell him?

(pause 5 seconds)

Go ahead and say it out loud.

There are so many people that Jesus healed when he walked the earth.

And with each person who came to him for healing, Jesus looked at them with those same kind eyes. He touched them with those same warm hands.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION / FOR THE PARENT

Read Mark 10:46-52 and imagine that you are Bartimaeus.

- What do you think Bartimaeus was feeling when he started to call out to Jesus?
- How do you think he felt when people told him to be quiet?
- How do you think he felt when the disciples came to get him, saying that Jesus wanted him to come?
- When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was calling for him, he threw off his cloak and sprang up. What would be racing through your mind if you were him?
- Imagine Jesus saying to you, "Your faith has made you well." And then immediately, your sight is healed. What would that be like?

Think about what Bartimaeus' life was like before that day with Jesus. He was poor. He had to beg for food. Some days he went hungry. He probably got sick a lot. But then, when he heard that Jesus was going to pass by, and he remembered all the things he had heard about Jesus, he started to call out for Jesus. Even when other people told him to be quiet, he called out even louder.

Is there anything we can learn from Bartimaeus? What do you admire about Bartimaeus?

Close your eyes and remember Jesus' kind eyes from our imaginative prayer. How do you think Jesus felt about Bartimaeus?

Take some time to pray and thank Jesus for his kind eyes and for the things you learned from Bartimaeus.

WEEK 1: MARCH 3RD - 9TH

GUIDED INTERCESSION

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” - Ephesians 6:12

This week we will pray against the spirit of racism in our country. Many have said that racism is our country’s original sin. Native peoples were decimated, Africans were stolen and enslaved, Chinese people and all “Mongols” were forbidden to immigrate, Japanese Americans were herded into concentration camps, the list goes on and on.

Take some time this week to list out the examples of racism either from our country’s history or from current events in our day that especially grieve your heart. As you read the news this week, add examples of racism to this list.

Write out your own prayer of repentance for the sin of racism in our country. Confess what specific situations that especially grieve your heart.

Take a few minutes and ask God, “Lord God, what do you want to give us in the place of racism?” Listen for what God may say to you. If you hear him say something specific, like a spirit of love across racial differences, write out your own prayer for God to fill us as a country with that opposing spirit.

Please join us for Sunday morning prayer, every Sunday at 9 am before service. We will pray together against the spirit of racism.

WEEK 2: MARCH 10TH - 16TH

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(pause 8-10 seconds)

Come, Holy Spirit.

Think of a person in your life who you really love. Could be a parent or a family member or someone else who is important in your life. Who comes to mind? Why do you love them?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Usually we love people who also love us. Can you think of a time when you felt really loved by this person? What did they do or say that made you feel loved? Imagine that you are back in that time again. Try to remember the situation. Try to remember that feeling of their love for you.

(pause 8-10 seconds)

Now imagine that there is a special thing happening for this person, and you really want to show them how much you love them. How would you show them your love? Would you make something for them? Would you write something for them? What would you want to say to them to express your love?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Do you have your way that you would want to show them your love?

(If no, give a few more seconds)

Imagine that you are now with this person. Imagine that you are giving them the gift you made, or the letter you wrote, or however you wanted to express your love for them. Imagine looking at their face. What does their face look like as you are showing them your love? What are they doing with their body? Do they come over and hug you? Do they say something to you?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

How does it feel to show your love to this person?

Answer that question out loud – how does it feel?

(pause 3-5 seconds)

Now, imagine that there were some people who were watching you show your love to this person. For some reason, they are frowning at you. Their arms are folded across their chests. One of them says to you, "Why are you wasting your love on this person?"

How does that make you feel?

(pause 3-5 seconds)

What do you want to say back to this person who is criticizing your love for this person?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

We're going to look at a story of a woman who was showing her love for Jesus, and Jesus' disciples criticized her for doing that. As we read this story, imagine that you are this woman.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION / FOR THE PARENT

Read this woman's story in John 12:1-9 and imagine that you are Mary.

- In this day, a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard was usually a woman's dowry. A dowry was what a woman's family gave to the family of a man who would marry her. What do you think Mary was feeling when she used her dowry ointment to anoint Jesus' feet?
- Servants were usually the ones to wash people's feet. But here Mary uses her own hair to wipe his feet, after anointing them with this ointment. How would you describe what Mary was doing?
- Judas Iscariot criticized what Mary did, as being a waste of money. How do you think Mary felt about his words?
- Jesus defended Mary's powerful display of love. How do you think Mary felt hearing Jesus' words?
- Why do you think Mary wanted to express such profound love to Jesus? How did she experience Jesus' love in her life?

Think about Mary's story here. Is there anything you admire about what she does?

Mary's desire to show her love for Jesus comes from a powerful experience she had of Jesus' love in John 11. What experiences have you had of Jesus' love in your life? Take some time to list these out. For some of the more major ones, write out the details of how Jesus loved you in that situation.

Now that you have remembered times when you have felt really loved by Jesus, how can you express your love to Jesus?

Take some time this week to express your love to Jesus.

