

**Crying Out: Summer of Prayer Discussion Guides**  
*June - September 2020*

**Week 1 – That You May Pray**



**Teaching Text**

**1 Peter 4:7**

*The end of all things is near.*

*Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.*

**Recap**

Pastor Jon introduced a vision for our church this summer: learning to pray in this time of crisis with an eternal perspective. During this season, we have the opportunity to pray like we never have before, to cry out to God with urgency and fervency, knowing the end of all things is near.

**Discussion Guide**

**Contemplate**

1. We've changed our plans and practices because of COVID-19. How do we change our plans and practices in light of eternity?

## Week 2 – Prophetic Lament



### Teaching Text

#### Luke 19:41-44

*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”*

### Recap

As our society awakens to generations of systemic injustice and oppression while grieving the lives lost to violence and illness, we are called to be people who “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). Dear Church, now is the time to lament. The modern church has a history of minimizing grief and pain and adopting a theology of privilege that focuses more on celebration and joy. Culture at large has misshaped our faith, and we recognize that it is time to learn from our brothers & sisters who have been oppressed and can teach us to lament. Today, we hold space for grief and look at the elements of prophetic lament.

In the Old Testament, prophets—or watchmen—who were intimately connected to God’s people and God’s heart often prayed with prophetic lament. A lament is “a dirge, a wailing cry, or a deep groaning,” and a **prophetic lament** consists of **confession, intercession,**

**hope, vocalizing in community, symbolic action.** We see several examples of prophetic lament in the Bible. First, in Exodus 32, Moses confesses Israel's sin of idolatry, intercedes on their behalf, hopes in God's forgiveness, and then confronts the Israelite's for their sin while making them drink the powder of the crushed golden calf. We also see examples of prophetic lament through Daniel, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel who cry out in righteous grief on behalf of an unrighteous people. Jesus is the ultimate example of prophetic lament. In Luke 19, Jesus looks out over the city of Jerusalem and weeps for the sorrow and sin that is within her. Jesus confronts sin head-on and invites us to follow in His footsteps. He is the Wounded Healer, the Great Intercessor, the Balm of Gilead whose laments led Him to the cross and whose broken body brings us complete healing.

Through the example of Jesus, God invites us to courageously enter into the pain of others and to bear the mark of lamenters (Ezekiel 9:4). We do this by **looking** closely at the sin in our hearts and communities, by **learning** our history of oppression and the statistics of those dying around us, by **listening** to God's voice and asking Him what grieves His heart, and by **lamenting** in a way that produces lasting change. As followers of Jesus, we are all able to bring prophetic lament directly to the throne room of God through the Holy Spirit. Let us join together in lamenting before God so that He may change our hearts and make our city look more like His kingdom.

## Discussion Guide

### Connect:

1. It feels like we're drinking from a fire-hydrant of information right now. If you could recommend ONE book, TV show, movie, song, podcast, article, etc. to our group, what would it be and why? Feel free to share something that made you think the hardest, opened your eyes the most, or made you erupt in a belly-laugh.

### Check-in:

It's been a tough few days, and we want to create space for the wide spectrum of things you may be feeling—from joy to sorrow. Fill in the blank for both:

"The best/most encouraging part of my week was \_\_\_\_\_."

"The hardest/most challenging part of my week was \_\_\_\_\_."

### Contemplate

Choose one of the following passages to dig into with your group:

-Exodus 32:11–20

-Daniel 9:2–17

-Nehemiah 1:4–7

-Jeremiah 8:21–9:1

-Ezekiel 9:3b–6

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read aloud the passage. Allow your group to sit with the verses for a bit. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. Which words stand out to you in this passage?
2. How does understanding the context of this passage help us understand its meaning?
3. What does this passage reveal about lamenting?
4. What does this Old Testament passage reveal about Jesus?

### Consider

1. Societal lament ends with an appeal to human authority, while prophetic lament goes directly into the throne room of God. How have you noticed the differences between these two versions of lament this week?
2. We are exhorted to do the following: **look** at our brokenness; **learn** about the history of injustice and oppression; **listen** to God's voice and heart; **lament** over sin and pain; and **labor to** bring about the kingdom. Which of these step(s) do you need to focus on this week, and what will it look like?

### Cry Out

The elements of prophetic lament are: **Confession, Intercession, Hope, Vocal/Communal, Symbolic**. Take time to write a lament that covers the first three stages (confession of sin and ways we've participated in injustice; interceding for the oppressed; asking God to create a new hope within us).

For the last two elements (Vocal/Communal and Symbolic), create a Google folder where people can upload their written laments, if they feel comfortable. Spend time throughout the week reading each other's prophetic laments. Encourage one another to keep pressing into the pain of our world. Ask one person to read their lament at your next meeting, as a reminder that prophetic lament continues beyond this week.

**Cover:**

Break out into mini prayer groups. Practice lamenting together. Pray through and lament at least one of the following (or assign one of the following to each group):

- Our country's systemic oppression and violence against black bodies
- The families of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, who must grieve the unjust loss of their loved ones on a national stage
- The loss of life due to COVID-19, and the resulting unemployment rates and economic tragedy disproportionately affecting low-income communities
- The children in our country going hungry due to school lunches being suspended
- Those who are confined to unsafe and abusive homes during this age of sheltering in place
- The medical frontline workers who are faced with unending death and atrocities

CHURCH OF THE CITY NY

## Week 3 – The Cry of the Heart



### Teaching Text

#### Psalm 10

*Why, Lord, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*

*In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,  
who are caught in the schemes he devises.  
He boasts about the cravings of his heart;  
he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord.  
In his pride the wicked man does not seek him;  
in all his thoughts there is no room for God.  
His ways are always prosperous;  
your laws are rejected by him;  
he sneers at all his enemies.  
He says to himself, "Nothing will ever shake me."  
He swears, "No one will ever do me harm."*

*His mouth is full of lies and threats;  
trouble and evil are under his tongue.  
He lies in wait near the villages;  
from ambush he murders the innocent.*

*His eyes watch in secret for his victims;  
like a lion in cover he lies in wait.  
He lies in wait to catch the helpless;  
he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.  
His victims are crushed, they collapse;  
they fall under his strength.  
He says to himself, "God will never notice;  
he covers his face and never sees."*

*Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God.  
Do not forget the helpless.  
Why does the wicked man revile God?  
Why does he say to himself,  
"He won't call me to account"?  
But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;  
you consider their grief and take it in hand.  
The victims commit themselves to you;  
you are the helper of the fatherless.  
Break the arm of the wicked man;  
call the evildoer to account for his wickedness  
that would not otherwise be found out.*

*The Lord is King for ever and ever;  
the nations will perish from his land.  
You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted;  
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,  
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,  
so that mere earthly mortals  
will never again strike terror.*

## **Recap**

There is a cry in our heart that has been going on for centuries in America. It comes from the cultural intersection of race and class, and how that has resulted in injustice, both personal and systemic. When we confront these issues, there are complicated emotions present, such as grief, anger, fear, and shame. Today, we as Christians are called to do the work of learning the history of racial injustice in America and understanding what persists as brokenness in our society today. We are invited to become emotionally mature so we can take on these heavy burdens, bringing our uncomfortable emotions in the context of worship instead of shoving them under a rug. And we are asked to use our imaginations to engage in culture-making, partnering with God to bring reconciliation and restoration in our time.

