



THE RESTORATION INITIATIVE FOR  
CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

*Lenten Prayer  
Guide*

*Thank you* for joining us on this Lenten journey!

The Restoration Initiative for Culture and Community was founded on the belief that Jesus offers restoration to each of us as individuals and to communities as a whole. That restoration is not just for Heaven, but we believe that Christ's love and grace have the power to transform our world here and now.

During this special season leading up to Easter, we take time to reflect and remember Christ's sacrifice and our calling as we follow after Him - a call to repent, to reimagine, and to restore.

What follows is a weekly prayer guide designed to lead you through the seven weeks of Lent and reflect on what this time means to us as those who seek to make our world look more like God's Kingdom.

We are grateful to be on this journey with you over the next seven weeks as we move toward Easter and celebrating Jesus' resurrection!



# Week One

## Meditate on Isaiah 58

The idea of fasting is one that's especially common during Lent. We choose to give up something we enjoy or crave as a sacrifice for 40 days in an effort to identify with Christ's suffering. In New Orleans, a deeply Catholic city where The Restoration Initiative is based, many give up meat for the seven weeks leading up to Easter, although some may not consider that much of a sacrifice given our amazing seafood industry.

Fasting certainly isn't a new concept - we see the people of God called to fast and pray throughout the text of the Bible, and many other faiths also employ the practice. The act of sacrificing something can be meant to help us focus more on spiritual matters.

In Isaiah 58, we see the people of God practicing fasting rituals, but the Lord sends a message of rebuke through the prophet, saying, "they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God." He reminds the people that their fasts are self-serving and that they use those days to oppress their workers instead of glorifying the Lord.

What is it that God wants from His people instead? Breaking the bonds of injustice, sharing bread with the hungry, sheltering the homeless - the Lord calls His people to care for those on the margins, those who are deemed "less than" by society.

During this Lenten season how can we engage in the justice we see laid out for us in Isaiah 58? What are some practical ways we can use these seven weeks leading up to Easter to do more than just go through the motions?



Reread Isaiah 58:8 - "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly." Our healing is tied directly to breaking the bonds of injustice. Our welfare is connected to the welfare of those misused and abused by society. We don't just fight oppression for the sake of others - in doing so, in honoring the Lord with our fasting and sacrifice, we find healing as well.

*Pray this week* that the Lord would give you strength and wisdom during this season of Lent and that your fasting during this season would be more than just going through the motions. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see and act in ways that honor God and fight injustice during these next seven weeks and beyond.



# Week Two

## Meditate on the Penitential Prayer of St. Augustine

O Lord,  
The house of my soul is narrow;  
enlarge it that you may enter in.  
It is ruinous, O repair it!  
It displeases Your sight.  
I confess it, I know.  
But who shall cleanse it,  
to whom shall I cry but to you?  
Cleanser me from my secret faults, O Lord,  
and spare Your servant from strange sins.

How often do we find ourselves crying out in the same way as St. Augustine? “The house of my soul is narrow.”

In New Orleans, where The Restoration Initiative is based, we know a thing or two about narrow houses. Many of our neighborhoods are lined with row after row of “shotgun houses,” homes built on long, narrow lots where one room follows another, sometimes with a tight hallway connecting every space. When the house fills up, it’s hard to move around without bumping into someone or something. A house too full can bring on a feeling of claustrophobia, and you have to step outside to catch your breath.

And in our everyday lives, we sense what St. Augustine conveyed in his prayer. Maybe we can’t even find the words to describe it, but the feeling is undeniable and almost palpable: a tightness, a fullness of self, with what seems like no breathing room to allow for the work of the Holy Spirit.

It’s likely that King David understood this feeling as well. We see his cries to the Lord in Psalm 51 for cleansing and renewal. “Purge me



with hyssop, and I shall be clean” (v. 7a). He asks God to use hyssop, a plant used throughout the ages as both a literal and ritualistic cleansing agent, purging him of his sins.

What is it in your life that might be making the house of your soul narrow? What’s causing you to be “replete with very thou,” as the poet T.E. Brown put it?

*Pray this week* that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes to what’s making your house narrow. Ask that the Lord would forgive you of the sin that crowds your heart and that He would open up the narrow spaces with His mercy and love.



