



# **UNITED? WE MOURN:**

A VIDEO LAMENT OF COVID-19 + RACISM

**PRAYER GUIDE**

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**UNITED?**  
we pray

*I will say to the LORD,  
"My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."  
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and  
from the deadly pestilence.*

**Psalm 91:2-3**

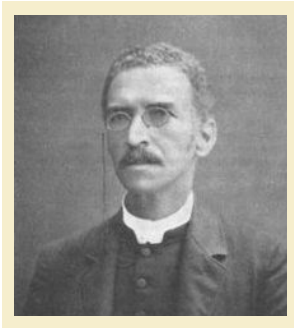
**United? We Pray** is a ministry devoted to praying about racial strife—especially between Christians. We want to encourage Christians amid the strife to rely upon God in prayer. So our prayers can be informed, we strive to learn and write about race, racism and its effects, and theology; we aim to be biblical, beneficial, and clear in all our efforts.

Learn more at [www.uwepray.com](http://www.uwepray.com).

## BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Coronavirus has caused, revealed, and exacerbated many trials and tragedies. It has highlighted what has always been the case: that we are not in control. But it also affords us the opportunity to remember what has also always been the case: *God is in control!* Hallelujah! And so we turn to Him with our complaints, fears, requests, and hopes. In other words, we lament, which is what we pray our video and this guide encourages you to do, especially amid this woeful pandemic. COVID-19 affords us an opportunity to learn and re-learn how to rely upon God in prayer. We are far from the first Christians to do so.

## BACKGROUND OF UNITED? WE MOURN



In December of 1898, Rev. Francis Grimké preached a sermon called “God and Prayer as Factors in the Struggle.” The struggle the reverend referred to was black people’s struggle for equal rights and treatment in a nation that denied them such. The reverend called his oppressed brothers and sisters to set aside a day of prayer and fasting on May 31, to take this struggle to the throne of grace.

But that’s not all Rev. Grimké preached. On Sunday, Nov. 3, 1918, the reverend delivered a discourse to his church in Washington D.C., which had just re-opened after 3-4 weeks of closure given the influenza that struck. In light on the tragic epidemic, Rev. Grimké gave his church eight reflections, grappling with why God would allow this pandemic, to how he humbled racists through it, to churches’ submission to governing authorities. We join in on the prayers of saints echoing throughout the centuries.

### SOME REFLECTIONS GROWING OUT OF THE REGENT EPIDEMIC OF INFLUENZA THAT AFFLICTED OUR CITY.

SAMUEL 24:15-16:

So Jehovah sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even unto the time appointed; and there died of the people from Dan even unto Beer-sheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel stretched forth his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, Jehovah repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough; now stay thy hand.

## LAMENTING COVID-19 + RACISM

No doubt, the pandemic has brought unexpected blessings for many folks. More time with the family. Slower schedules. An opportunity to pause and reflect. And yet, for others, COVID-19 has affected their employment or health. The virus has prevented others from seeing their newborn grandchildren, or attending weddings or funerals. Consider for a moment that some church buildings were closed for the first time in their history this past Easter, not to mention the racism exacerbated in these disrupted days. As Christians, we mourn these things together.

As Scripture says:

*"If one member suffers, all suffer together."* (1 Cor 12:26)

Yet we don't mourn without hope. In his book, *Deep Clouds, Dark Mercy*, Pastor Mark Vroegop, one of the participants in our video, defined lament as "a prayer in pain that leads to trust." And so, friends of United? We Pray have come together to trust our great God, bringing to him a number of issues. You can find these matters and the order of the video, as well as the bios for our participants, below. The video will be pre-recorded so you can access it at any time; please feel free to share it with others. Whether you listen straight through in one sitting, in different chunks, or simply allow it to play in your background, we pray you are helped to trust in God because of this resource. We must do more than pray if we're going to love our neighbors amid this pandemic and fight racism, but we cannot do less. And so, taking racial struggles to the throne of grace, we are,

**The United? We Pray Team**

**UNITED?**  
we pray

## PARTICIPANTS

**James Choi** shares a testimony about the increased racism against Asians amid the pandemic and laments this sin against fellow image-bearers (Genesis 1:27).

**Jeremy McClain** shares a testimony about what it's like to pastor in an under-resourced area hit hard by COVID-19 (Ephesians 6:18).

**Justin Giboney** laments how COVID-19 has disproportionately affected African-American communities (Proverbs 31:9).

**Courtney Reissig** laments the suffering so many people around the world are undergoing in this time, including the contracting of sickness and the loss of loved ones (Psalm 27:13).

**Mark Vroegop** laments the closure of churches for weeks as many begin opening (Psalm 42:4).

**Trillia Newbell** turns to God with thanks, reminding us of his goodness even in this time (Psalm 136:1-3).

**Alicia Akins** intercedes for the particularly vulnerable: the incarcerated, women and children in abusive situations, the elderly (Proverbs 31:8).