WEEK 2: MARCH 10TH-16TH

GUIDED INTERCESSION

“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.” - 2 Corinthians 10:4

This week we will pray against the spirit of fear in our country. Advertisers and news shows prey on our collective enslavement to fear. We are taught to fear from a young age, whether it be the person with the different skin color, or the person who comes from another country, or the strangers at the local park. We hear about teachers who molest students, online predators who find vulnerable youth, and vulnerable youth who get sucked into forced prostitution. The spirit of fear in our country is so thick that you can almost touch it.

Take some time this week to list out your fears, and the fears you see and hear around you. Could be what people you who know are afraid of. Could be the fears that the media likes to stir up.

Write out your own prayer of repentance for the sin of fear in our country. Confess whatever specific fears that especially grieve your heart.

Take a few minutes and ask God, “Lord God, what do you want to give us in the place of fear?” Listen for what God may say to you. If you hear him say something specific, write out your own prayer for God to fill us as a country with that opposing spirit.

Please join us for Sunday morning prayer, every Sunday at 9 am before service. We will pray together against the spirit of fear.

WEEK 3: MARCH 17TH - 23RD

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(pause 8-10 seconds)

Come, Holy Spirit.

Imagine that today, you are going to the White House to meet the President of the United States. If our current President is not someone you like as much, imagine a previous President that you did like and respect.

You wrote a letter to this President, telling him about some of the things that you are worried about in our neighborhood. You wrote about the oil drilling site on Jefferson Blvd, and all the neighbors who live around the drill site who have had cancer. You wrote about the local elementary schools and all the kids who are multiple grade levels behind in reading and math. You wrote him about the trash on the street and the places that smell like urine when you walk by. You wrote him about the homeless people who have been sleeping out in the open in our neighborhood, and how cold it has gotten here at night. You told him that you are worried about them getting sick.

You wrote this letter a few months ago, and just last month, you got a letter back saying that the President would like to invite you to the White House for a visit. And so now, today is the day! You flew to Washington, DC, yesterday, and now you are getting ready to go to the White House.

You are standing outside the front entrance to the White House. How are you feeling?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Take a deep breath in.

Imagine that you are walking up the front steps. Two secret service agents are standing there and open the door for you.

You make your way through the security line. Another guard puts your bag through the scanner machine. You walk through the body scanner, and another guard checks to make sure you don't have any weapons on you.

As soon as you make it through security, you walk up to the reception desk. A nice lady asks you who you are there to see. You show her the letter you received inviting you to come to visit the President. She smiles at you and says, "We are so glad that you could make it today. Wait just one minute while I call someone to bring you in."

After a few minutes, a nicely dressed woman comes out of one of the many side doors and

walks to the reception desk. She greets you by name and asks you to please follow her.

As you are walking through the main hallway with tall ceilings and elaborate decorations, she points out some of the different rooms you are walking by, telling you their names, and letting you peak in to see what they are like. She tells you that the President is having his morning coffee break, and that he is looking forward to your visit.

She leads you through a large door. As you walk in, you see secret service agents standing at all the windows. And you see the familiar profile of the President, while he is sitting on an emerald green couch, sipping his coffee mug. He turns his head when you walk in, stands up, and puts out his hand to shake your hand, all with a warm smile on his face.

How are you feeling?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

After you awkwardly shake his hand, he invites you to sit down on the plush chair facing him. There are all kinds of pastries on the coffee table, along with some coffee, tea, and water. He invites you to help yourself. You are too nervous to eat or drink, and obediently sit down where he asks you to sit. You sit on your hands to keep yourself from fidgeting.

He picks up a piece of paper on the couch where he is sitting. You realize that it's the letter that you wrote him. He thanks you for your letter, and starts to ask you about the things you wrote about. He tells you that the problems you are describing are very concerning to him. You can tell that he has been thinking about them. He says that he wants to make sure that something gets done about these things. He tells you that he has made some phone calls and that the mayor is going to follow up about these problems. He says that he expects the mayor to report back to him in 2 months with his plan of action. He asks you, "What do you think about that?"

What do you think about that?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Is there anything you want to say to the President?

Go ahead and say it out loud.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

The President stands up and smiles. He offers his hand again to shake yours, and he says, "I really wish we could sit and talk for longer, but I am afraid that my coffee break is over. Thank you again for taking the time to write and to tell me about these problems. And thank you for taking the time to fly all the way out here to meet with me. It was really an honor to meet you."

You nod your head and fumble over your words. You say something about how you were so honored to meet him. The same nicely dressed woman comes over to walk you out.

As the two of you walk back down the same hallway, she says to you, "You can rest assured that the problems are going to get taken care of. Mr. President is a man of his word. And everyone who he tells to do something, make sure that they get it done for him."

You don't know what to say, but you nod in agreement. You squeak out a "thank you so much" as you leave. When you are back outside, you stand for a moment in the warm sun. You wipe your hands on your pants, because they are wet with your sweat. You take a few deep breaths in and out.

You cannot believe that you have just met the President of the United States. And even more, you cannot believe that the President of the United States would take the time to care about the problems in your neighborhood. You feel yourself smile. You can't wait to get home and to tell everyone you know the good news.

