



RESTORING *JOY*

DAILY PRAYER & SCRIPTURE GUIDE

A time to *listen*

"There is a time to speak, and a time to listen." Ecclesiastes 3:7

The wisdom contained in this little line of ancient poetry is truly profound. It's written by the Teacher in the book of Ecclesiastes as the way to discern the voice of God when our own wisdom and understanding has run out. When our strength and our words aren't enough, it's time to listen.

The health of a church family is not determined by numbers or programs, but rather by the extent to which it is with Jesus, becoming like Him, and following him wherever he leads, no matter the cost. As we as a church family seek to discern where Jesus is leading us, who He's calling us to be and what He's calling us to do, it has become clear that our wisdom and strength aren't enough, and it's time to listen. Specifically, it's time to be with Jesus through the practices of worship, prayer, Scripture, fasting, and community in order to listen for his voice.

Under the weight of a global pandemic, significant cultural upheaval, and a steady stream of transition and change in our own congregations, we have experienced much loss. Anytime there is change, there is loss. And when there is loss of something meaningful, there is grief. Our church family has lost and grieved much these last two years. Yet, we are the people of God. And he has never left us alone. And though it is true that we have endured much loss, what if it is also true that a renewed joy is not that far away? The Psalmist says it like this:

Psalm 100:1-3

"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

Because we belong to God, then joy and gladness of heart is always within reach. This season and this guide is all about being with God, listening for his voice, and asking him to restore our joy. And as the Teacher in Ecclesiastes said, this starts with being still, quiet, and attentive to the heart and voice of God.

The background of the entire page is a dark, semi-transparent overlay of a stained glass window. The window features intricate leaded glass patterns with various colors including red, orange, yellow, and blue, though they are muted by the overlay. The overall effect is a textured, artistic backdrop for the text.

HOW TO USE THIS *GUIDE*

This guide is designed to take us on a daily journey of listening to God and to one another. The themes of each week build on each other and anchor us in the practices of scripture, silence and solitude, prayer, and fasting. All of these practices are spiritual formation pathways, not a To Do list. In this season, we are making a practice of slowing down to be with Jesus, listen to His voice, and follow Him wherever He leads, no matter the cost.

Each week, we will be joining hundreds of others in our church as we pray through the same themes and meditate on the same passages together. Our hope and prayer in this is that God would create a oneness of heart and soul throughout our church family as we take this journey together.

Daily, we will be invited into a scripture reading and guided prayer. These times will be marked by moments of stillness and silence before the Lord at the beginning and the end. And you'll be prompted to write down any reflections on what stood out during your time in Scripture and prayer.

The themes of each week are designed to build on one another, leading us to a place of crying out to God to restore joy and renew our hearts. This guide is our companion on that journey.

One of the core
practices of this
season will be that
of *testifying*.

This is the language the New Testament uses to describe talking about what we've seen and heard from Jesus. Talking about our experience is one of the ways we will discern God's voice and direction for where he is leading us. The season is a time to listen not only to God, but also to one another. So the invitation is to carry these two questions with you all 46 days of this journey, and share with us how you think the Lord is answering them for both you and our church family:

What could joy restored look like in my life and in our church?

What are my hopes and fears for the future?

We invite you to participate in this practice of testifying to what you are seeing and hearing from Jesus in two ways: Through a simple tool we're calling a Prayer Card and by sharing your story online.

Prayer Card & Journal

At the start of the journey, ask the Lord some version of this question, "What could joy restored look like in my life and in our church?". Write this question down on your prayer card and carry it with you on the journey. You can put the card in a place you look on a daily basis like your mirror or refrigerator, or carry it with you in your Bible or the prayer journal we provide. The purpose of this practice is to pay attention to what the Lord is saying to you over time. Seeking the Lord and listening to him take time and attention. This prayer card and practice is just a tool to aid us in that process. The hope is that you have heard from the Lord how to pray for and pursue restored joy in your life and in the life of our church family by the end of the season of Lent, Resurrection Sunday.

As the days and weeks go on during this season, we carry with us not only the prayer card, but a prayer journal as well. Listening to God means spending time in moments of silence and solitude, opening the Scriptures, and pausing to reflect what we are reading, sensing, feeling, needing, and dreaming. The prayer journal is the place to process along the way. And over time, through these daily practices of being with God, the hope is that we begin to have a sense from the Lord of how to answer the main question we're asking of him, "What could joy restored look like in my life and in our church?". As this becomes more clear, write what you are discerning on your prayer card, and carry it with you even beyond this season and pray about it for as long as it takes to see God move in your life and in our church family.