Pastor David Bailey presented us with a condensed history of oppression against black people in America: In 1619, 401 years ago, the first enslaved Africans were forced to come to America for economic reasons. In 1705 in Virginia, a few rich landowning men passed “An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves” that defined black people as slaves, and white people as Christian servants. This was the moment a legal privilege was created based on a person’s skin color. In 1865, slavery was abolished, however the 13th Amendment provided an exception through criminalization. Today, black and brown people are more heavily policed and serve inordinately long sentences to provide cheap labor. 1877 began an era of terror through the Jim Crow Laws. In 1909, W.E.B Du Bois created the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to address lynching and police brutality, however it wasn’t until 45 years later, in 1954, that significant changes in state and legislation took place through Brown v. Board of Education. Immigration has also had racist overtones from the beginning, when non-black POC would appeal all the way to the Supreme Court to be classified as white and obtain the benefits of society, birthing anti-blackness.

This long history can lead us to feel complex emotions, but God has given us language to express these emotions through the Psalms (Psalm 10). We are also given a way forward through the hope of the resurrection of Christ. As unique pieces, each needed to fit together in the true picture of reconciliation, let us join in this joyful work ahead.

### **Discussion Guide**

#### **Connect:**

New York (along with other parts of the country) is now in phase one of reopening.

1. What’s the first place you want to visit once things are fully (and safely) reopened?

OR

2. What is one thing (physical possession, TV show, person, daily habit) that helped you make it through these past few months of quarantine?

#### **Check-in:**

On a scale of 1-10, how are you holding up emotionally this week, especially as compared to last week?



## **Contemplate:**

Read this week's teaching text, Psalm 10, with your group (ask someone, or multiple people, to read it aloud). Allow your group to sit with the verses for a bit. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. What images or phrases speak the loudest to you?
2. What do these verses tell us about God's character and his response to oppression?
3. What does this Psalm teach us about praying about injustice?

## **Consider:**

1. Even out of overwhelming injustice, death, and sin, God brings meaning and redemption. Because of the resurrection, Christians grieve injustice not as the world grieves but as people who have hope. How have you seen this hope at work in your own life over the past couple of weeks?
2. As Christians we are called to take on the work of racial reconciliation and engage in resurrecting activities in partnership with God. What is one "resurrecting activity" you want to commit to doing in the week(s) ahead?

## **Cry Out:**

1. If your group participated in the written prophetic lament activity from last week's sermon discussion guide, ask one or two people to read their laments aloud to the rest of the group, as a reminder of the ongoing need for lament.
2. Revisit Psalm 10, this week's teaching text. This Sunday, Pastor David Bailey told us that through the Psalms, God gives us the language to deal with injustice, and last Sunday, Pastor Suzy preached about the different elements of a prayer of prophetic lament: confession, intercession, hope, vocalizing in community, symbolic action. Discuss where you see some of these elements in Psalm 10. In the coming week, spend time praying through Psalm 10 as a way of crying out to God about the injustices we see in the world today.

## **Cover:**

Break out into mini prayer groups and practice crying out to God about injustice together. Pray using the words of Psalm 10, or pray in your own words, through the following (some of these prayer topics are a continuation from last week):

- Lament for our country's systemic oppression and violence against black bodies; intercede for meaningful, systemic change.

- Mourn for the families of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Rayshard Brooks, and others, who must grieve the unjust loss of their loved ones on a national stage, as well as for those who have lost loved ones due to racial violence without their names being known.
- Petition for conviction and courage to speak up and act against racial injustice (and all intersecting forms of injustice) in our individual lives and spheres of influence.

CHURCH OF THE CITY<sup>NY</sup>

## Week 4 – A Cry for Break Through



### Teaching Text

#### Isaiah 53:12

*Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

### Recap

As we continue to dive deeper into prayer, we discover that it has distinct forms. Devotional prayer provides the gifts of faith, wherein we present personal requests before the Lord and He answers according to His will and out of his kindness. We may rejoice if He answers us and delivers a gift, but have no power to say that we will always receive the same answer. Intercessory prayer provides the grace of faith, where our intimacy with God and alignment with His plan produce spiritual authority. This comes from the ultimate spiritual power, Jesus, who "was numbered with the transgressors" and "bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

So how do we reach this point of intercession and breakthrough? First, we must identify with brokenness, just as Moses went from seeing himself as a privileged Egyptian to identifying with the suffering of the Hebrew people (Acts 7:23 and Exodus 2:11). Then we must enter the agony, going deeper than sympathy and even deeper than empathy, as we pray for change. Transitioning from empathy to agony is costly, destroying convenience in our life,

but "agony doesn't have the luxury of changing the topic or changing the channel." It is from this place of pain that Nehemiah rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:4). Lastly, we move with authority by the Holy Spirit's power. Let us come together as a church that enters into intercessory prayer on behalf of our city, contending for God to renew it in the image of His kingdom.

### **Discussion Guide**

#### **Connect:**

1. Summer is officially upon us. What is one thing you're hoping to experience this Summer?

OR

2. What was your favorite thing to do in the Summer as a child?

#### **Check-in:**

We want to create space to share anything that has been taking up mental or emotional energy this week. Fill in the blank:

" \_\_\_\_\_ is one thing I haven't been able to get off my mind and/or heart this week."

#### **Contemplate:**

Choose one or two of the following passages to dig into with your group:

-Isaiah 53:12 (teaching text)

-Hebrews 7:25 & 2 Corinthians 5:21

-Romans 9:2-4 & Nehemiah 1:4

-Acts 19:11-16 -Ezekiel 22:30-31

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read the passage aloud. Allow your group to sit with the verses for a bit. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. Which words or phrases stand out to you?

2. How does understanding the context of this passage help us understand its meaning?

3. What do these verses reveal about intercession and crying out for breakthrough?

### **Consider:**

1. Intercession is stewarding your intimacy with God for the sake of others. How can we practice this sort of intercession for New York City?
2. When we pray generally without power or authority, sometimes God will answer out of His kindness, and this is a **gift of faith**. However, when we gain a place of intercession in a certain realm, we enter into the **grace of faith**. What is an example of a realm in which you want to enter into the grace of faith?

### **Cry Out:**

Breakthrough comes in three phases: **identification**, **agony**, and **authority**. Think about what each of these phases could look like in your own life. Either individually on paper or verbally with the group (or a small breakout group), consider the following:

- 1.) Who do you identify with right now? Is it selfish, surface-level, or sacrificial? Is there a city, community, or group of people whom you love and for whom you desire justice and mercy?
- 2.) How can you consciously enter into their agony? How can you develop this "holy obsession to see something changed"?
- 3.) What will it look like when you move from borrowed authority into Holy Spirit-given spiritual authority?