**Austin Suter** intercedes for medical professionals, first responders, and health care professionals, thanking God for them and imploring God for a vaccine (Psalm 46:1).

**Duke Kwon** intercedes for governing authorities to have wisdom, that they might be a blessing to the people they lead (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

## PARTICIPANT BIOS



**Isaac Adams** (@isickadams) is the founder of United? We Pray and serves as a pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington D.C. He is the author of *Training: How Do I Grow as a Christian?* and *What if I'm Discouraged in my Evangelism?*



**James Choi** (@jschatology) serves as a pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church and intends to soon plant New Covenant Baptist Church in Montgomery County, MD. He is the husband of our beloved United? We Pray Community Manager, Jeri.



**Jeremy McClain** graduated from Howard University in 2007. Two years after graduating from Howard University, he began to search for ways to serve under-resourced and at-risk communities. He now serves as pastor of Mercy of Christ Fellowship Church in Lincoln Heights, Washington D.C.



**Justin Giboney** (@JustinEGiboney) is the co-founder of the AND Campaign, an organization whose mission is to educate and organize Christians for civic and cultural engagement that results in better representation, more just and compassionate policies and a healthier political culture.



**Courtney Reissig** (@CourtneyReissig) is a wife, mother, writer, and speaker. After doing some graduate study at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, she met her husband Daniel and fell in love. They now make their home in Little Rock, Arkansas where they are the parents of four boys. They are members at Immanuel Baptist Church.

## PARTICIPANT BIOS



**Mark Vroegop** (@MarkVroegop) has been Lead Pastor of College Park Church in Indianapolis since 2008. He is the author of *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*. Mark's next book, *Weep with Me: How Lament Opens a Door for Racial Reconciliation* will release in August 2020.



**Trillia Newbell** (@trillianewbell) is the author of several books and works with Moody Publishers as an acquisitions editor. She graciously co-hosted the United? We Pray podcast for its initial seasons. Her greatest love besides God is her family. She is married to her best friend and love, Thern. They reside with their two children near Nashville, TN.



**Alicia Akins** (@feetcrymercy) is a writer and recovering expat based in DC. She is a student at RTS Washington and serves as a deaconess in her church, Grace DC Downtown. You can find more of her writing at [www.feetcrymercy.com](http://www.feetcrymercy.com).



**Austin Suter** (@amsuter) is the editor of U?WP. He is husband to Michelle and a member at Oakhurst Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC. He is finishing up his M.Div at RTS Charlotte.



**Duke Kwon** (@dukekwndc) serves as the pastor of Grace Meridian Hill. He is the husband of Paula, father of three, a neighbor in Columbia Heights, and a cautiously optimistic fan of the Lakers (hence, his hat in the video!)

## A FINAL NOTE & PRAYER

Thank you, brothers and sisters, for joining with us as we take racial and pandemic struggles to the throne of grace. As churches begin to reopen, and debates rage about the best way for business and economies to flourish, we wanted to close with a parting word:

Don't take the blessings you have for granted.

*"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."* (James 1:17)

The cup of coffee. The friend who encouraged you with a text message. The health you're presently enjoying. That last breath. All gifts from God. And so is your local church. Whether yours is opening back up or still closed, we pray that we would not take the ordinary, beloved church for granted.

As a pastor, Francis Grimké longed that people would see the importance of the local church, having lost the privilege of attending it for a few weeks (and we have lost it longer than people did in Grimké's day!). In his message, the reverend reflected: "I hope now that [the churches] are opened again, we will show our appreciation of their value by attending regularly upon their services."

### **Let's pray one last time.**

*O, Father, our Father, we lament any death, suffering, or sickness caused by this pandemic. We grieve the anxiety and loneliness that may be mounting in these disrupted times. We want to hear the gospel preached in churches, and we want to sing to you with our brothers and sisters. Will pulpits and pews keep on being empty? Will church halls not echo again with your praises?*

*And yet, Father, in your mercy you have not let this virus overcome us completely. You have let scores of people heal from it. You have brought new life in the midst of death, and so we turn to you in trust. We ask that those who don't know Jesus would come to know him. We ask for those who are restless would find rest in Jesus, who is gentle and lowly of heart. O, LORD, thank you for not letting us rest in our bank accounts or portfolios, or our own wisdom or insights. These things may go up and down, and we too, like a flower of the grass will pass away. Yet you care for us more than the grass of the field. And so we come to you in prayer, in the name of our Lord and brother, Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*



*Remember my affliction and my wanderings,  
the wormwood and the gall!  
My soul continually remembers it  
and is bowed down within me.  
But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:  
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,  
"therefore I will hope in him."*

**Lamentations 3:19-24**