What did it feel like to have someone with so much power care about the problems you care about?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

What do you think God wanted to show you through this imaginative prayer?

FOR YOUR REFLECTION / FOR THE PARENT

Read Luke 7:1-10 and imagine that you are the Centurion.

- What have you heard about Jesus? (Look back to Luke 6:17-19 if you need to)
- Why are you asking Jesus for help in this way? Through the Jewish elders and then through your friends?
- What do you believe about Jesus' word?
- Why does Jesus praise your faith?

What does the Centurion understand about Jesus? What can we learn from him?

What could it mean for you to have faith like the Centurion?

Are there any needs that you want to ask Jesus to help with? Imagine that you are the Centurion sending the message to Jesus through his friends. What would you want them to say to Jesus for you? Take some time to write out your request to Jesus.

Pray and ask God to help your faith be more like the Centurion's.

WEEK 1: MARCH 17TH - 23RD

GUIDED INTERCESSION

“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” - Luke 18:7-8

This week we will pray against the spirit of violence in our country. Violence is so common these days that we have become numb to it. Even though January of this year saw 32 mass shootings (where a mass shooting is defined as 4 or more people), we barely saw these stories in the headlines. Mass shootings are just one example. Every day, guns are used for suicides, domestic violence incidents, gang violence, and more. The use of guns is not the only way that violence is acted out.

Take some time this week to list the periods of violence in our country's history that especially grieve you, as well as any current examples of violence that you see online or in the news.

Write out your own prayer of repentance for the sin of violence in our country. Confess whatever specific incidents of violence that especially grieve your heart.

Take a few minutes and ask God, “Lord God, what do you want to give us in the place of violence?” Listen for what God may say to you. If you hear him say something specific, write out your own prayer for God to fill us as a country with that opposing spirit.

Please join us for Sunday morning prayer, every Sunday at 9 am before service. We will pray together against the spirit of racism.

WEEK 4: MARCH 24TH - 30TH

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(pause 8-10 seconds)

Come, Holy Spirit.

Imagine that you are on a camping trip with friends and family. Your camp site is in a grove of tall trees. Just beyond the grove is a trail that leads to a bluff with a wide panorama view of the ocean. Yesterday when your group hiked to the bluff, the sky was cloudy so you couldn't really see the ocean that clearly.

You are bundled up in your sleeping bag. You don't know what time it is, but you have been asleep for a while. It's still dark outside. You can hear the crickets chirping, and your brother is snoring next to you. You try to pull the sleeping bag up over your face, to drown out the noise and to help you get warm.

After a few minutes, you hear voices outside your tent. You recognize the voices. They are part of your group. Some of them are going to hike out to the bluff to try to catch the sunrise. You debate for a few minutes whether you want to go. You decide that since you are already awake, you will brave the cold and go with the small group. You put on every layer of clothing you brought and your warm hat. You quietly leave your tent. Your brother is still snoring loudly.

You stand outside your tent, rubbing your hands together. Take a deep breath and smell the cold air, full of the fragrance of the trees around you.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

The small group leaves the camp and starts on the trail to the bluff. Everyone is tired and quiet as they walk. You can see your breath in the air every time you breathe out. After a few minutes, you aren't cold anymore. The hiking has helped to get your blood flowing. After about 30 minutes, the trail gets a lot steeper. You are near the top of the bluff. It's still dark as your group arrives at the bluff. A few people stand close together, huddling to stay warm. A few others pull out some blankets to sit on and wrap themselves with. You join the standing group.

After a while, the sky starts to get lighter. As it does, your group starts to realize that the clouds are out again. The sun rises, but is covered up behind the clouds. You feel a little bummed, but it's fun to be with your friends.

After another 15 minutes, everyone decides to head back to the campsite. Oatmeal and bacon are on the menu for breakfast. Your stomach rumbles. You decide to run back to

the camp to help get breakfast started.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

Each morning on your trip, a small group gets up early to try to see the sunrise. Every morning, the group has 1 or 2 fewer people. You have been part of the faithful crew getting up to try. Each morning, the clouds block the sunrise. On the 4th morning of your trip, the morning you will pack up and head home, you hear the familiar voices outside your tent. You know what they are up to. You hear the crickets still chirping. Your brother is still snoring. You think about staying in your sleeping bag this time. You have gotten tired of the cloudy view. But as you hear the group leaving the camp, you feel a sudden urge to get up and go with them. You quickly dress and hurry out the tent, not as quietly as you should. Your brother stirs and throws a dirty sock at you as you leave the tent.

You hustle through the camp site and jog through the grove of trees to catch up with your group. When you finally do, your friend at the end of the line looks back at you and smiles. She pats you on the back and says she's happy you made it. The hike to the bluff begins. This time, it seems to take less time to get up to the bluff. You've seen the same twists and turns in the trail before. Like the previous mornings, it is still dark when your group gets to the top. As you stand at the top, you take a few deep breaths. For some reason, there is a stronger ocean smell in the air this time. You love the smell of the ocean.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

What do you think? Are you going to be able to see the sunrise today?