### **Cover:**

Break out into mini prayer groups. Practice intercession together. Pray and ask God for breakthrough in at least one of the following areas (or, assign one of the following after asking your group if anyone feels they have authority in one of these areas):

- Our country's systemic oppression and violence against Black bodies; intercede for meaningful, systemic change
- The medical frontline workers who are still faced with unending death and atrocities, COVID-19 or otherwise
- Those who are confined to unsafe and abusive homes during this age of remaining largely indoors
- The rising but silent plague of loneliness, depression, and anxiety in New York City

## Week 5 – Coaching Tips to Bridging Racial Barriers



### Teaching Text

#### Galatians 2:11-14

*When Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”*

### Recap

Guest pastor of Christ Church, Dr. David Ireland, preached about what it means to be a more diverse community—a truly multi-ethnic church—providing us with three coaching tips to bridge racial barriers: welcome confrontation, face the challenge and accept the coaching.

Dr. Ireland explained that cross-cultural coaching on prejudice (and other racial barriers to reconciliation) is critical, demonstrating its importance through how Paul coached Peter through his prejudice in Galatians 2:11-14.

Prejudice means prejudgment with emotions. It has very little to do with intellect. There are five levels of prejudice: talking, avoidance, discrimination, violence and extermination. Peter was guilty of level two, avoidance, and Paul had to confront it. He had a preference to eat with the Jews instead of the Jews and the Gentiles. Any time our preferences subvert, malign or no longer fall in line with the values Jesus espoused, our values are wrong.

For Church of the City to be a church of the *multi-ethnic* city, we need to be a multi-ethnic church. Jesus tells us time and time again that his family is racially diverse. After all, he says, “for God so loved *the world*”—the whole, whole world! As such, Dr. Ireland explains the difference between mono-cultural churches and multicultural churches. Multicultural churches differ in their people, worship style, preaching style, approaches and topics of conflict, and in romance (more multicultural relationships).

1 Peter 2:16-17 assures us that through welcoming confrontation, facing the challenge and accepting the coaching, Jesus *can* change our hearts. Jesus is not only able to heal our bodies, he’s able to change our views and create awesome reconcilers.

### **Discussion Guide**

#### **Connect:**

1. In this week's sermon, Dr. David Ireland challenged us to become "students of culture." Go around the group and let everyone share a piece of their "culture."
2. What is a practice, custom, tradition (anything!) that makes you, your family, or your background unique to you?

#### **Check-in:**

We're all doing a lot of unlearning and learning during this time, but often we may not take time to check in on how that is influencing us emotionally, mentally or spiritually.

Finish this sentence: “This week I have been feeling \_\_\_\_\_.”

#### **Contemplate:**

Choose one or two of the following passages to dig into with your group:

- Galatians 2:11-14 (teaching text)
- Revelation 7:9
- John 3:16
- 1 Peter 2:16-17

1. How does understanding the context of the text help us understand what God is teaching us through it?
2. What stands out to you?
3. What do these verses teach us about God's heart for a diverse Church?

**Consider:**

1. Dr. Ireland said that "community is the deepest thing in you connecting to the deepest thing in me where there's a sense of belonging and family." When we think about the Church in Antioch, what made it a community after God's own heart?
2. What is one way you plan to create a multi-racial, multi-ethnic community in your own life this week? Feel free to share personal experiences, conversations or highlights so far.
3. Peter was willing to welcome confrontation, face the challenge Paul presented publicly and accept his coaching, and as a product of that, Peter's prejudiced heart was changed. How willing are you to receive correction and confrontation that leads to change? Do you tend to be soft hearted or defensive?

**Cry Out:**

1. Dr. Ireland challenges us in his sermon to be "cross-cultural Christ followers," "authentic reconcilers," and "attractive racially." What could that look like in your life?
2. How can we challenge ourselves to be more like Paul, and later Peter, and more aligned with the heart of the Father for a diverse Kingdom?
3. Has the Holy Spirit been revealing prejudices in your heart that you need to confront?

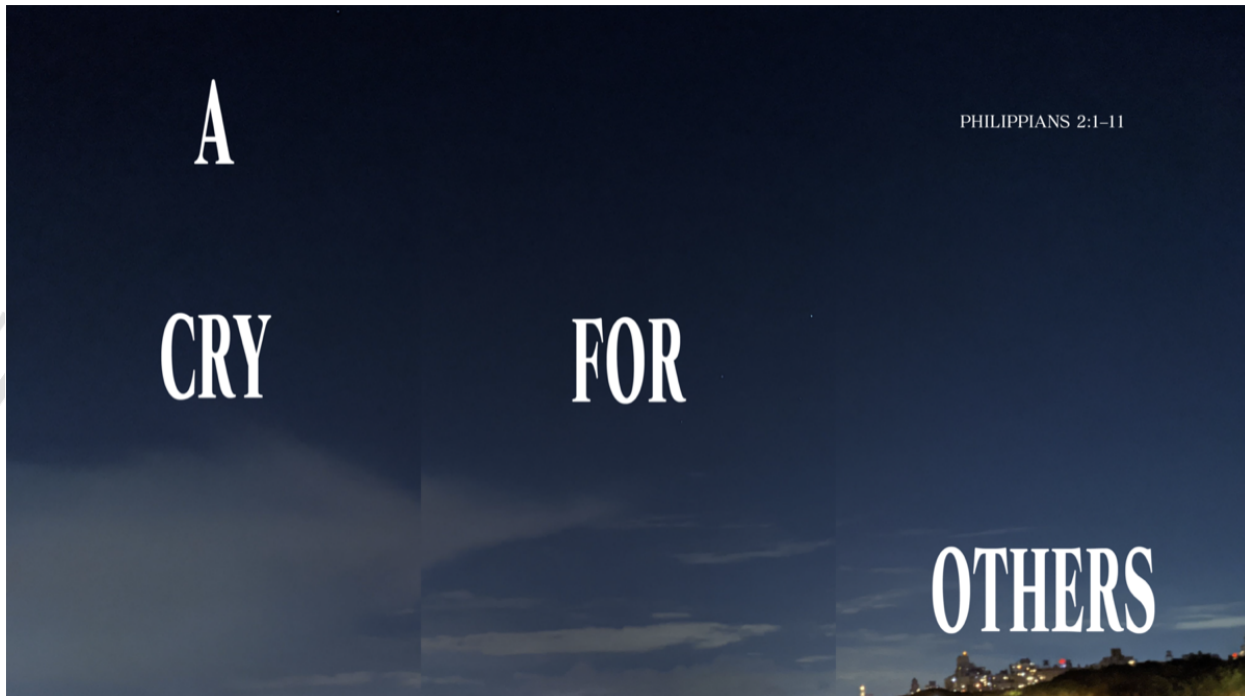
**Cover:**

Break out into mini prayer groups. Pray and ask the Lord to:

- Make prejudice in our own lives evident
- Guide us as we long to be reconcilers and bridge-builders
- Set the Church apart as a model of unity in a racialized world



## Week 6 – A Cry for Others



### Teaching Text

#### Philippians 2:1-11

*Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

### Recap

There is so much at stake currently for the future of the country. As followers of Jesus, we must be careful not to fall into the cultural traps of fear, selfishness, and competition. In this sermon, Pastor Jon challenged us to take on the mindset of Jesus: sacrificially thinking of others before ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4). In the sermon, we see how a culture of

self-centeredness in the church can mirror the dysfunction that is fragmenting the secular cultural around us. So much of what drives our modern life is “I win, you lose.” But the Gospel calls us to adopt a new narrative of “I sacrifice, we win.”