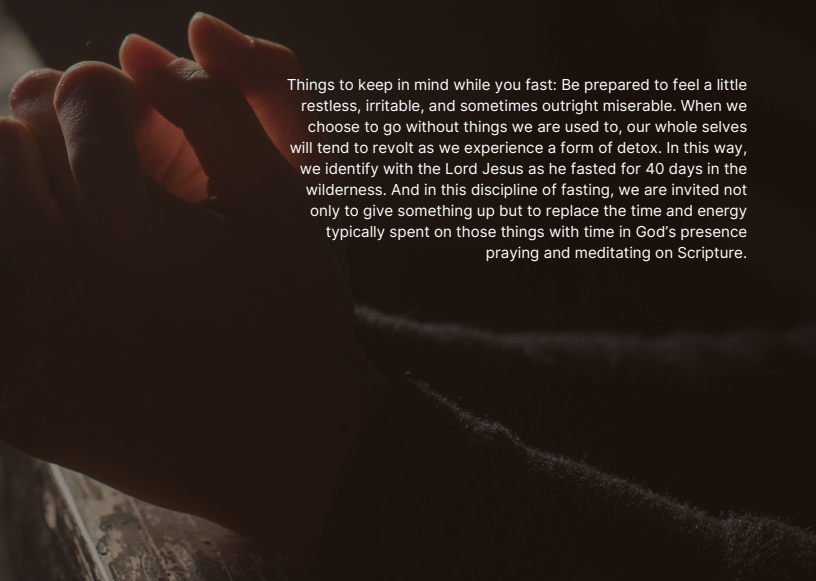
Testifying Online

As we take this question to the Lord and reflect on what He is saying through His word and what He is revealing through prayer, pay attention to what the Lord is revealing to you. As he does and as things become clear, we invite you to practice testifying by sharing your experience with Jesus using the link below. This is both an opportunity to talk about what God is doing in your life personally, as well as how the Lord might be revealing his heart for this church family through you.

FASTING AND PRAYING

Each week, there will be a new suggested fast to accompany our times of prayer as we seek the Lord together. You are invited to do one of three things with this suggestion:

- Fast from only that thing for the week and switch to another one the next week.
- Add each week's fast to the last one thereby ending this journey fasting from multiple things at once.
- Modify the fasts to fit your own convictions and needs.



Things to keep in mind while you fast: Be prepared to feel a little restless, irritable, and sometimes outright miserable. When we choose to go without things we are used to, our whole selves will tend to revolt as we experience a form of detox. In this way, we identify with the Lord Jesus as he fasted for 40 days in the wilderness. And in this discipline of fasting, we are invited not only to give something up but to replace the time and energy typically spent on those things with time in God's presence praying and meditating on Scripture.

Weekly Suggested Fasts

1

Social Media and the Internet (for entertainment)

2

Television & Movies

3

Sleep (i.e. an hour less in the evening or in the morning)

4

Caffeine and sweets

5

Shopping for non-essential items

6

Food (choose a kind of food from which to abstain,
if this is a healthy and wise option)

*Please see a helpful resource on a spiritual approach to fasting at:
www.GospelCC.org/fasting*

Because of our society's historical overlap between religion and culture, there is a fairly common, though fadingly so, understanding of sacred Christian holidays. For instance, Christmas and Easter are very common culturally observed holidays that are explicitly Christian. And for the historic Christian calendar, Christmas and Easter (the seasons of Advent and Lent) are the primary anchors of time around which the entire calendar revolves.

So what if there was a way to leverage these culturally relevant holidays in such a way that:

- 1.Enabled us to be shaped by Jesus Christ on a more regular basis*
- 2.Empowered followers of Jesus to communicate the message of the gospel of Jesus to those who don't follow Him?*

We have an opportunity for personal transformation and communion with Christ, and we have opportunities to engage on mission with our neighbors through these common holidays.

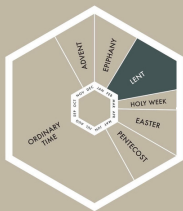
Making the Most of Lent

What is *Lent?*

The first day of Lent is known as Ash Wednesday. It marks the first of 46 days leading up to Easter in which followers of Jesus intentionally walk into the wilderness in order to fast from the things of this world which vie for our attention and affections. Lent is a season of fasting from lesser things that we tend to love in our lives, in order to feast on Christ, whose love is better than life (Psalm 63:3).