As you wait, you take a seat on a big rock near-by. You lean back on the rock behind you, and you close your eyes. You think back over the past few days. All the stories and laughter you shared with your friends and family. All of the rounds of cards you have played. You think about the new trails you explored. You remember the camp fire from last night, and the marshmallows you roasted. You can almost taste them still.

As you are resting there, you end up falling asleep for a few minutes. You start to hear some muffled voices. You feel something warm on your face. As you try to pry your eyes open, the bright light blinds you for a few moments. After you blink and rub your eyes, you realize that the sun is just peeking out over the horizon. Its orange-yellow color reaches out along the ocean's edge. There isn't a cloud in the sky. The ocean ripples are faint down below, but you can make out the bobbing movement of the water. Even though you have seen a sunrise before, for some reason, this one is even more beautiful than others you've seen.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

You take a few deep breaths and drink in the glowing light in front of you.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

This one was so worth the wait.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION / FOR THE PARENT

Read Luke 2:22-35a and imagine that you are Simeon.

- What was the word that the Holy Spirit gave you?
- What was it like when you finally saw baby Jesus? What did you feel?

Read Luke 2:35b-38 and imagine that you are Anna.

- What has your life been like?
- When you see your friend Simeon holding this baby in his arms, what are you thinking?
- What are you feeling?

What are you waiting on from God? What are you longing to see God do in your life, in our world?

Imagine what it would be like for your wait to finally be over. Write out a description of what that would be like.

Pray and ask God to help you to wait with Simeon and Anna's faith and expectancy.

WEEK 4: MARCH 24TH - 30TH

GUIDED INTERCESSION

“Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name’s sake!” - Psalm 79:9

This week we will pray against the spirit of greed in our country. In many ways, greed went hand in hand with racism at the beginning of our country’s history. Those early colonists saw the fertile land and took what they wanted. They looked for ways to maximize their profits, and having a steady stream of cheap labor served that end. In many ways, racist thinking served to justify what greed demanded. Greed continues to play out today. From banks, to clothing manufacturers, to the food industry, the spirit of greed is often what leads to the exploitation of the poor.

Take some time this week to list out the injustices done in greed in our country’s history that especially grieve you, as well as any current examples of greed that you see online or in the news.

Write out your own prayer of repentance for the sin of greed in our country. Confess whatever specific incidents of greed that especially grieve your heart.

Take a few minutes and ask God, “Lord God, what do you want to give us in the place of greed?” Listen for what God may say to you. If you hear him say something specific, write out your own prayer for God to fill us as a country with that opposing spirit.

Please join us for Sunday morning prayer, every Sunday at 9 am before service. We will pray together against the spirit of racism.

WEEK 5: MARCH 31ST - APRIL 6TH

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(pause 8-10 seconds)

Come, Holy Spirit.

Imagine that you are in your senior year of high school. It's spring semester. You are almost done with school. You are so ready to be done!

You are sitting one day in your homeroom class. The teacher is giving instructions about something, the bell rings, and the sound of chairs squeaking on the tile floor fill the room. As you pack up your bag, your zipper snags. It takes a few minutes to get it unstuck and to get all your stuff packed up. Most of your friends have already said bye to you and rushed out the door. As you walk towards the door on the other side of the room, you go past your teacher's desk. On the floor, with its edge sticking out, you see a \$20 bill. Without thinking, you pick it up, shove it in your pocket, and head out the door.

Later that day, when you get home, you change out of your school clothes and put on your soccer uniform. You drop your jeans to the floor, and you catch a glimpse of the \$20 bill sticking out from your front pocket. You remember that you still owe some money for your uniform, so you grab the money and bring it with you to your game. You give it to your coach, who nods his head and sends you on to the field to warm-up before the game.

You feel a twinge of guilt as you run onto the field, but you tell yourself that you just got lucky. If someone else found the money, they would do the same thing you did.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

You are back at school the next day. Everything is normal with your friends and classes. You are still feeling so ready to graduate and be done.

When you are back in your homeroom class, you notice that your teacher pulls her purse out from the front right drawer of her desk. She shuffles through her purse, pulls out a piece of paper, and then puts the purse back in the drawer.

The bells ring and everyone starts to pack up. The teacher steps out into the hallway to escort another student to the front office. You pause for a moment. You slowly pack up your stuff, waiting for everyone else to pack up and leave. As you walk by your teacher's desk, you quickly slide the drawer open. You see some money sticking out of an envelope. You quickly grab the envelope, close the drawer, and slide it into

your jacket.

You get outside and find a quiet place to sit. You are sweating all over. You don't know why you did what you just did. You curse yourself for doing it. You debate going back to your teacher, confessing and giving back the envelope. You slowly take the envelope out and open it. There are multiple \$100 bills in it. You quickly shove it in your pocket. You think of all the things that the money could buy. The new shoes you've been needing. Your fees for your graduation night class party. The new phone you've been dying to get. You close your eyes and say that this will be the last time you do something like this. You promise.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

A few weeks pass. Soccer season ends, and you get an award at the end of season banquet. You are feeling pumped about graduating in a month. You have held to your promise and have not let yourself think about lingering in homeroom again.