# Week Three

## Meditate on Luke 1:46-55

This passage, most often saved for Advent readings leading up to Christmas, is a striking hymn. The longest speech of any woman recorded in the New Testament, Mary's Magnificat, as it's called, describes a powerful God and His bold servant.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the famous German theologian executed by Nazis, once said, "These are the tones of the prophetic women of the Old Testament: Deborah, Judith, Miriam, coming alive in the mouth of Mary." While we often paint a picture of Mary as meek and mild, we see anything but that in this passage. This young, poor woman, pregnant and unmarried, powerless in every way according to the standards of her day, declares proudly how her God elevates the lowly and brings down the mighty.

What can we learn from Mary in this passage? Often, we only see her as a silent vessel, but she is not silent. We see a woman of grit and passion who is confident in her God. She speaks of what the Lord has done and what He will continue to do, and she declares that she is His servant, obedient to the point of lowering herself even further than her born station. She understands her calling, and she answers faithfully.

What acts of obedience is Christ calling us to during this season of Lent? How can we, like Mary, commit to being faithful servants of the Lord?

*Pray this week* that the Lord would show you the areas in your life where He is calling you to obedience and you have yet to follow. Ask God to forgive your unfaithfulness and give you the grit to come back to obedience again and again.



# Week Four

## Meditate on Micah 6:1-8

What is good? What does God call us to in our walk with Him? We see it clearly laid out for us in this passage. The Lord reminds His people of what He has done for them, what He has brought them through, and then He tells them exactly what it is He is calling them to - justice, kindness, and humility.

What does it mean for us to “do justice” on a daily basis, going about our regular lives? For some, doing justice and doing their job collide, working in areas of advocacy for a living. For others of us, though, it may seem a little more far off and disconnected from our every day. Some may work directly in the arenas of change, pushing to change unjust systems in our communities. And some of us engage by volunteering with an afterschool program in an underresourced area or serving those at risk of hunger in your community. It could look like showing up for someone struggling to navigate the immigration system or helping collect school supplies for families in need. Maybe it starts by asking questions of and listening to the elders of your neighborhood to find out what people in your community most need. We can engage in acts of justice every day.

And how exactly are we to go about doing justice? With *hesed*, a Hebrew word that in this passage translates to the loving kindness God has for us. It is with this same loving kindness that we are to act. But lest we begin to boast in our kindness and our acts of justice, we see in this passage the reminder to also walk humbly with the Lord.

Why do we act justly? Why do we extend loving kindness? How are we, broken and redeemed creatures that we are, to do any of this? It's through God, through His strength and grace that we can live



out this sort of lifestyle. That is what helps us walk humbly - by remembering our own brokenness and salvation, our own redemption from despair, and that redemption only comes from the Lord, the one who has delivered His people time and again.

*Pray this week* that the Lord would remind you in tangible ways how He has delivered you. Ask Him to let that journey spur you to act justly and kindly as you move through your week, and ask the Holy Spirit to make you mindful of your own need for a Savior so that you do everything with humility and honor the Lord.



# Week Five

## Meditate on the Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.  
Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.  
Where there is discord, let me bring union.  
Where there is error, let me bring truth.  
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.  
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.  
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.  
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.  
O Master, let me not seek as much  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love,  
for it is in giving that one receives,  
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,  
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,  
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace - the first line of this famous prayer is actually quite a bold ask. Peace is a word we throw around quite a bit, but in the Bible, the word often translated as peace comes from the Hebrew shalom.

Shalom carries more weight than our loose concept of peace these days. We use peace to describe stillness, a break from fighting, or sometimes even just a feeling of calm.

Shalom, however, is the concept of wholeness, restoration, and completeness. It is the idea of goodness and well-being, and it carries the idea of fully paying a debt or making something right.



We can't know for sure if the writer of this prayer, more likely an anonymous French writer from the previous century than the beloved saint who died in 1226, would have also substituted the word shalom for peace in the first line. However, it seems obvious from the rest of the prayer that "an instrument of shalom" is exactly what the writer is describing, asking the Lord to make them an instrument to bring about God's restoration and wholeness in the world.

As we move through Lent, a season of reflection and restitution, we look to Easter when Christ's sacrifice and resurrection ripped apart the divide between us and God. Jesus showed us a new way, a way that pointed toward Heaven and brought about redemption and restoration here on earth. May we also pray to be instruments of shalom - of restoration and wholeness and hope - in our everyday lives.

*Pray this week* that God would give you the desire to live out what's described in the Prayer of St. Augustine. Ask Him to stir in you a passion to be an instrument of peace, one who brings His light and joy to those around you. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you strength and humility to be one who brings truth and forgiveness in a world in need of both.