As Christians, we are encouraged to mimic Jesus by showing up as sacrificial servants and take on such a radical lifestyle that the people around us will ask questions to which only the gospel is the answer. Jesus did not consider his equality with God something to tightly grasp ahold of, but rather something to steward for the people around him. At his last supper, he humbled himself and washed his disciples' feet with his own garment without regard for his reputation or preserving his privilege. Similarly, we can regularly ask ourselves how we can be a generous church and steward the privilege we have, whether that is through finances, gifts, time, or energy, in order to elevate Jesus. When we live in this way, we are told we will be blessed (John 13:17). The sacrifice of the early Christians living in the way of the cross is what turned the world upside down – we could also do this now in our city.

### **Discussion Guide**

#### **Connect:**

1. The Fourth of July looked a lot different for most people this year, logistically and emotionally. What was one thing you enjoyed over the long weekend?

#### **Check-in:**

We are officially in our fifth month of the pandemic. How are you feeling as the city continues to reopen? What has changed for you since the beginning of all of this?

#### **Contemplate:**

Read this week's teaching text (Philippians 2:1-11) aloud with your group.

1. What stands out most to you about this passage?
2. What are a couple of practical ways to model this type of humility in today's world?

#### **Consider:**

Pastor Jon talked about how easy it is for the fears, defensiveness, and competition of our culture to infiltrate our hearts.

1. Do you feel a spirit of competition or defensiveness in any particular area of your life (work, friends, politics, etc.)?
2. What role has fear played in this area over the last few months?

### **Cry Out:**

1. Pastor Jon urged our church to be a community that shares a mindset of sacrifice as Jesus did. In what areas are you able to sacrifice and what might that look like for you? (Finances, Energy, Education, Gifts, etc.)
2. What does it look like to rely on God's resources (vs. human resources alone) to sustain us as we give sacrificially?
3. Jon suggested that if we took this call seriously, we could change the reputation of the church in our city in one generation. Do you believe this? Discuss what you think it would take for this to be true.

### **Cover:**

In smaller groups, practice intercession for the body of believers to step into a spirit of sacrifice for the good of God's people and for His glory.

- Pray through Isaiah 58 or with words of your own.
- Pray for God to reveal to each individual in your group if fear or defensiveness has taken root in their heart.
- Pray that God would show each person the areas in their lives in which they have been blessed in order to share with others.

## Week 7 – Prayer in a Time of Fruitlessness



### Teaching Text

#### Habakkuk 3:16-19

*I heard and my heart pounded,  
my lips quivered at the sound;  
decay crept into my bones,  
and my legs trembled.  
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity  
to come on the nation invading us.  
Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.  
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to tread on the heights.*

## Recap

In this life, we might find ourselves in seasons where it takes all of our strength to get out of bed, to hope, to pray. Desperation and fruitlessness make it harder to push the Kingdom forward in the same way we have before. When we face these extended periods of barrenness and destruction, oftentimes, the only way out is through. So how do we pray in these seasons of agony, desolation, and sorrow?

Looking to the prophet Habakkuk, his prayer in Chapter 3, verses 16-19 shows us how to continue in obedience and prayer through seasons of fruitlessness. He starts by **crying out** to God, acknowledging the world he lives in and the pain he's experiencing. Although he knows the Babylonians are coming, he still seeks God's salvation for Judah. From Habakkuk to Joel, Elijah, Job, Naomi, and many others, we see God's people throughout Scripture crying out to Him in prayer.

How we choose to respond after crying out is always connected to God's response to our prayer. God gives Habakkuk a future promise that the Babylonians will be driven out and destroyed, but Habakkuk must first endure Judah's destruction. In Habakkuk's prayer, he remembers that God has been faithful in the past and **makes the choice** to rejoice and have faith that He will be faithful again. Habakkuk reminds us that the righteous will live by faith, and that God hears the prayers of His people.

The conclusion to Habakkuk's prayer, like every prayer of desperation, is actually God's response. First, God strengthens us with power to know His love, and then He transforms us. Habakkuk talks about the way God makes his feet like the deer's to tread in high places. This "deer" is more closely translated to "hinds," or a kind of antelope that is able to literally scale mountains because of the way God has made their feet. When we are forced to walk through seasons of fruitlessness, the good news is that God transforms us and makes our feet like the hinds to tread in these high, perilous places. So in the seasons of fruitlessness, we can cry out to God, remember that God comes for His people, and choose to rejoice and be obedient, **resting in the conclusion** that He strengthens us, transforms us, and enables us to tread on the higher ground.

## Discussion Guide

### Connect:

1. What was the most motivating or encouraging part of your week?

### Check-in:

Today's sermon talked about prayer in a time of fruitlessness. Is there an area of your life that feels fruitless right now?

## **Contemplate:**

Choose one or two passages from the following list and have one or two people read the chosen passages aloud with your group.

- Habakkuk 3:16-19 (teaching text)
- 1 Samuel 1:10, 13, 15-16
- Isaiah 57:15
- Psalm 46.1-3
- Hebrews 11:39-40
- 2 Samuel 22:24-5 & Psalm 18:33-34

Take some time to consider the scripture and its relationship to your personal connection to God before diving into one or more of the following questions:

1. Which words and/or phrases resonate with you from this passage?
2. What do these verses teach you about crying out to God in a time of spiritual drought?

## **Consider:**

1. Eugene Peterson says the Christian life is “a long obedience in the same direction.” What do you think this means?
2. In the Bible, even the most righteous individuals and prophets experienced fruitlessness. In the midst of barrenness, they still chose to rejoice in the Lord and cry out in prayer, knowing God fulfills his promises. How can we similarly remind ourselves to cry out and live by faith during difficult circumstances?

## **Cry Out:**

1. Painful seasons can become altars of God’s nearness. Looking back, do you have any of these altars where God was clearly present in your despair?
2. What is an unfulfilled prayer you've been praying for awhile now? Will you be OK if you don't see the answer to this prayer in your lifetime?
3. How are you doing with last Sunday’s practice of crying out for others by sharing Jesus’ mindset of sacrifice?

## **Cover:**

Break out into small groups to practice crying out, placing our trust in God to fulfill his promises in times of fruitlessness, and recognizing it is in his strength that our prayers are answered.

- Pray over specific examples of fruitlessness that people in your group shared tonight.
- Pray for God to reveal to each individual how to rejoice in times of despair and trust in him.
- Pray that God would show each individual that, ultimately, the ends of prayers are always answered in God's strength, not by our own.