On a Wednesday afternoon, your homeroom teacher calls you to the front and gives you an envelope. Things have been so busy that you had forgotten about what you did a few weeks ago. She then calls a few other students' names, and gives them envelopes as well. You go to your seat and start to pack up your stuff. The envelope is addressed to your parents. Probably some other detail about graduation stuff. You put it in your backpack. As you leave, your teacher tells you to make sure to give the envelope to your parents that day.

You do your normal thing after school, hanging out at your friend's house for a while before heading home. You eat dinner with your family, though it's a bit of a rush, since your sister has some event at school to get ready for. She is in middle school, and you shudder when you remember your middle school days. You are so glad they are over with!

As you sit down at the kitchen to start your homework, you see the envelope in your bag. You bring it over to your mom, who is busy on the phone. She nods and takes it from you. You head back to the kitchen to work.

After a while, your mom pops her head into the kitchen. She says, "Your homeroom teacher is asking for a parent-teacher conference for tomorrow. Do you know what for?"

You feel a sudden tightness in your stomach. You say, "Ah... no... I don't."

Your mom says, "Ok. It's not the best time for me, but I will try to make it." She heads back down the hallway. You slump in your chair. Your palms start to sweat.

(pause 3-5)

What are you thinking?

(pause 8-10)

The next morning comes, but you have a hard time waking up. You didn't sleep much

that night. Your mom has already left for work when you get downstairs. Thursdays are her early day. You grab a banana and head out the door, saying bye your sister who is getting ready to catch her bus. Your school is within walking distance, and you welcome the chance to get some fresh air before school.

In your homeroom class, your teacher calls a set of names. A group of students go to her desk. You are with that group. She says to the 4 of you, “Hopefully all of you gave those envelopes to your parents last night. Did you?” She goes around and waits for each person to respond.

“Ok, great. I have asked them to come in today for a parent-teacher conference with me. I would also like all 4 of you to be there. So I expect to see you at 4!”

The bell rings, you all nod and say yes, and head back to your desks to pack up.

After school, you walk a few laps around the track with your headphones on. It feels like forever for 4 pm to come around.

At 5 ‘til 4, you head back inside and walk to your homeroom classroom. You see the door is open and a few parents standing inside talking. You recognize your mom’s voice and hear her laughing and chatting with another parent.

How are you feeling?

(pause 3-5 seconds)

The 3 other students and yourself head inside as your teacher comes to the door. Your teacher asks everyone to find a seat wherever they like.

She says, “Thank you all for making the time to come. I am sorry for the short notice for this meeting. I really appreciate that you are all here.”

She pulls on her shirt and fidgets with her watch. You can tell she looks nervous. She takes a deep breath.

“I have called you all in this afternoon, because something has happened with our class fees accounting. The office staff wants me to verify which students paid in cash and which students paid by check. I tried to think back over who I got cash from, and you all came to mind. Parents, do you mind telling me which of you paid by cash?”

One of the parents says, “Sorry to hear about the accounting problem. But couldn’t you have just sent an email? Why do you need to do this in person?”

Your teacher nervously says, “Well, I guess I could have thought of that. This seemed like the quickest way to figure it out.”

One by one, the other parents say they paid by cash. Your mom scratches her head, and says, “I can’t remember if I paid this or not. But if you have us down for having paid, my guess is that I paid by check. I usually don’t pay for things like this with cash.”

Your teacher nods and says, “Ok, great! Thank you all. We are done for today. I’m sorry for taking your time.”

As the other students and parents head out the door, your teacher asks you and your mom if you could stay for an extra minute.

“Mrs. Brown and Karina, thank you for staying. I have something I need to tell you, Mrs. Brown. Karina’s class dues were paid in cash. With a \$100 bill to be exact. Are you sure you have no memory of that?”

Your mom looks at you and looks back to your teacher.

“No, I really have no memory of that. And I usually don’t use bills that large. So that’s really strange. Karina, do you know anything about this?”

You look down at your feet. You bite your lip. You fight back the tears that want to come.

Your teacher says, “A few weeks ago, I had some cash in my purse disappear. I had it in an envelope and saw it in my purse right before the end of the day bell rang. I left the classroom for a few minutes, and when I came back, the envelope with the money was gone. There were five \$100 bills in it. I had just gone to the ATM that morning. Two days later, Karina turned in her class fees. She paid with a \$100 bill. The other 3 students also paid in cash, with \$100 bills, which is why I called this meeting. But you are the only one who says you did not pay in cash, Mrs. Brown. Is there anything you want to say, Karina?”