# Week Six

## Meditate on John 10:10

We know that the gospel is good news. Literally translated, the Greek word euangelion means “good tidings,” and it is just that: the news that the sacrifice has been made and we are redeemed. The question arises, though, whether the gospel is good news for what is to come or also serves as good news now in our everyday lives.

While it is clear from the life of Christ that the answer to this question is both, we see it beautifully encapsulated when we examine what we now know as Holy Week. Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the solemnity of the Last Supper, the pain of crucifixion, Christ’s magnificent resurrection – as believers, we meditate on these significant moments recorded in the gospels. The week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday is one of the most cherished times in our church calendar, yet it is so easy to blaze past the incredible picture of kingdom work that Jesus gave us in the days leading up to his death and resurrection.

The gospel writers did not rush straight to Christ’s crucifixion in their accounts, but instead they carefully told us about each day of that week leading up to Jesus’ death. Between his celebrated arrival in Jerusalem and his arrest and crucifixion, we see Jesus weeping over the city, confronting the corrupt system in the temple, healing the blind and lame, teaching and washing his disciples’ feet. He addressed injustice, restored health, and gave of himself. He did exactly what he said he came to do in John 10:10: give life. *Zoé*, the Greek word for life in that text, refers both to spiritual life in the future, as well as physical life in the present. During Holy Week, we see that Jesus did both. He made a way for us to have eternal life with God, and he brought vibrant and beautiful life to people in their day-to-day lives.



What does this say to us now? How do Jesus' actions during that week and even throughout his earthly life inform our Christianity today? Christ showed us that while the kingdom is our heavenly destination through his death on the cross, we are called to do as he did and build his kingdom on Earth. While this may seem like lofty talk, it is in fact a command for us to act in tangible ways as Jesus did: to confront injustice, to care about the wellness of our communities and to speak words of truth and life.

Following after him does not mean we keep our heads down and push through to heaven. Instead, we share the new life that we have been given today. If we truly intend to follow in Christ's ways, then we too must be as concerned with the here and now as we are with eternity. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, brokenhearted for the people; we are called to weep and mourn the brokenness of our cities. He cleared the temple, overturning the tables of the moneychangers and confronting the economically unjust systems in place; we must also confront injustice, economic and otherwise, in our communities. He healed people; we need to be concerned with the access to wellness in our neighborhoods. Jesus taught and also spoke truth to the powers of the day, and we must do the same. He knelt and washed his disciples' feet, pairing his words with his actions, just as we should do today.

Christians, we cannot squander our time on Earth just counting down until we reach our heavenly home. The gospel is for the here and now. It changes lives, and it changes communities. It calls us to speak up, act, care, and serve so that we are doing as we are praying, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven."

*Pray this week* that the Lord would impress on you tangible ways that you can speak up, act, care, and serve within your own community. Ask for wisdom and gentle boldness as you do kingdom work in the here and now.



# Week Seven

## Meditate on Isaiah 61

In this last week before Easter, we explore once again the attributes of a God who is a God of justice. This passage is a beautiful reminder of our calling in Christ, especially poignant at this time of year when we celebrate His sacrifice and gift of salvation.

We at The Restoration Initiative feel deeply connected to this passage. We live in a city that has been devastated time and again by fire, flood, violence, and the sinful stain of slavery. New Orleans has been restored over and over though, by the grace of God. Many of our streets are lined with mighty oak trees. In fact, our logo contains three oak trees, a nod both to the landscape of our city and the “oaks of righteousness” described in Isaiah 61. And the reason we continue to do the work God has called us to at The RICC is because we know that our salvation, our redemption isn’t just for us - it’s for our community as well.

When God redeemed and restored each of us, He commanded that we then proclaim that good news to those around us who have also been brokenhearted, who’ve been oppressed, who have been covered in ashes, those who mourn. He has given us a mantle of praise and renewed our spirits so that we can lift up those around us.

We don’t do any of this in our own strength. Instead, we look to the Lord, the one who makes “righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.”

Where are the places of devastations in your community? Where are the ruins? Are there people in your everyday life who have been living in ashes, waiting to be lifted up and dressed in beautiful garlands instead? How can you, in this last week of Lent and



beyond, follow Christ's example of reaching out to those on the margins and those in darkness? Who needs to hear you proclaim the good news?

*Pray this week* that God would give you an overwhelming understanding of His call and that He would help you see those mourning and oppressed in your community. Ask that the Lord would give you boldness to act in His loving kindness to those who are brokenhearted around you.