CHURCH OF THE CITY NY

# A CRY FOR

HEBREWS 10:19-25

# ENCOURAGEMENT

## Teaching Text

### Hebrews 10:19-25

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

## Recap

Many of us feel a deep sense of discouragement as we face uncertainty and difficulty in our current moment. On top of this, we are living through a time in history when the mainstream culture is one of criticism, cynicism, and attack. Amid all of this criticism and uncertainty, we as Christians are called to commit to building a counterculture of encouragement. In Hebrews 19, the believers of God are called upon by the writer to "not give up meeting together" but continue to "encourage one another" as they face persecution. The Greek word for "encourage" here is *paraklein*--the word used to send timid and fearful soldiers courageously into battle, to stir someone up and give them the courage to press on through difficult times. This is the type of encouragement we are to extend to one another, speaking words of life and affirmation into people's hearts. As we do so, we live out the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is the source of all encouragement, as we can see in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ("the **Father** of compassion and the God of all comfort"), 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 ("our Lord



**Jesus Christ**...who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement"), and John 14:26 ("the Advocate, the **Holy Spirit**"). Though our words may seem simple, God can use them to restore others and shape lives in powerful ways.

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Connect:**

1. This season has been one of adapting to change, and as a result, we've adopted some new habits and routines. Describe a new (or old) daily ritual that you look forward to. If it's your morning coffee, be specific. How do you make it? When do you drink it and where? What makes this daily ritual unique to you and no one else?

### **Check-in:**

Let's be people who come alongside each other in the ups and downs of mundane, daily life. Take some time to share one high and one low from your week.

### **Contemplate:**

In each Person of the Trinity, we see that God is a God of encouragement. Read these Scriptures about the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit aloud in your group, then answer the following questions.

- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (Father)
- 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (Jesus)
- John 14:26 (Holy Spirit)

1. What individual traits do you see in each Person that you may have never noticed before?
2. Does this call to mind any other Scriptures about God's heart for encouragement?

### **Consider:**

1. What area of your life has been particularly discouraging lately? Is something consistently troubling your spirit?
2. We live in a culture of criticism, cynicism, and attack, and Jon pointed out that a constant spirit of criticism is a sign of spiritual immaturity. What triggers this spirit of criticism in your life?
3. Does anyone have a story to share about a time when you gave or received a word of encouragement that significantly altered your mood, perspective, or spiritual well being?

**Cry Out:**

1. How can you take a step toward God's Word and Truth the next time you are discouraged, instead of sinking into greater discouragement?
2. When you sense a spirit of criticism toward yourself or toward someone else, how can you reverse those thoughts and pursue that person with words of grace? Is the Holy Spirit bringing to mind anyone who may need specific encouragement today?
3. When you engage with others, do you enter the room with an attitude that says, 'Here I am' or an attitude that says, 'There you are'? How can we grow in considering other people's well being above our own?

**Cover:**

When we encourage one another, we live out the ministry of the Trinity. Let's spend some time speaking specific words of encouragement over each person in the group. Depending on the size of your group, you can do this all together or break up into smaller groups. Allow each person to be showered with encouragement for about 5 minutes. Begin and end this time by inviting the Holy Spirit's presence and asking Him to help you continually build a culture of encouragement with one another.

## Week 9 – A Cry for Encouragement Part II



### Teaching Text

#### Hebrews 10:19-25

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

### Recap

This week, we continue in the topic of encouragement with a close reading of Hebrews 10:19-25. As the believers in the book of Hebrews were under pressure, shrinking back, and reverting to their former way of life, the author of this text uses three exhortations of encouragement to remind them that Jesus is the new and better way to gain confidence before God.

First, the **encouragement to draw near to God** in verse 19 (“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...”) highlights the invitation, or access we have to the Father through Jesus. Now that mercy comes through the blood of Jesus, we can enter into the presence of God with confidence.

The author encourages the Church to rely on what Christ has done and to draw near to God no matter what patterns of sin or deep sense of shame we carry.

The second **encouragement to faithfulness** in verse 23 (“Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful”) exhorts us to hold fast to our conviction of the truth of the gospel. The power of this encouragement comes from speaking hope to one another and reminding each other that we were born to follow Jesus in radical discipleship.

The third and final **encouragement to love and good deeds** found in verses 24-25 (“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together...”) prompts us to spur one another on to be a spiritually provocative community. The people in our communities carry breathtaking potential, and through the encouragement modeled by Paul in Romans 16:1-16, we can be a community that releases that potential inside of one another. May we become a community who comes alongside and builds each other up, so God may fulfill our redemptive potential and make us into a community of hope in a culture of despair.

### **Discussion Guide**

#### **Connect:**

1. We've been in this season for quite a while now, and "zoom fatigue" is starting to set in. What are some ways that you like to spice up your meetings and conferences so that you and others can remain engaged?

OR

2. What has been a persistent source of joy for you that you discovered during COVID-19? Do you find yourself musing on the migration patterns of the Bodega Cat on the corner? Have you made an anonymous friend in the neighborhood whose window is across the street from yours? Feel free to get quirky and creative!

#### **Check-in:**

We are a community called to love one another, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Where do you find yourself relying on your own performance or routine that could use a burst of encouragement?

#### **Contemplate:**

Choose two of the following texts to discuss with your group:

- Hebrews 10:19-25
- Romans 15:4
- Hebrews 3:12-13
- Romans 16:1-16

1. What part of this passage reverberates in your heart right now?

2. Why do you think God puts such emphasis on how encouragement and community strengthens faith?

3. How does the context of Paul's audience (in Hebrews or in Romans) color our understanding of this passage?

**Consider:**

1. The teaching text includes 3 big exhortations: to draw near to God, to remain faithful, and to press on toward love and good deeds. Which of these three do you find you need most right now?

2. Jesus tells us to follow him now and to let the dead bury their dead. When you hear this wisdom, what conviction does God put on your heart? And where can you follow him in spirituality, in generosity, or in practice?

**Cry Out:**

1. What can we do in the coming week to look more like Barnabas, who received the title "Son of Encouragement"?

2. Think of an area of your life where you feel like you keep failing. Is that area of your life being nourished by an environment of encouragement? What do you think God could accomplish if you were to be constantly encouraged in this area?

**Cover:**

As you break out into smaller groups for prayer, consider Jon's exhortation for the church. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw us nearer and bring each other up. Pray for the Holy Spirit to intercede and build a church of hope in a culture of despair. Close out by speaking encouragement over members of the church you feel may be overlooked, whether they are present in your Community Group or not. Like Paul does in Romans, we should honor those who work to bring forth God's Kingdom.

## Week 10 – The Cry of the Poor in Spirit



### Teaching Text

#### Matthew 5:3

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

### Recap

Dr. Bryan Loritts continued our Crying Out series with a look at the Sermon on the Mount and the call of Jesus to be “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5). In a culture so obsessed with fullness and a constant striving for “more”, this counter-cultural exhortation invites us to participate in Christ’s example of humility.