(pause 3-5 seconds)

What do you say?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

What are you feeling?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

You fumble over your words and say that it was you. That you felt horrible after doing it. That you promised yourself to never do it again. That you were very sorry.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

Your teacher takes a deep breath. She says, “Thank you for telling the truth, Karina. I will not report this to the principal on a few conditions: First, I expect to be paid back the \$500 you stole. Mrs. Brown, I would encourage you to not give your daughter the money to pay me back. She should get a part-time job to work for it. Second, Karina, you will need to write me a reflection paper that is at least 5 pages long. I want you to write every detail of your actions and thoughts on that day a few weeks ago when you went into my purse and stole the money. I want you to list each moment you felt a twinge of guilt, before, during, or after. I want you to write out the things you told yourself to excuse what you were doing. I want you to write down

how you talked yourself into this mess, and what lessons you will take with you from this. Something like this could get you kicked out of school, in which case you would not graduate with your class. I would be really sad to see you not graduate. You are a good kid, but you made some very bad decisions. I hope you will learn from your mistakes here.”

Your teacher walks out of the classroom and leaves you there with your mother. You start to cry.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Getting caught red-handed doing something wrong is a horrible feeling. You might feel ashamed of yourself. Embarrassed. Karina’s teacher could have outed her in front of her 3 other classmates, she could have reported her to the principal. But she didn’t. She confronted Karina and her mother in a private and quiet way. And she gave Karina some ways to make right what she had done wrong.

How did it feel to be Karina and to realize that your teacher was showing you mercy?

FOR YOUR REFLECTION / FOR THE PARENT

Read John 7:53-8:11 and imagine that you are the woman in this story.

- What are you feeling as the religious leaders bring you out?
- It takes two to commit adultery. What does it tell you about the religious leaders that they only brought the woman to Jesus?
- Why do the religious leaders leave one by one, beginning with the older ones, when Jesus says “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her,” and starts to write on the ground?
- If you were this woman, what would be feeling as you see the men leaving one by one?
- What is running through your head when you hear Jesus’ last words to you, “Has no one condemned you? ... Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Jesus doesn’t excuse our sin. But he also doesn’t shame us or condemn us. How does his mercy help us to leave our sin behind us?

Is there any sin in your life that you are needing Jesus’ mercy for? Take some time imagining this sin being brought out in the open – like the woman in this passage – and like Karina in our imaginative prayer. If it helps you, write this out. Imagine your sin being brought out into the open. And imagine how Jesus would show you mercy. Soak in Jesus’ mercy. Ask him to help you to sin no more.

WEEK 5: MARCH 31ST - APRIL 6TH

GUIDED INTERCESSION

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” - Matthew 7:7

This week we will pray against the spirit of misogyny (the hatred of women) in our country. From early on in our country, a woman’s voice and life was deemed less valuable than a man’s. The spirit of misogyny leads to a woman’s body being seen as an object to be used and to gain satisfaction with – it is what birthed the pornography industry. Misogyny plays out in abusive relationships, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. No side of the political spectrum is without its tales of sexual harassment.

Take some time this week to list out the situations of misogyny in our country’s history that especially grieve you, as well as any current examples of misogyny that you see online or in the news.

Write out your own prayer of repentance for the sin of misogyny in our country. Confess whatever specific incidents of misogyny that especially grieve your heart.

Take a few minutes and ask God, “Lord God, what do you want to give us in the place of misogyny?” Listen for what God may say to you. If you hear him say something specific, write out your own prayer for God to fill us as a country with that opposing spirit.

Please join us for Sunday morning prayer, every Sunday at 9 am before service. We will pray together against the spirit of racism.

WEEK 6: APRIL 7TH - 13TH

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(pause 8-10 seconds)

Come, Holy Spirit.

Imagine being at your friend's house. You are hanging out there with a few friends all together. You are all watching TV together, eating snacks, talking, and laughing. You love spending time with your friends.

Let yourself really be in this moment.

What TV show are you all watching?

(pause 3-5 seconds)

What snacks are you eating?

(pause 3-5 seconds)

What are you talking and laughing about?

(pause 3-5 seconds)

After a while, your stomach starts to feel funny. Your forehead starts to sweat, and you start to feel light-headed. You get the feeling that you are going to be sick to your stomach. You try to get yourself to the bathroom as quickly as you can, but sadly, you don't make it. You drop to your knees in the hallway and throw up all over the carpet. It's really painful and disgusting.

When you are done, you sit back and fall over on the ground. You curl up in a fetal position. Your stomach still doesn't feel so good.

Your friends hear you and come over to you in the hallway. You hear some of them say:

"Oh man!"

"So gross."

"Are you ok, Javier?"

You hear some shuffling, and one of your friends puts a towel over the mess you made on the carpet. He says to you, "Let's get you into the bathroom, ok?"

You feel some hands and arms gently lift you up and help you stumble into the bathroom. Your friend lays out some clean towels on the floor. He says you can lie back down on

your side if it feels better. He stacks 2 clean towels that are folded up and gently props your head up on them.

He asks you, "Do you want a sip of water?"

You nod your head. He brings a cup of cold water to your lips as you slowly lift your head up. You take a few sips, grateful for the chance to flush out the bad taste in your mouth.

You lay your head back down, and he tells you to close your eyes and rest. He sees you shivering and covers you with another towel. Before you know it, you fall asleep.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

After a while, you hear some muffled voices. You open your eyes and see your Dad at the bathroom door.

He says, "How are you feeling, Javier?"

You whisper, "A little better."

He asks you, "Are you able to get up so I can take you home?"

