

Mission Cincinnati

Weekly Practices for Lent 2023

During the Season of Lent this year, we are inviting our congregation to participate in some simple practices each week based on the lines of the Lord's Prayer. Each week, we'll practice lectio divina with one of the lines of the Lord's Prayer, we'll be given a prompt to ponder, and we'll have a practice to inhabit so we many embody this prayer. Prayers for a blessed Lent, friend!

WEEK OF ASH WEDNESDAY

Lectio: Sometime before the first Sunday in Lent, do lectio divina with the Lord's Prayer. Lectio is a process where we slowdown in our reading of and /or listening to Scripture. We take it all in. We don't study it or analyze it, but meditate on it, going over a short section of it several times so that we can hear the Holy Spirit's voice specifically for us. For this practice, you can either read or listen to the Scripture (Matthew 6:9-13) using one of many audio Bibles you can find online. You can also find a recording of the Lord's Prayer by Rev. Kristen at www.rhythmsoftheway.org/lent.

Here are the steps:

- **First reading:** Just take it all in.
- **Second reading.** Notice if is there a word or phrase that stands out to you.
- **Third reading.** As you ponder the word or phrase that stood out to you, ask yourself: is there a specific word that God has for me? How is this word/phrase touching my life currently?
- **Fourth reading.** Ask yourself: Is there an invitation in the Lord's Prayer that God has for me specifically in this season? Ponder this invitation and discern how to enact it.
- **Rest in the Lord.** Now, just take a few minutes to rest in the Lord's love for you.

WEEK 1: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name."

Lectio: Begin by doing lectio with this one line of the Lord's Prayer.

Ponder this Week: *What does it mean to praise and reverence God?*

Practice: This week, spend some time writing down *aspects of God that are worthy to be praised*. Remember the names used throughout Scripture for God. (Wonderful Counselor, Strong Fortress, I am, Rock, Good Shepherd, etc.) and use these as prompts as you write down your praises. As you write your praises, make sure to make your praises personal; don't just write down abstract truths that you know in your head, but perhaps don't know in your heart.

As an example:

1. Lord, I praise you for being my redeemer. When times got tough 10 years ago, you did not leave me in that difficult place. Instead, you brought me out of it into a new, spacious place with new people, where I was nourished and empowered in my calling. Thank you for saving me.

Collect all these praises into a journal entry, a poem, a song, or some creative work. Speak these praises out loud to God.

WEEK 2: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Lectio: Begin by doing lectio with this one line of the Lord’s Prayer.

Ponder this Week: *Imagine a world where everyone’s will (including your own) was surrendered to God, and His perfect will of peace, reconciliation, harmony, flourishing, and love was done on the earth.*

Practice: Take some time this week to pray for the world – for all areas where God’s will is not being lived out and experienced. Pray for all those afflicted by poverty, injustice, hunger, war, broken relationships, prejudice, violence, corrupt systems, sickness, and more. To make sure you pray specifically and concretely this week, spend some substantial time with news sources (whether in paper form or online) and pray about the situations named in the news. Also pray about ways that God may be inviting you to respond in your own spheres of influence to bring light and life into these situations.

WEEK 3: “Give us this day, our daily bread.”

Lectio: Begin by doing lectio with this one line of the Lord’s Prayer.

Ponder this Week: *How does God show his love for you?*

This week, we ask for our daily bread – the daily needs that we and our loved ones have. We can ask for these needs unreservedly and with boldness because God loves us and delights for his children to bring their requests to Him. He is our good Father who loves us more deeply, purely, and wholistically than any earthly parent ever could. He sees us, knows us, understands our deepest needs (even when we don’t), and desires our good. So, we ask.

Practice: This week, as you bring your needs and desires to your heavenly Father in prayer, ponder His love for you. Recall the times He has provided for you over your lifetime. Also, practice gratitude this week for the good things your Heavenly Daddy will provide. At the end of each day, reflect on God’s big and little gifts throughout the day, write them down, and put them together in a bowl. On Saturday, empty your bowl, read your thanksgivings, and praise the Lord for His goodness to you this week.

WEEK 4: “Forgive us our trespasses as we have forgiven those who trespass against us”

Lectio: Begin by doing lectio with this one line of the Lord’s Prayer.