Jesus came to offer the world a new way of life - a way of meaning, value, and significance that defies the lies of the enemy so prevalent in our world today. But many choose to remain enslaved by the “old way”, denying this offer and believing the false promises of the world.

The words of Jesus, “blessed are the poor in spirit”, refute these lies by proclaiming that true blessing comes from a place of sacrifice. “Poor in spirit” reflects a heart position of humility in which believers accept and acknowledge that we cannot follow God or walk in His righteousness in our own strength. Just as we see Christ embody this example of humility and blessing on the cross, we too must posture our hearts in recognition of our neediness for God in order to find true fulfillment.

Pride is the enemy of such humility. It takes many forms - confrontation, people-pleasing, timidity, prayerlessness - and robs our hearts of the ability to see our need and walk in Christ’s example of sacrifice. But by fixing our eyes on Jesus and standing in his grace, we

cultivate humility in our hearts once again.

Let us remain in Christ that we may acknowledge our neediness, accept the grace we've been given, and steward that grace towards those around us. Then we shall be called truly blessed.

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Contemplate:**

Consider the verses referenced by Dr. Loritts in Matthew 5:3-10.

1. Which of the Beatitudes stand out most to you?
2. Dr. Loritts reminds us that the Beatitudes are metaphorical clothing that make the people of the Kingdom of God stand out. In what ways are the Beatitudes countercultural or go against the grain of our world?

### **Consider:**

1. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible standards presented in the Sermon on the Mount, but Dr. Loritts reminds us that Jesus wants us not to turn away from Him when we are overwhelmed, but towards Him. What does turning towards or fixating on Jesus in times of despair look like for you? How can you practice being more dependent on God?
2. Dr. Loritts listed out questions we can ask ourselves to see if we struggle with pride: are you offended easily? Are you a people pleaser? Are you timid? Do you find it hard to apologize? Do you tend to make conversations about yourself? Do you go for long periods without prayer? Consider these questions. Is there one that you struggle with the most? Is there one that maybe surprised you, or that you didn't previously see as something indicative of pride?

### **Cry Out:**

1. We can cultivate humility in our lives in two practical ways: (1) abide in Christ, (2) be gracious. How can you cry out to God and ask Him to help you practice these two things? Can you think of a few tangible ideas of how you can practice being more gracious to the people in your life?
2. Dr. Loritts quoted Edward McKendree Bounds saying, "Prayer is an expression of the soul's dependence on God." How can you commit to leaning more on God this week through prayer?

### **Cover:**

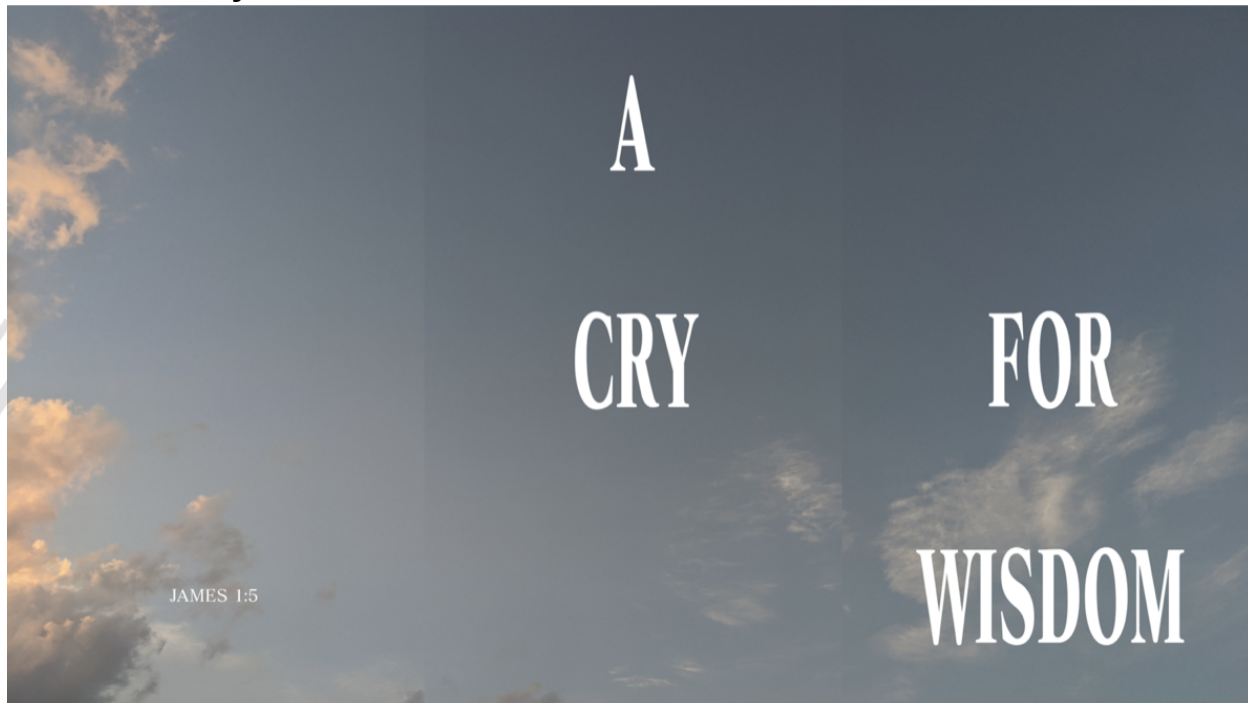
Spend time alone with God wherever you hear Him most clearly - alone in your room, outside in nature, early in the morning, later at night, with worship music, in quiet. Ask Him to

examine your heart and point out where you may struggle most with pride, feel like you don't need God, or struggle to extend grace to others. Spend time asking for God's forgiveness and for a heart of humility and dependence on Him. Remember God wants us, his children, to turn towards him. When we are feeling overwhelmed, he wants to show us that he can do immeasurably more than we can on our own if we invite him to.

CHURCH OF THE CITY<sup>NY</sup>



## Week 11 – A Cry for Wisdom



### Teaching Text

#### James 1:5

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”*

#### Recap

Pastor Suzy Silk continued our Crying Out series by delving into James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God.” In an era when worldly wisdom is the norm, this message invites us to cry out for Godly wisdom.

We are in a season where we lack wisdom, not just on a personal scale, but a global one. As followers of Christ, we know that the essence of wisdom is spiritual, and scripture tells us that God is the true source of that wisdom. He created it, He tested it, He hid it away, and he offers it to us as His children through the Holy Spirit. When we live by faith and in accordance with his instructions, we live a wise life, though it might look foolish to the world.

Godly wisdom is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. We see through His crucifixion the wisest decision ever made. The truth of the gospel and the beauty of the crucifixion shows us that God is working to redeem all things. Though it may be foolish to the world, it’s God’s embodied wisdom in Jesus being crucified that actually brings us to relationship with him, enabling us to know the Spirit and develop wisdom from God.