This season of fasting is for the purpose of preparing our hearts for Resurrection Day (Easter Sunday), which is set apart to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, on which the entire message of the gospel hinges. We fast, in part, to mirror Jesus' season of fasting in the wilderness after he was baptized by John the Baptizer and before he began his public ministry among us (Matthew 4:1-17, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13). In this way, the Lenten season can be incredibly formational for followers of Jesus as we set ourselves apart to feast on Christ supremely and in extraordinary fashion.

What if you considered a type of fast in your own life, so that your heart would be prepared to better celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday this year? What kind of fast would be most helpful for you? See the list of suggestions from our Lenten Guide 2019.



church calendar
SEASONS

Living Expressions

This season of Lent also positions us to be a living, breathing, talking expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who need it. Because fasting from the common things we usually participate in is so unusual, the way we relate to those around us will be unusual as well. If we're fasting from TV and social media, we won't be able to join in on the conversations at work about the latest episode or viral video or post. That will give us an opportunity to explain why and, ultimately, point to Jesus.

Observing Lent can be both personally and missionally transformative. This season, we will consider fasting from lesser loves in order to seek and rest in Christ's love more fully. We will leverage this opportunity to invite people who don't know Jesus into conversations about our decisions to observe Lent, follow Christ, and how we have been transformed by Him.

Being Emotionally Present

At the beginning of each time of prayer, you'll notice the question, "Describe how you are feeling today". During this season of Lent, if you choose to embark on a fast of some sort and invest in the daily portions of Scripture and prayer, you will likely experience unique discomforts and emotions. We are more than simple brains with bodies. We are human beings made up of body, mind, heart, and soul. This guide is designed to engage us at every level of the human experience. Taking time to write out however we are feeling is a part of learning to love God and listen to him with all of our hearts.

Week 1

Worship

Week One ————— Worship

This week is aimed at directing our hearts to experience the presence and power of God in our lives, be renewed in our love for him, and be transformed by his love for us. Week 1 is about worship—setting our attention on who God is.

Start and end each day with two minutes of silence and solitude before God. Read the Scriptures, pray, and then reflect and respond.

Day 1: The holiness of God: Ezekiel 1:1-28

Day 2: The glory of God: Exodus 33:12-23, 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Day 3: The love of God: Psalm 145, Romans 8:31-39

Day 4: The provision of God: Psalm 23, Acts 4:32-37

Day 5: The presence of God: Psalm 46, Matthew 28:20-28

Day 6: The people of God: Deuteronomy 5:1-32, 1 Peter 2:1-10

Day 7: The power of God: Job 38-39, Ephesians 1:15-20

Prayer Focus:

Consider praying for the Lord to meet you each day in the Scripture readings and to reveal himself afresh and anew, and to inspire worship and love for Him in your heart.

As we pay attention to different attributes of God, let's ask Him to show us whether we truly believe these truths about Him or if we need to ask Him to increase our faith.

As we begin this journey, consecrate this time to the Lord, and ask him to speak clearly to you and transform your heart day after day. Pray for ongoing transformation in the life of our entire church family as we take this journey together.

Week 2

Repentance

Week Two ————— *Repentance*

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

– Joel 2:12-13

When God asks for all of our hearts, he is asking to be invited into every part. This does not mean that we clean up every part of our heart, in order to present it to God as a gift. Honestly, we cannot do that. Rather, it means opening our heart as it is to God and allowing His love, grace, and mercy to convict us of sin, move us toward repentance, then cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Each day of this week, we will read two passages. One will put a spotlight on a particular sin, inviting the Holy Spirit to convict us where needed. The second passage will remind us of the beautiful promises which correlate with repentance. This week, we are asking God to perform healing heart surgery on each of us and on our church.

Start and end each day with two minutes of silence and solitude before God. Read the Scriptures, pray, and then reflect and respond.

Day 1: *Selfishness/Lack of love: 1 Corinthians 13, Revelation 2:1-7; Cleansed: 1 John 1:9*

Day 2: *Rivalry/Disunity: 1 Corinthians 1:10-30; Blessed: Psalm 32*

Day 3: *Works of the Flesh: Galatians 5:16-26, Colossians 3:1-17; Healed: 2 Chronicles 7:14*

Day 4: *Thought life: Psalm 101, Philippians 4:1-9; Grace and Mercy: Hebrews 4:12-16*