Ponder this Week: *Are there places in your life where you need forgiveness? Are there people you need to forgive?*

Practice: This week, ponder ways that you need to be forgiven and think about people you need to forgive. Spend some time in prayer, discerning with God what concrete steps you need to take in order to seek or grant that forgiveness, whether that is asking God for forgiveness, writing a letter, making a phone call, or going to a person directly to ask or give forgiveness. If possible, start taking some of those steps this week. *(Note: In cases where you have experienced deep wounding and relational breakdown and you are the one who needs to forgive someone, remember that forgiveness is a gift from God and a process that takes time. Ask God for forgiveness to grow in your heart and be patient with the process. Also, remember that forgiveness does not mean forgetting or automatic healing and reconciliation, but instead means not holding onto resentment, anger, or need for vengeance. It means releasing the people who have offended you to God so that they are no longer bound to you and so that you can be freed from the burden and control that unforgiveness has placed upon your heart.)*

WEEK 5: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Lectio: Begin by doing lectio with this one line of the Lord’s Prayer.

Ponder this Week: *What are the areas in your heart and your life where you are tempted to act in ways opposed to God’s good ways for your?*

Practice: This week, we ask with the Psalmist, “*Search me O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*” (Psalm 139:23-24). This week, we ask God to both **test us** – to show us anything in our hearts that needs revealing and to **protect us** – to keep us away from harmful situations and temptations, situations where we will fall into sin because of distorted desires and attitudes in our hearts (whether known to us or unknown). To do this, we’ll practice *The Prayer of Examen* this week.

These are the steps.

1. Find a comfortable place to sit. Become Aware of God’s Presence. Thank him for His love.
2. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s grace and insight so that you may see and understand God’s involvement in your life and you may see your life clearly.
3. Now, review your life thus far in 2023 (or you can go further back if prompted by God). Recall any and all specific moments this year where you have been tempted to act in ways that did not show love to God or neighbor. Did you give in to those temptations? What were your feelings and responses at the time?
4. Now, focus your attention on any moments that particularly stand out to you. Take those moments and reflect more deeply on what you did, said, or thought. What were your desires in the moment? Your motivations? In these moments, how would you characterize your relationship with God?
5. Respond to what God has shown you, with confession and with thanks for His love and forgiveness. Rest in God’s love for you and ask him to show you how you may better love God and neighbor in the coming days. Ask for his grace and power to do so.

Turn the page over for the last two weeks of practice.

HOLY WEEK: “For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.”

(Though this line is not in the Scriptures, it has been a part of the liturgical praying of this prayer for centuries.)

Ponder this Week: *Jesus was exalted after becoming human and dying on a cross for our sins. What does it look like for us to humble ourselves like Jesus?*

This week is Holy Week, a week where we remember Jesus’s days leading up to his crucifixion, and we enter into the pain of crucifixion. This last line of the Lord’s Prayer, however, reminds us that victory is around the corner. Jesus will be raised from the dead, proving once and for all that He is indeed King and He will reign in power and glory forever and ever. This is great news, but we don’t want to jump to the Resurrection quite yet. We believe that our feasting will be so much sweeter after we have spent this week pondering the sufferings of our Lord. So, let’s spend this week pondering a Scripture that brings the reality of Holy Week and this last line of the Lord’s prayer together. Ask yourself: what does it personally mean for you to have the mind of Christ, to humble yourself, and to enter into his sufferings?

Practice: For Holy Week, do lectio divina with Philippians 2: 6-11. Also do some imaginative prayer, imagining yourself at the foot of the cross. What do you see and hear? What do you experience? How do you feel? What does it look like to humble yourself like Jesus? Have a conversation with the Lord.

Philippians 2: 6-11

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.

EASTER: Repeat - “For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.”

Practice: This week, use this line of Scripture as a *breath prayer*, saying it in your mind (or out loud if you wish) as you work, walk, play, eat, and rest. Breath prayer is a way to “pray without ceasing”, to center our attention and give us peace, and slowly form us.

Also do something this week to celebrate the good news that Jesus is Lord, that His Kingdom has broken into this world, and that He will reign forever and ever. Do this by planning something fun, whether that is a picnic, a dinner, a walk near the river, a party, a hike, or whatever brings you joy.

For more Lenten devotionals, practices, and activities, go to www.rhythmsoftheway.org/lent