Through the core aspects of godly wisdom, we see that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, wisdom comes from and is given by the Holy Spirit, the path of wisdom is

obedience to God's laws, the wisdom of God is worth seeking, and most importantly, godly wisdom is available to every believer. Like Solomon, let us cry out to God for His wisdom, seeking the face of the Lord in all we do and obeying His word.

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Contemplate:**

Consider some of the passages Pastor Suzy referenced concerning Godly wisdom.

- James 1:5
- Ephesians 1:17
- Colossians 1:9
- Psalm 90:12
- 1 Kings 3:4-15

1. What do you learn about the insight we can gain when we seek the wisdom of God?
2. The scriptures say God is pleased when we ask for wisdom. Where do you need to ask God for His wisdom this week?

### **Consider:**

1. James 3:13-18 tells how the wisdom of God is different from, and far superior to, the false wisdom of the world. The real essence of wisdom is not empirical or philosophical, but spiritual, and God sits as the source. In our human strength, we cannot search out true wisdom, nor can we solve the problems of the world through better strategy, more empirical data, or philosophy. How does this truth convict your heart? In what area of your life can you surrender worldly wisdom?
2. Godly wisdom is more profitable and more precious than anything, and produces peace (James 3:18), righteousness (Psalm 1:1-3), and hope (Ephesians 1:17-18). The wisdom of God is worth seeking and sacrificing for. How will you seek God's wisdom this week? Where might He be calling you to sacrifice so that you may gain peace, righteousness, or hope?

### **Cry Out:**

1. Our culture often says that in order to convince someone of something, you must be passionate and eloquent and learned, but the scriptures tell us that wisdom from above is full of mercy. When somebody approaches you with mercy, it is actually more convincing to your soul and serves as a taste of the fruit of heaven. When is a time someone has approached you with mercy-filled wisdom? Who can you approach with mercy this week?
2. The strategy of the gospel, the crucifixion, and the way that God is working to redeem all things seems topsy-turvy, upside down, and foolish to the world. But even this "foolishness" is wiser than anything you could find on earth. Will you be counted a "fool" for the sake of the gospel? What might hold you back from embracing Godly wisdom?

**Cover:**

What God does comes out of who he is, so let us take the time this week to commune with our Lord and **seek** His presence. Even if it's just for fifteen minutes a day, begin to cultivate a "secret place" in your heart each day through prayer and worship so that you may be filled with the fear and awe of God. Then ask for His heart to be revealed to you by asking Him how you can work with Him, delight Him, and glorify Him during your day. Remember that the way of wisdom is not simple answers to questions along the way. It's actually a path that we are to walk in. God wants to produce streams of living water in us that comes from living in accordance to His will, and it begins by spending time in God's presence to learn how He views us and the world.

CHURCH OF THE CITY NY

## Week 12 – A Cry Intervention



### Teaching Text

#### Acts 12:1-19

*It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.*

*So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

*The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.*

*Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.*

*Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”*

*When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”*

*“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”*

*But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.*

*In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.*

## **Recap**

Pastor Jon preached about the opportunity we have for divine intervention through intense, persistent, and united prayers.

In 2020, we’ve had the worst pandemic in many generations, racial injustice has been highlighted, unemployment rates are high, and yet for many of us, we are experiencing prayer fatigue and struggling to persistently ask God to break in. What will it take for the church to truly pray like never before and end 2020 differently than how it started?

The church in Acts responded to the crisis of their times with intensity instead of passivity. Prayer must be intense — “a war-time walkie talkie,” as John Piper says. For intervention to happen, prayer must also be persistent. We don’t need panic prayers; we need persistent prayers. These intense and persistent prayers belong in the context of community. The power of corporate prayer is that people will hold your hands up and unite around you as you seek God and ask for His intervention, just as Aaron and Hur did for Moses.

We can shape our families, communities, churches, and city through prayer. Are we willing to do it? Let’s commit to praying like never before. Raise your voice, release your cry, and let’s do this together.

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Contemplate:**

Read Acts 12:1-19.

1. What does this passage tell us about the heart of the early church?
2. What can we learn about prayer in this passage?

### **Consider:**

1. The first principle of prayer is that our prayers must be intense. What are some things that you have been passively praying about recently? How can you regain a “Gethsemane-level” intensity in your prayer life?
2. The second principle of prayer is that our prayers must be persistent (1 Kings 18 & Daniel 10). Why do you think we sometimes have to ask God for the same things, over and over? How can principalities and spiritual warfare affect our prayers?
3. The third principle of prayer is that our prayers must be united. How did the early church in Acts model this? What are some things that we as the modern church can pray for together?

### **Cry Out:**

Scripture tells us that some things can only be released through prayer and fasting (Matthew 17 & Mark 9). Choose a day (or longer) this week to fast and cry out to God for our city, our church community, your family, or to ask for intervention in an area in your life in which you're seeking personal breakthrough.

### **Cover:**

Practice praying intensely and persistently this week in community. Ask your family, spouse, or small group of friends or CORE group to join you in asking God for breakthrough in a specific area. Make a plan for how you will pray together: joining the prayer room on Zoom each morning, fasting together, writing prayers for each other, prayer-walking up and down the streets, etc.

## Week 13 – A Cry for Repentance



### Teaching Text

#### 2 Chronicles 34

*Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.*

*In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles and idols. Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles and the idols. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem. In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem.*

*In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and Maaseiah the ruler of the city, with Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the temple of the Lord his God.*

*They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the temple of God, which the Levites who were the gatekeepers had collected from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel and from all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then they entrusted it to the men appointed to*

*supervise the work on the Lord's temple. These men paid the workers who repaired and restored the temple. They also gave money to the carpenters and builders to purchase dressed stone, and timber for joists and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin.*

*The workers labored faithfully. Over them to direct them were Jahath and Obadiah, Levites descended from Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, descended from Kohath. The Levites—all who were skilled in playing musical instruments—had charge of the laborers and supervised all the workers from job to job. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and gatekeepers.*

*While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses. Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord." He gave it to Shaphan.*

*Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: "Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them. They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the Lord and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers." Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.*

*When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: "Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the Lord; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book."*

*Hilkiah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.*

*She said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, 'This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people—all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all that their hands have made, my anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.' Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord. Now I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.'"*

*So they took her answer back to the king.*



*Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book.*

*Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it; the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their ancestors.*

*Josiah removed all the detestable idols from all the territory belonging to the Israelites, and he had all who were present in Israel serve the Lord their God. As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the Lord, the God of their ancestors.*

## **Recap**

In this past Sunday's sermon, Pastor Jon discussed the importance of repentance in following God. The full journey of repentance begins with the radical pursuit of God, followed by total annihilation of idolatry, the repair and rebuild of the ruins, and finally ruthless obedience to the word.

Josiah's path demonstrated these major stages of repentance. Although Josiah was faced with multiple generations of decline, he was redirected to follow the scripture once it was rediscovered and completely destroyed the strongholds in his kingdom. He ultimately rebuilt his kingdom and dedicated his life to living in the path of God, redirecting and reforming the entire generation as well.

