



CONSIDER



re-centering our lives in Christ

Four weeks of
Considering
the Christ

Consider the Christ Devotional Guide: *Re-Centering our Lives*

❖ *Why this special focus?*

Just as Advent is a time to remember, anticipate and celebrate the incarnation of Christ, this time of year (known as *Lent*) gives us the opportunity to re-center our lives by recalling the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Lent is hard, and it can be frustrating to lose our focus and surrender to our weaknesses time and time again. In our context, it is easy to get lost in the cultural expectations of Easter and miss the meaning. That is why so many of the saints before us encouraged stillness and reflection as a sure way to place ourselves in God's presence and grow with him. Through times of meditation, we take our eyes off ourselves and fix them on the Christ. As we practice these ancient spiritual disciplines, we adequately prepare our minds and hearts for the gift of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Instead of arriving distracted and exhausted on Easter Sunday, we walk joyfully into church ready and eager to adore our resurrected King.

❖ *How do I use this devotional guide?*

This guide will help you rest with God. Each week includes a Scripture reading that will compliment Micah's message, as well as a framework for reflecting on the main theme for the week (*remembering, throwing off, perseverance and centering*).

Each week, you will read the provided passages and also consider journaling, discussing, praying through and living out the truths of each passage. This guide is not meant to only be utilized on Sundays, but daily as an encouragement to pursue rest with God.

❖ *How do I get started on theological reflection and journaling?*

As you read, discuss and pray through the selected scriptures, hopefully many questions will begin to emerge in your mind and heart. However, as a starting point, consider using these general questions:

1. What do these passages of Scripture reveal about the nature and character of God?
2. What do these passages reveal about your own spiritual condition – your heart, mind and soul?
3. What do these passages reveal about the necessity of fellowship and community? What about the nature of the kingdom of God?
4. How should you respond to these revelations? What actions are you called to take to better align yourself with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?

❖ *What about my children and/or teenagers?*

Inside the guide, families with elementary aged kids will find the *CHILDREN'S CORNER* for each new week. A set of ***Resurrection Eggs*** will be used to accompany this guide for children ages 6th grade and younger. **Please pick up 1 egg carton per family at the Ministry Table in the Gathering Room.** This section includes an age appropriate scripture focus, reflection questions, prayers, and activities. This will serve to help engage your children in the discussion throughout the week. **Note:** 12 eggs are included in the Resurrection Egg carton. We will open 3 eggs per week as directed in the guide. We encourage families with teens to treat them as adults as you include them in your weekly readings and discussions.

❖ *What is the goal of the Consider the Christ Guide?*

The goal is that you will engage in some God-focused rhythms like scripture reading, reflection, prayer, journaling and gospel-oriented action to prepare your whole self for being a dwelling place for the Resurrected Redeemer, Jesus the Son of the Living God.

Week 1 (March 15-21): Remember - *consider those who have gone before us*

Weekly Focus: As we begin our journey toward Jesus' death and resurrection, it is significant for us *to remember*. It is important for us to remember the faithful witnesses who have gone before us and set a healthy faith example. Above all, it is imperative to remember and celebrate our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has gone before us. Jesus knew this would be important, so he left a way for us to do just that. Remember.

Weekly Text: Hebrews 12:1a; Luke 22:7-32 (*emphasis on v. 19*)

Supplemental Passages: Psalm 77:11-12; 2 Timothy 2:8; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25

For Practice: **take one minute each day this week** to sit still and repeat Luke 22:19 as a breath prayer. As you inhale, silently pray in your mind, "This is my body given for you..." Then as you exhale, pray slowly, "...do this in remembrance of me."

For Reflection: In Luke 22:8 the day of Unleavened Bread (the day on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed) had arrived. Jesus gave them precise directives, which they found exactly as Jesus had said. By verse 15 Jesus states clearly, "I have earnestly desired to eat *THIS* Passover with you before I suffer." This is a clear distinction from the previous Passover meals Jesus had shared with his disciples. It was *THIS* Passover meal that would culminate in his death. Jesus would become the ultimate Passover lamb. We see foreshadowing in verse 18 where Jesus says, "I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes." Jesus knew that by this time Judas had already betrayed him and the events of his death had been put in motion.