Day 5: *Partiality: James 2: Luke 10:25-37; No Condemnation: John 8:1-11*

Day 6: *Unknown Sin: Psalm 139; Restoration: Psalm 51*

Day 7: *Idolatry: Psalm 115; Times of refreshing: Acts 3:19-20*

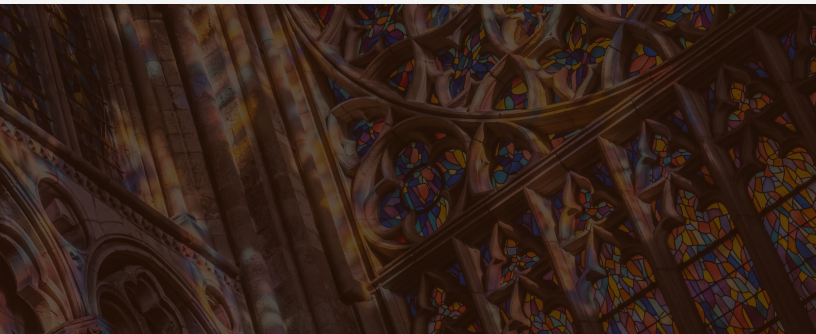
Week Two ————— *Repentance*

Prayer Focus:

Pray that God will humble each of our hearts before Him as we read these different passages. Pray that our heart will be soft and we will respond in brokenness over sin. In your journal, be honest about how you react to each of these passages.

Remember, repentance is a gift. Repentance is the door through which we enter into the glorious riches of God's grace which is lavished on us in Christ. Repentance immediately restores any brokenness in our relationship with God.

Pray that we will trust and receive God's forgiveness over our confessed sins rather than remain in shame. May we rest in His words, "Neither do I condemn you, but go and sin no more."



The background of the image is a dark, moody photograph of a stained glass window and a brick wall. The stained glass is on the left, featuring geometric patterns in shades of purple, blue, and yellow. The brick wall is visible through the window opening. The overall lighting is dim, creating a contemplative atmosphere.

Week 3

Listen

Week Three ————— *Listen*

Listen. This is our theme for the entire season of Lent, the purpose of this guide, and the specific theme for this week. God is always speaking, and we are invited to learn how to listen. This week we will read all of Psalm 119, which is both the longest chapter in all of the Bible, and also all about the Word of God. In addition to that, each of the daily passages will be about God speaking and us listening. As we read these Scriptures, pay attention to how they talk about what it means to listen and respond to the voice of God. And as we do, let's ask God to speak clearly to our hearts and give us the wisdom and faith to respond.

Start and end each day with two minutes of silence and solitude before God. Read the Scriptures, pray, and then reflect and respond.

Day 1: Psalm 119:1-24, Psalm 19, John 1:1-18

Day 2: Psalm 119:25-48, Psalm 78:1-40, John 10:1-21

Day 3: Psalm 119:49-72, Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, James 1:2-8

Day 4: Psalm 119:73-96 1 Samuel 3:1-21, James 1:16-26

Day 5: Psalm 119:97-120, Psalm 78:1-40, James 4:1-10

Day 6: Psalm 119:121-144, 1 Kings 1:1-19, Psalm 39:1-13

Day 7: Psalm 119:145-176, Psalm 29, Hebrews 1:1-3

Prayer Focus:

Each day this week, pay special attention to the thoughts that come up in your mind during the moments of silence before reading the daily Scriptures. Grab your prayer journal and write down the thoughts that come to mind. Listening to God requires also listening to our own thoughts and desires, so that we can discern the difference. Prayerfully offer these thoughts to the Lord as they arise. Prayerfully consider each day, ***"What are my hopes and fears for the future of my life? For the church?"***

Write down the words and phrases that stand out to you in each day's Scripture readings. Read slowly, ask God to speak to you and your heart, and expect him to minister to you through his Word.

A low-angle, upward-looking view of a large, ornate stained glass window. The window is composed of many small, colorful panes depicting various religious and historical scenes. The lighting is dim, with a warm, golden-brown glow emanating from the left side, possibly from a light source or a reflection on the glass. The overall atmosphere is solemn and majestic.

Week 4

Surrender

PRVNÍ
ČESKÁ
VZÁJEMNÁ
PRŮSTAVNÍ

Week Four ————— *Surrender*

As we ask God to restore our joy, it is vital that we surrender to God our own expectations of what restored joy will look like. The future is uncertain and unknown to us, and the more we become attached to outcomes, the harder it is to discern where God is leading and what He's saying.

We spent last week focusing on who God is. This week, as we open our hearts and get into a posture of surrender, let us keep in the forefront of our mind to Whom we are surrendering—our loving, all-powerful, and holy God. Also, keep in mind we are praying for God to restore “our” joy. God wants to work uniquely in each of our lives and also work collectively within His body. We are asking God to allow each of us to relinquish grips on our personal agendas and outcomes so that we can be of one mind and in one Spirit.

Start and end each day with two minutes of silence and solitude before God. Read the Scriptures, pray, and then reflect and respond.