In our own lives in modern times, it is imperative we eliminate the idolatry and strongholds in society and retain trust in God to revive this generation and more to come. God's desire is to rejoice in our repentance. We must turn our hearts to God, cry out for repentance, and follow the scripture to raise up our generation.

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Contemplate:**

There was a lot of Scripture to digest this Sunday:

- 2 Chronicles 34
- Acts 3:19-20
- 2 Kings 23:21-23 & 25.

1. When you reread these passages and let God speak to you through The Word, what is brought to the forefront of your mind?

2. What sin is God putting on your heart to repent?

3. Have you been conditioned by our culture to write off this sin as a "struggle?"

**Consider:**

Thinking of your sin is shameful and difficult for all of us, but identifying the "monuments and idols" we have erected in our lives is a pivotal first step in repentance.

1. Looking back through history as Josiah looked to David, who is a spiritual figure that you could establish as a reference point and "father" in your own growth?
2. How was this person's sin like yours, and how did they repent?

**Cry Out:**

None of us have the strength to do this on our own. Humble yourself before God and ask for the strength needed to become a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy. How can purifying your faith renew the city and help bring about a spiritual super bloom?

**Cover:**

The fruit of repentance is rejoicing. Totally annihilate the idols of sin that you have erected in your life and place the worship of God at its center. Take this time to thank God for His mercy and reconsecrate yourself before him. Take time to listen, you may just hear the angels singing.

CHURCH OF THE CITY NY

## Week 14 – Prioritizing Prayer



### Teaching Text

#### Daniel 6:1-11

*It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”*

*So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” So King Darius put the decree in writing.*

*Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.*

This past Sunday, Pastor Dimas Salaberrios preached a powerful word about prioritizing prayer. When we communicate with God through prayer, his presence profoundly shows up in our lives. Jesus modeled this by continually retreating to desolate places to pray. Daniel also modeled prioritizing prayer in Daniel 6:1-11. Possessing an excellent spirit, Daniel distinguished himself among the nobility of Babylon by consistently tapping into the spirit of God. When the satraps and other rulers attempted to taint this excellence, Daniel prioritized God over man's decree, and cried out to God in his upper room three times a day.

As humans, we were built to need constant communication with God and to flourish in intimacy with him. There are many ways to pray and seek this intimacy: we can set aside blocks of daily time to talk to God or simply sit in his presence, we can fast and pray for specific requests, we can pray hundreds of small prayers as we go about our day. When we drill down in prayer, we have to trust that it is having an impact in realms we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1). Prioritizing prayer is hard work, and at times, can feel like fighting a brick wall, but the results are astounding. We are truly our best selves when we have spent time in the presence of God. Church, may we seek the face of the Lord, trust him in prayer, and be patient.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Contemplate**

Read Daniel 6: 1-11.

We see in the text that Daniel was described as having "an excellent spirit in him" and that his adversaries could find no fault in his work or his ways.

1. What do you think this would look like in today's culture?
2. Can you think of anyone in your life that is "distinguished" by the evidence of the Holy Spirit in their ways?

### **Consider**

We see that Daniel's response to the edict was to immediately return home and pray in spite of the danger it presented him.

1. What is your typical default response when you are faced with a challenge or attack?
2. How quickly do you turn to prayer in those moments?

### **Cry Out**

There are a number of ways the enemy tries to rob you of your prayer life— distraction, time constraints, laziness, discouragement. What are the biggest hindrances in your prayer life? Ask God to reveal them to you and spend time praying against the enemy's tactics.

## **Cover**

Pastor Dimas reminded us that prayer is work. It takes discipline and intentionality to develop a powerful prayer life. For many of us, it also requires letting go of our idea of what prayer "should" look like and simply sitting before the throne of God exactly as we are. What are three things you can do this week to further practice the spiritual discipline of prayer?

CHURCH OF THE CITY<sup>NY</sup>

## Week 15 – A Cry for the Harvest



### Teaching Text

#### Luke 10:1-11

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road."*

*"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house."*

*"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.'"*

### Recap

This past Sunday, Pastor Suzy exhorted the church to prayerfully live out Jesus's mission to seek and save the lost, and to cry out for the harvest. God's heart is for those who are far from Him; His desire is for "all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). In Luke 10:1-4, we can see how Jesus invites and commands us to **look**, **ask**, **go**, and **sacrifice** as a worker in His harvest field in imitation of His life. Jesus began His ministry by **looking** at the crowds, seeing their true spiritual need, and having compassion on them. Similarly, all who are Jesus's disciples are called to "open (our) eyes and look at the fields, for they are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). We are to lift our eyes above ourselves with compassion and faith, believing that there is already a harvest prepared, and all that is needed are workers. Second, as Jesus's ministry is permeated with prayer and constant conversation with the Father, we are prompted to **ask** God to raise workers and send them out into His harvest field. This is a prayer for awareness, recognizing that God is the Lord of the Harvest, but also a prayer of release. Next, asking in this way turns into a prayer of readiness which compels us to **go** as Jesus did. Anyone who follows Jesus as Lord is being sent to go. This commandment is not for the select few. Everyone is expected to be a harvester and an evangelizer. Finally, Jesus tells the 72 unnamed disciples that they must be willing to **sacrifice** and to go out willingly as lambs among wolves. We are being sent among enemies, but Jesus sends us where He is already going. This strategy of looking, asking, going, and sacrificing works. It's the reason why we are reconciled to the Father and brought into the Kingdom, and how the early church spread like wild fire. To be a disciple of Jesus means that you join him in His mission. Although we may be tempted to rebrand Christianity and to make it popular, Jesus is confident in who He is and His message, and we can walk forward in faith as well, knowing that he will be with us always even until the end of the age.

## Discussion Guide

### Contemplate:

Read and reflect on the following passages:

- 1 Timothy 2:4
- Matthew 9:36-37
- John 4:35-38
- John 17:6-19
- Luke 10:1-11

1. What do these verses highlight for you about the heart of God?
2. How do Jesus's words about the harvest either challenge or encourage you?
3. What are some parts of Jesus's prayer for His disciples (John 17) that you want to claim over your life?

### Consider:

Pastor Suzy reminded us this week that God is the Lord of the harvest, and that as His workers we are often brought in to reap what another has sown (John 4:37-38).

1. Who are some of the different people God placed in your life to help you forward on your own salvation journey? Reflect on the various roles they played as you progressed in your faith walk.

2. Who are the people whose lives you feel that you have been placed in to either sow or reap a harvest? Prayerfully consider how you might reach out in the coming week to share the love of God with them.

**Cry Out:**

Ask God to show you the opportunities He has placed in your life to join in with the mission of Jesus. Pray for the words of the Holy Spirit to be given to you as you sow into other people on their journeys toward knowing God.

**Cover:**

As Pastor Suzy noted, 2020 might have the best harvest we've ever seen, as people turn heavenward for comfort during a year of intense hardships. Let us cover our city and our nation in prayer as we ask God to send workers into the field, and be willing to go and sacrifice for the kingdom, knowing that we go in freedom into the places Jesus is himself going.

GROUP OF THE CITY NY