What is also interesting is that after Jesus finished pouring out his heart about his suffering and his betrayal by one of his own, his disciples immediately begin arguing about who the greatest is. Jesus again delivers an allegory about who is greater, the servant or the one sitting at the table—Jesus was both sitting at the table and serving. This passage ends with Jesus telling Peter that Satan has demanded they (disciples) be sifted (tested), but Jesus tells Peter that he (Jesus) has prayed specifically for him (Peter).

Lent is our season of anticipating the LORD's death and resurrection. The lessons Jesus gave his disciples remain relevant to us today. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper so that we can remember his broken body and shed blood. Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice that redeems us to this very day. We must always be cognizant of our heart's desires so that we don't fall into the temptations of the world and end up in positions like Judas. Lastly, we, his disciples, will be sifted like wheat. We will be tested. We expect hardship and it is ok because Jesus, the High Priest, King of Kings is praying for you, me, and all our brothers and sisters. Remember, Jesus has our back.

Weekly Prayer: LORD, thank you for loving us as much as you do. Strengthen us, LORD, so that we cannot only withstand the sifting but conquer it with absolute faith in YOU. Keep us ever mindful, LORD, of our responsibility to one another. And finally, LORD, help us to remember you and seek your face every day so that we can find rest and peace. In the name of your most precious son, Jesus. Amen.

CHILDREN'S CORNER – week 1

We will open Resurrection Eggs 1, 2, and 3 this week. Feel free to space these out as it makes sense in your family schedule.

EGG 1 = Palm Branch

Scripture focus = Matthew 21:9

EGG 2 = Silver Coins

Scripture focus = Matthew 26:14-15

EGG 3 = Last Supper

Scripture focus = Matthew 26:26-28

Reflection:

*Tell about a favorite memory.

*Talk about what communion represents and how/what it helps us remember.

Weekly Prayer:

Lord, help me remember that Your love is great and that it doesn't ever go away. Thank you for the practice of communion to help us remember Your great love.

PRAYER JOURNAL

God, I love you because.....

Today, I need forgiveness for.....

I want to pray for.....

Lord, please help me.....

Thank you for.....

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activities:

- Scripture reading with each egg – feel free to expand the discussion of those scriptures or read surrounding scriptures as you feel led with your family.
- Engage in prayer with your children regardless of age throughout the week as you discuss the contents of each egg & scriptures. Depending on their age, consider using the reflection topics and prayer journal section to help guide your discussion and prayer times throughout the week.
- COMMUNION @ HOME
 - Sometime this week, consider taking communion together as a family at home.
 - Have children assist in the set-up and the choosing of supplies for the sacraments (bread/cracker/juice/other – sometimes kids are very creative in coming up with alternative forms of symbols – have them explain why they suggest what they do)
Ex: one time a kid suggested using Hawaiian rolls as the communion bread – when asked why, he stated “because it reminds me of when it says ‘come and taste and see that the Lord is good.’” – Hawaiian rolls it was that day!
 - Have children assist in reading scripture, saying the prayer, or giving other thoughts / asking questions about this time.

Week 2 (March 22-28): Throw Off - *consider the things that weigh us down*

Weekly Focus: As we seek to re-center our lives with our Triune God, it is significant to throw off everything that would hinder us from that pursuit. Temptation comes to us from every angle. Satan's schemes are meant to entangle us in the ways of evil, and they often go undetected. Often times, we do not see the chaos. The first thing that tends to happen is we *feel* the weight of the temptation or sin that has entrapped us. It is time to throw it off and re-center our energies on our Risen Savior.

Weekly Text: Hebrews 12:1

Supplemental Passages: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

For Practice: ***take two minutes each day this week*** to sit still and rest with Psalm 139:23-24 as a prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

For Reflection: The fans of the professional soccer team in Liverpool, England often sing the following words: "You'll never walk alone." This song has become a mantra to the team through good times and bad. The words "you'll never walk alone" remind us of God's faithfulness to us. It also reminds us that the Christian life is to be lived in fellowship with others.

1 Corinthians 10:13 strikes a chord that rings out through all of Scripture: God is faithful to his people always. Perhaps this is why Paul begins the chapter by recounting Israel's ancient history in the Exodus narrative. God's people were led out of oppression in Egypt. Through this exit, they had to trounce across wilderness and even through a sea. And yet, God was faithful to his people. Paul notes in chapter 10 that God provided clouds to guide them day and night, provided safe passage through the sea, nourished them with bread from heaven, and gave them the water they needed. Certainly, God is faithful!