Day 1: Control: 2 Chronicles 20:1-12, Proverbs 3:5-6, Hebrews 12:1-8

Day 2: Fear: Joshua 1:1-9, Matthew 6:25-34

Day 3: Self-sufficiency: John 15:1-17, 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Day 4: Desires: Psalm 37:1-9, Matthew 13:44-46

Day 5: Possessions & Prestige: Luke 21:1-4, Acts 2:42-47, John 13

Day 6: Attachment to Outcomes: Genesis 22:1-18, Luke 22:39-46, Matthew 6:9-13

Day 7: Comfort: Isaiah 40:1-8, Matthew 16:24-28

Prayer Focus:

Pray that the Holy Spirit guides us through each daily reading. Remember, God is gracious and kind. Satan is the accuser. We are not walking into condemnation but rather into freedom as we ask God to help us surrender whatever we need to.

Consider asking the Lord, “How has my heart been holding too tightly to something other than Jesus? What might surrender look like for me?”

Pray for the hearts of every member in both GCC congregations, that we all would be willing to lay aside our personal preferences for the sake of loving one another and the mission of Jesus.

Pray specifically that God grants each of us the grace and courage needed to let go and that our church experiences a new sense of freedom and hope.

A faint, vertical stained glass window is centered in the background. It features a central cross with a heart in the center, surrounded by various colored panes in shades of purple, blue, and gold. The window is set within a dark, textured frame.

Week 5

Follow

Week Five --- Follow

This week is full of passages and prayers that direct our attention to what it means and what it looks like to follow Jesus, wherever he leads. These texts will include warnings about loving the wrong things and about over-emphasizing the place of external acts of religious devotion. We'll see texts that call us to set our eyes on the Lord, no matter the chaos or confusion surrounding us. All of this is to prepare our hearts to identify and take tangible steps to follow Jesus on his mission. These days have no distinct themes, but rather one unified theme: Following Jesus wherever he leads is costly, but so very worth it.

Start and end each day with two minutes of silence and solitude before God. Read the Scriptures, pray, and then reflect and respond.

Day 1: Psalm 63, Romans 12:1-8

Day 2: Micah 6:1-8, Luke 7:36-50

Day 3: Habakkuk 3:1-19, Luke 19:1-10

Day 4: 2 Chronicles 20:1-29, John 12:27-36

Day 5: Jonah 1-4, Philippians 4:1-22

Day 6: Psalm 111, Luke 14:25-35

Day 7: Daniel 3:1-30, Mark 10:35-45

Prayer Focus:

The invitation to follow Jesus is not an offer of a better life, but rather to be with Jesus wherever he is, because He is better than life. So let us pray now for the courage to follow Jesus wherever he would lead, no matter the cost.

Pray for the leadership community that serves and cares for both congregations, as they help us to follow Jesus on his mission, wherever he may lead. Pray for ever-increasing wisdom, humility, flexibility, and discernment.

Pray for a oneness of heart and soul among this church family, as we seek the Lord.

Week 6

Restoration

Week Six ————— Restoration

This week we are zeroing in on one question: “What could joy restoration look like in my life and in our church?” We have pursued the Lord in worship, journeyed toward surrender in order to follow him wherever he leads. And now, as individuals and as a church family, we are asking the Lord to reveal to us how.

Sharing the Good News of the finished work of Jesus in our homes, community, and world is the mission of Jesus —and our commitments to give sacrificially of our finances is driven by that mission.

Start and end each day with two minutes of silence and solitude before God. Read the Scriptures, pray, and then reflect and respond.

Day 1: Psalm 40, John 12:20-26

Day 2: 1 Chronicles 29:1-22, Romans 15:1-13

Day 3: Isaiah 53:1-12, Hebrews 12:1-13

Day 4: Deuteronomy 15:7-11, 1 John 3:11-24

Day 5: Isaiah 29:13-19, Matthew 25:31-46

Day 6: James 1:2-18, Matthew 6:19-24

Day 7: Genesis 1:26-2:3, Hebrews 13:1-21

Prayer Focus:

Take some time to seriously reflect on this question and wait for the Lord to guide you: “How does the Lord want to restore joy in my life?”

Pray that our church family would be consumed by a deep desire to love Jesus enough to follow him wherever he leads, no matter the cost. Pray that we would love our neighbors enough to sacrificially give from hearts of love, so that we might see a movement of the gospel like we’ve never seen before!

Pray that the Spirit of God would work to restore our joy, revive our hearts, and bring renewal to our city.

Gospel Community *Church*

gospelcc.org