You nod your head. Your Dad helps you up, and you lean on him as you make your way out of the bathroom.

You look down and see the hallway carpet, and a sudden flush of shame hits you. You remember throwing up all over the carpet. But now, it looks fresh and clean. You can tell that someone cleaned up your mess.

Most of your friends are gone, except for your friend whose house you're at. You see him as you walk through the living room, leaning on your Dad.

You whisper, "I'm so sorry..."

Your friend says, "Don't worry about it. It's fine. I'm sorry you got so sick. You get some rest, ok?"

You smile a little and say, "Thank you."

(pause 3-5 seconds)

What are you feeling about your friend?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

What an incredible friend you have. A friend who is willing to take care of you when you are sick, who cleans up your mess that most people wouldn't want to touch.

How does it feel to have a friend serve you in such a humbling way?

FOR YOUR REFLECTION / FOR THE PARENT

Read John 13:1-20 and imagine that you are Peter in this story.

- When you see Jesus tie a towel around his waist and start to wash the other disciples' feet, what are you feeling?
- Why do you not want Jesus to wash your feet?
- Why do you make such a sudden change and tell Jesus to wash your hands and feet, too?
- What does it mean that Jesus wants you to do what he did?

Are there times when you haven't wanted to serve someone? Maybe you haven't wanted to clean up a mess in the kitchen, or take out the trash, or clean the toilets. What are you needing from Jesus so that you can be more like him, washing his disciples' feet? What are you needing so you can be more like Javier's friend in the imaginative prayer, who took care of his sick friend and cleaned up his mess?

Go back through the imaginative prayer, but this time imagine that you are Javier's friend, and that you are in your own house. Imagine that you are the one taking care of your sick friend, helping him to get to the bathroom, cleaning up the mess of his vomit. Pray and ask Jesus to help you to be like Javier's friend in real life.

WEEK 6: APRIL 7TH - 13TH

GUIDED INTERCESSION

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” - Ephesians 3:20-21

This week we will pray against the spirit of white supremacy. Every year, more than 250,000 people in our country are the victims of hate crimes. Between 2008 and 2017, 71 percent of extremist-related fatalities in the U.S. were committed by members of the far right or white supremacist movements. Many of those who have started to come out of these movements tell of their own trauma and pain that they tried to deal with through hate and bigotry. We will pray for God to bring these white supremacists to repentance, and that they will find freedom and healing through Jesus.

Take some time this week to list out the white supremacist hate crimes in our country’s history that especially grieve you, as well as any current examples of white supremacy that you see online or in the news.

Write out your own prayer of repentance for the sin of white supremacy in our country. Confess whatever specific incidents of white supremacy that especially grieve your heart.

Take a few minutes and ask God, “Lord God, what do you want to give us in the place of white supremacy?” Listen for what God may say to you. If you hear him say something specific, write out your own prayer for God to fill us as a country with that opposing spirit.

Please join us for Sunday morning prayer, every Sunday at 9 am before service. We will pray together against the spirit of racism.

WEEK 7: APRIL 14 - 20TH

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

(pause 8-10 seconds)

Come, Holy Spirit.

Imagine you are at work. It's a busy day at the office. You are one of the security officers. You are dressed head-to-toe in black. You have your weapon on your belt. Your heavy boots are solid. You've been dreading coming to work these days. You've been asked to do things that you really don't feel good about. But every day you keep coming to work, because you have bills to pay, a family to provide for.

The office has been a lot busier these days. Long lines of people wait for a long, long time. They are often tired and hungry. Men, women, and children are in line. You try not to look them in the eye, but when you do, you see how desperate they are.

How do you feel when you see the desperate look in their eyes?

(pause 3-5 seconds)

As a security officer, you stand there and make sure no one acts out. But recently, you've had to step in to help the other people working at the office. There have been times when you've had to escort crying women to one exit, while their husbands are taken to another exit. There have even been times when you've had to take the hands of little kids, and walk them to a room in the back, while their crying mothers are escorted to the exit. You don't ask questions about what's happening to these people, but you know that whatever is happening is not good.

Because things have been so busy at work, they have started offering overtime pay. Things have been tight at home, so you need the extra cash. You sign up for the extra shifts. At first, all the crying and desperate looks get to you. But you decide that you just need to do what you need to do for your own family. You try to avoid looking in their eyes even more.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

One day, on an especially busy day, you've had to take quite a few children away from their parents. 4:15 pm rolls around, and you are tired. Only 45 more minutes doing this horrible job, and then you can go home and try to forget it all until the next day. But this time, one of the managers tells you to help take a screaming child to the back room. The child is screaming, in tears. Her curly hair matted down with sweat. The only way you can take her is by picking her up. As you carry her in your arms, you have a sudden

memory flash in your mind. You remember your own daughter when she was little. All of a sudden, you feel like throwing up. How can you take this child away from her father?

What are you feeling?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

What are you thinking?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

You slowly turn around and start walking back towards the girl's father. Your manager sees you and says, "Hey, what are you doing? The holding room is behind you."