Paul admonishes the Corinthians to crave no evil. He instructs them to not commit idolatry, immorality, not to try the Lord, or grumble against him like Israel did in the wilderness. It may be easy at first glance to read these as a list of "do's" and "do not's," but at the core of this letter is a heartfelt plea to *trust God*. After all, what is idolatry other than a want for control of a pocket-sized god? Likewise, what is immorality other than a want of pleasure that stems from a lack of trust in God?

Just before the promises of verse 13 comes a warning in verse 12: "Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (NASB). Remember, you are not too big to fail. However, at the same time remember that God is too faithful to fail you. Then comes the gripping assurance of verse 13. Paul empowers the readers with the confidence that they do not walk alone because temptation is a universal struggle for people. After all, even Jesus Christ, our solid Rock, was tempted by Satan for a time. And Christ endured and overcame temptation so that you could overcome it as well. God is the cloud leading you through confusing circumstances. God is your deliverance through a raging sea. God is your strength when you are ready to lay down all things that hinder you. *Trust him.*

We serve a faithful God. God will make a way for you to endure whatever is weighing you down. It may not be comfortable to throw it all off, but thanks be to God that you never walk alone.

Weekly Prayer:

Oh God, give me the peace I need to accept the things I cannot change. Help me to love people instead of fix them...especially those that are my enemies...my irritants. God, give me faithful courage to change the things that are in my control. Help me, God, to throw off every weight, every sin, that keeps me from your likeness. And, God, give me wisdom to know the difference between the ways of evil and the ways of the kingdom. Lord, I commit my life to you so that you can use me for your glory. Amen.

Hebrews 12:1

"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles..."

CHILDREN'S CORNER – week 2

We will open Resurrection Eggs 4, 5, and 6 this week. Feel free to space these out as it makes sense in your family schedule.

EGG 4 = Praying Hands

Scripture focus = Matthew 26:39

EGG 5 = Whip

Scripture focus = Mark 15:15

EGG 6 = Crown of Thorns

Scripture focus = Matthew 27:29

Reflection:

*How's your heart today?

(Help guide your children in talking about anything that is heavy on their heart – whether that is a hurt, a sin, or a weight. Discuss the difference between a hurt, a weight, and a sin. Consider talking about how our heart heals with bringing hurts, sins, or weights to the light and talking about them to God and with someone we trust.)

Weekly Prayer:

Lord, thank you for loving us so much that You came to earth, lived here, and then chose to walk the path of the cross for us. Thank you for Your overwhelming love and for Your mercy and forgiveness. Help me to have courage to bring anything that's heavy on my heart to You for healing and forgiveness.

PRAYER JOURNAL

*God, I love you because...*_____

*Today, I need forgiveness for...*_____

*I want to pray for...*_____

*Lord, please help me...*_____

*Thank you for...*_____

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activities:

- Scripture reading with each egg – feel free to expand the discussion of those scriptures or read surrounding scriptures as you feel led with your family.
- Engage in prayer with your children regardless of age throughout the week as you discuss the contents of each egg & scriptures. Depending on their age, consider using the reflection questions and prayer journal section to help guide your discussion and prayer times throughout the week.
- Sometime this week, have your children join you in being still together.
 - Posture yourself with your children in either a kneeling position or laying on your stomach with palms facing down as a sign of reverence and surrender. Help them say aloud some of the things that may have come up in your discussions about hurts, sins, or weights this week, explaining that the posture of their body can be a reflection of the posture of their heart as they lay these heavy things down at Jesus' feet. Remind them that they are deeply loved – always – not just by you, but by God.

Week 3 (March 29-April 4): Perseverance - consider our race with God

Weekly Focus: After throwing off every weight and sin that hinders us from our pursuit of God, it is now time to run our race with God. But perseverance will be required of us along the journey. With gratitude in our hearts, we proclaim that we are not alone. Holy Spirit is our constant God presence and Christ's church is full of witnesses that declare the praises of the Risen Savior. So, we persevere and overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.

Weekly Text: Hebrews 12:1

Supplemental Passages: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Revelation 12:11; Philippians 3:2-12

For Practice: ***take three minutes each day this week*** to sit still and repeat Philippians 3:12 as a breath prayer. As you inhale, pray silently, "I press on to gain everything..." Then as you exhale, pray slowly, "Jesus has in store for me."

For Reflection: Nothing compares to knowing Jesus. There is nothing better than being found in his presence. Though we are pulled and pressed from every direction, we hear the voice of our Lord say as we get off course, "Come back and follow me."

Jesus whispers, "Take my hand and trust me," as he reaches out to rescue us with fresh mercies for today. And we often respond with things like, "But what about..." "But first, I just need to..." When we respond to God's invitation like this, we have fallen for the lie that life is measured by our accomplishments (or lack thereof).

As the Holy Spirit carries us away from this lie, we are reminded there is nothing more worthy of my time than being with our Savior. Jesus is the source of life. He is the only one who can fill us to overflowing with love. We are created to freely pour out love upon those around us today. Christ is the well that never runs dry. He calls us to faith. He invites us to trust him.

Though we may feel that we do not have the strength to face what today brings, Jesus whispers, "I will be with you always." Yes, this is the promise that brings our soul to life each morning and allows us to endure. How quickly we forget. As our Risen Savior clothes us with his presence, he knows our wandering hearts and whispers, "Do not worry about tomorrow. Come, follow me. Keep in step with my Spirit. I will be with you always."

As we persevere through each day...as we press on...we find strength through our intimate relationship with Jesus. All the things of this world fade away at the glory of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.

Weekly Prayer: "Lord, I am sorry for placing the demands and worries of this life above you. Thank you for rescuing me today. When I awake each morning, please remind me that nothing compares to the infinite worth of knowing you. All the days of my life, I ask that you gather me to be with you. I want nothing more than to live this life hand-in-hand with my Risen Savior. Thank you for the strength you provide to persevere. I know there is nothing that can overtake me as long as you are with me."

CHILDREN'S CORNER – week 3

We will open Resurrection Eggs 7, 8, and 9 this week. Feel free to space these out as it makes sense in your family schedule.

EGG 7 = Nails

Scripture focus = Matthew 27:31

EGG 8 = Dice

Scripture focus = Matthew 27:35

EGG 9 = Spear

Scripture focus = John 19:33-34

Reflection:

*Name 1 or 2 people that you trust. Why do you trust them?

*Name 1 or 2 people that help encourage you to trust God. How do they show you or teach you to learn to trust God?

Weekly Prayer:

Lord, help me to focus on Your love and Your goodness. Please help me learn how to come to You when I'm discouraged, upset, scared, or tired, or when I've hurt someone and need help apologizing. Help me to trust You to forgive me, to give me hope and strength, and to remember that You are always with me.

PRAYER JOURNAL

God, I love you because.....

Today, I need forgiveness for.....

I want to pray for.....

Lord, please help me.....

Thank you for.....

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activities:

- Scripture reading with each egg – feel free to expand the discussion of those scriptures or read surrounding scriptures as you feel led with your family.
- Engage in prayer with your children regardless of age throughout the week as you discuss the contents of each egg & scriptures. Depending on their age, consider using the reflection questions and prayer journal section to help guide your discussion and prayer times throughout the week.
- TRUST GAMES
 - Trust Fall – have child fall backward into arms of mom or dad without stepping back to catch themselves – they have to trust you to fully catch them.
 - Blindfold Maze – blindfold 1 family member and have them follow verbal instructions of another family member to maneuver through the house – you can increase the difficulty with various obstacles or crazy paths.
 - Have fun & laugh with your kids!

Week 4 (April 5-11): Centered: consider the Christ and fix our eyes on him

Weekly Focus: As we have found inspiration from witnesses that have gone before us, we now find our ultimate motivation from the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. As we have thrown away the things that have weighed us down and kept us from pursuing God, we now fix our eyes on Jesus. We set our sights on Christ, just like a successful runner does on their finish line. We consider the Christ, who endured much opposition, so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.

Weekly Text: Hebrews 12:2-3

Supplemental Passages: 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

For Practice: **take five minutes each day this week** to sit still and repeat Hebrews 12:3 as a breath prayer. As you inhale, pray silently, "I consider all you endured Jesus..." Then as you exhale, pray slowly, "so that I will not grow weary and lose heart."