You ignore your manager and take the girl back to her father. He gladly takes the girl into his arms and tries to comfort her. You don't understand the words he's saying, but you understand the feelings behind his words.

You turn to your manager and say, "What we are doing is wrong. Can't you see that? What we are doing is wrong."

Your manager launches into his explanation. You tune his voice out. All you hear is a voice in your own head saying, "This is wrong."

You start to walk around the office, saying to the other people working there, "Don't you guys see that what we are doing is wrong? How can this be ok that we are taking these children away from their parents? Can't you see how desperate these people are? They need our help! What we are doing to them is so wrong!"

With each person that you talk to, you see the same look of shame in their eyes. Some of them turn away to hide it. Others start to tear up and nod.

Your manager starts to raise his voice, telling you to be quiet. You talk even louder. Before you know it, you are shouting.

The front door opens, and you see 2 large police officers walk in. They have their hands on their weapons. They quickly make their way over to you, and before you know it, you are handcuffed. You start to cry. You keep saying over and over, "We're taking their children away from them. We're taking their children away from them. This is wrong."

(pause 5-8 seconds)

You are riding in the backseat of the police car. The faces of all the children and fathers and mothers of the past few weeks start flashing through your mind. You start to sob uncontrollably.

(pause 3-5 seconds)

They take you to a holding cell at the police station. You sit on the cold metal bench. You are exhausted. After a while, you hear some footsteps. You see your wife walking with a police officer. And with your wife is one of the office staff from work.

When the cell door is opened, your wife rushes in to hug you. You start to tear up again. You tell her, "What we were doing was so wrong. We were taking children away from

their parents.”

Your wife softly says, “I know, honey. I know.”

After a few minutes, you look up at the office staff. You say, “What are you doing here, Mr. Barnes?”

He says, “I wanted to thank you for what you did today.”

You say, “Thank me? Thank me for what? I deserve to be in jail. I’ve been taking children away from their parents.”

He says, “I want to thank you for helping to have the courage to do what I have wanted to do, but have been too afraid to do. I’ve reached out to a non-profit legal aid group. I downloaded our records of all the separations we’ve done in the past year. We’re going to get those kids back to their parents, if it’s the last thing I do in life. You want to help me?”

You take a deep breath.

You whisper, “It would be an honor.”

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Sometimes realizing that what we’ve been doing is wrong is painful. When it dawns on us how we have been hurting people, it’s horrifying.

But how powerful it is when we have the chance to make things right. It doesn’t take away the wrong that we did. But it gives us the chance to find our way to peace.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION / FOR THE PARENT

Read Luke 19:1-10 and imagine you are Zacchaeus.

- For Zacchaeus to be a chief tax collector and to be rich, he had to shut off his conscience. Every time he took more money than the official tax from a poor shop-keeper, he had to silence his conscience. Imagine what that must have been like for Zacchaeus. What are some of the other emotions he also probably had to shut down along with his conscience?
- Why do you think Zacchaeus was so interested in trying to see Jesus?
- How do you think he felt when Jesus stopped to talk with him in the tree?
- The crowds muttered when Jesus went to Zacchaeus’ house. Imagine you are Zacchaeus and you hear them muttering. How does that make you feel?
- What was it about spending time with Jesus that made Zacchaeus decide to make right every wrong he had ever done as a tax collector? What would make him change so drastically?

Take some time to think about the things you have done that have hurt others. How have you tried to make those wrongs right? Are there any that you haven’t tried to make right yet? What would that take?

WEEK 7: APRIL 14^H - 20TH GUIDED INTERCESSION

“Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.” - 1 Samuel 3:9

This week ask the Lord if there is another spirit at work in our country that He wants you to pray for. If you like, you can go through the news and ask the Lord to give you eyes to see the spiritual forces that are animating the problems we have. Do you see a spirit of arrogance? Or a spirit of anger? Or a spirit of hopelessness? What does the Lord highlight in your heart?

Choose one and write it here: _____

Take some time this week to list out the times this spirit has been at work in our country’s history that especially grieve you, as well as any current examples that you see online or in the news.

Write out your own prayer of repentance for this sin in our country. Confess whatever specific incidents of this sin that especially grieve your heart.

Take a few minutes and ask God, “Lord God, what do you want to give us in the place of this spirit?” Listen for what God may say to you. If you hear him say something specific, write out your own prayer for God to fill us as a country with that opposing spirit.

Please join us for Sunday morning prayer, every Sunday at 9 am before service. We will pray together against the spirit of racism.

WEEK 8: APRIL 21ST - 27TH
POST-FASTING REFLECTION

How have these past few weeks of fasting been for you?

How did God meet you in your fasting?

How did God meet you in the imaginative prayer exercises?

How did you sense God's presence in your times of guided intercession?

Take some time to thank God for the ways He met you in these 40 days of Prayer and Fasting. Even though our 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting is officially ending, there may be some things that God is stirring you to continue praying for and even fasting for. Take some time to ask the Lord if there is anything like that for you.

If there is something God would have you continue praying for and/or fasting for, what is it?

Please share this in your home fellowships. It may be that God stirs others similarly, and you may want to pray together about these things.