For Reflection: It can be easy for us to grow weary and lose heart. If our attention is captured by the list of burdens experienced by fellow brothers and sisters in our church family – not to mention the global community – we can quickly become overwhelmed. Concerns such as cancer, depression, loneliness, broken relationships, grief and addiction only begin to describe the prayer needs. In fact, the temptation is to be overcome by the weight of these difficulties and, consequently, to think and live as if there is no alternative.

We begin to believe that we are broken people without hope. After all, suffering is difficult and often times feels like it is never going to end. However, let us not forget that we serve a God who went before us and has conquered death and all other evil. Death and evil are not yet destroyed, but they have been defeated.

God's movements are seen if our eyes are fixed on him. A once divided marriage has been reconciled. A woman has been designated cancer-free. A former drug addict has found life and freedom in Christ. In all of this lies an important reminder that our mortal bodies are wasting away. Some days, even perhaps many days, we truly feel it. We are broken people, but that is not all we are. At the same time that we feel these afflictions, Jesus is restoring our spirit, our inner person, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit has been given to us as a pledge of God's faithfulness and things to come. That which has been started will be completed so that in the end, God will be glorified in all things.

We do live in a tension in this time between the times. Jesus has come and brought the hope of resurrection. Jesus will come again and bring this hope in its fullness as he puts an end to Sin and Death for good. So, take heart, my brothers and sisters! Our Risen King is coming! So, fix your eyes on him and be encouraged!

2020 Easter Prayer:

Gather Me to Be with You
Ted Loder in Guerillas of Grace

O God, gather me now to be with you as you are with me.

Soothe my tiredness,
 Quiet my fretfulness,
 Curb my aimlessness,
 Relieve my compulsiveness.

Let me be easy for just a moment.

O God, gather me to be with you as you are with me.
 Keep me in touch with myself,
 With my needs,
 My anxieties,
 My angers,
 My pains,
 My griefs,
 My corruptions,
That I may claim them as my own rather than blame them on someone else.

O God, gather me to be with you as you are with me.

O Lord, deepen my wounds into wisdom.

Shape my weaknesses into compassion.

Gentle my envy into enjoyment, my fear into trust, my guilt into honesty, my accusing fingers into tickling ones.

O God, gather me now to be with you as you are with me.

CHILDREN'S CORNER – week 4

EGG 10 = Linen

Scripture focus = Matthew 27:65-66

EGG 11 = Stone

Scripture focus = Matthew 27:59-60

EGG 12 = Empty Tomb

Scripture focus = Matthew 28:5

Reflection:

*What are some ways you see or hear God or are reminded about special moments you've had with God? Encourage all family members to share examples. (ex: in nature, in scripture, when sharing a meal, within encouraging notes, when you look at a special rock or wear a piece of jewelry)

*What are some ways you worship God?

Weekly Prayer:

Lord, please help us when we doubt Your love and goodness. Sometimes it's hard to remember and to believe and to hope and to understand. Help us to have eyes to see You and ears to hear Your voice. Help us to remember truth when we forget. You defeated death and You give us life! We praise Your holy name, forever and ever, and we rejoice that the tomb is empty!

PRAYER JOURNAL

God, I love you because.....

Today, I need forgiveness for.....

I want to pray for.....

Lord, please help me.....

Thank you for.....

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activities:

- Scripture reading with each egg – feel free to expand the discussion of those scriptures or read surrounding scriptures as you feel led with your family.
- Engage in prayer with your children regardless of age throughout the week as you discuss the contents of each egg & scriptures. Depending on their age, consider using the reflection questions and prayer journal section to help guide your discussion and prayer times throughout the week.
- As we learn and talk about different ways to fix our eyes on Jesus this week, let's engage in some form of worship together as a family.
 - A few ideas = **dance** to a favorite song together – make up motions if you want to!; **say** different names of God out loud together as you **jump** as high as you can or while laying as **still** as possible or while **bouncing/throwing a ball** to each other; **sing** a song together; take a **walk** outside together and talk about what you **see, feel, hear, and smell**; **draw** a picture of how you imagine the glory of God with sidewalk chalk or on paper.