



EXCHANGE GUIDE

pursuing new life in Christ

Four weeks of
pursuing new life
in Christ

Exchange Guide: *four weeks of pursuing new life in Christ*

❖ *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. In our context, it is easy to get lost in the cultural expectations of Easter and miss the meaning. By focusing on some of the helpful themes of Lent (repentance, fasting, moderation, self-denial, etc.) we can adequately prepare our minds and hearts for the gift of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

❖ *How do I use the Exchange Guide?*

This guide will walk you through the month of March as you pursue new life in Jesus. Each week includes a reading from the life of Christ in the Gospel of John (corresponding with Micah's message), as well as four supplemental passages to consider throughout the week and prayers to center your mind on the way of Christ. Additionally, there is an encouraged exchange (fast/abstaining) that coincides with each week. The challenge is to exchange time-consuming habits (food, media, comfort/convenience, sleep) for better practices (ancient spiritual disciplines) in order to pursue life in Christ.

Each Sunday, you will read the provided passages from the ministry of Jesus 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 the way of Jesus.

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

Many of us struggle to get started when it comes to writing our thoughts on paper. 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 Jesus?
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 EXCHANGE CORNER* for each new week. This section includes an age appropriate scripture focus, reflection questions, prayers, exchanges, and activities. This will serve to help engage your children in the discussion throughout the week. We encourage families with teens to treat them as adults as you include them in your weekly exchanges, readings, and discussions.

Exchange Guide Activity for Children:

In order to help our children tangibly connect with the prayers and reflections each week, consider having each child create/decorate two cups. One cup will be labeled *GIVE UP* and the other *FILL UP*. As the children make their “exchanges” each week, encourage them to write or draw what they are “giving up” and what they are doing instead to “fill up” their cups (their hearts and souls) and place these in the corresponding cups. Keeping them visible will help remind and encourage the whole family.

❖ *What is the goal of the Exchange Guide?*

The goal is that you will engage in the practice of exchanging self-focused habits for God-focused rhythms like reading, praying, reflection and gospel-oriented actions as we head toward Easter and beyond.

Week 1 (March 4-10): **Becoming Less: *dying to self***

Weekly Exchange: Food (*The hope is that instead of eating during your selected times, continue to read, reflect and pray through the passages and prayers provided. Spend your regular eating times to connect with the Lord and ask him to be greater in your life.*) You might choose to fast from one meal a day; others will do an entire day; others still might choose a fast of multiple days. Whatever you choose, do it with the purpose of drawing near to the Lord.

Weekly Text: John 3:1-30

Supplemental Passages: Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:5-17; Philippians 2:1-4; Romans 15:5-13

For Reflection:

Becoming less has far more to do with what God wants to do in us than with our trying to “reach” or “realize” lessness. This truth eliminates anxiety and concern as to the success or non-success of our journey, for we can be quite certain that, if we want to become less and increase God in our lives, God is always successful and that is what matters...What we think of as our search for God is, in reality, a response to the divine Lover drawing us to himself. There is *never a moment when divine Love is not at work...*This work is nothing other than a giving of the divine Self in love. The logical consequence for us must surely be that our part *is to let ourselves be loved, let ourselves be given to, let ourselves be worked upon by this great God and made capable of total union with Him.*

—Ruth Burrows, *Essence of Prayer*

Weekly Prayer

Artist of souls,
you sculpted a people for yourself
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer, fasting and simplicity,
that the discipline of these thirty days
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship,
and deepen our thirst for the living water you offer
through Jesus Christ.

God of the covenant,
in the glory of the cross
your Son embraced the power of death
and broke its hold over humanity.
In this time of repentance and reflection,
draw all people to yourself,
that we who confess Jesus as Lord
may put aside the deeds of death
and accept the life of your kingdom. Amen.

CHILDREN'S EXCHANGE CORNER – week 1

Scripture Focus: John 3:16

Reflection Questions:

What makes me feel close to God?

What are 3 things that you are thankful for from God our Provider?

Weekly Prayer:

Lord, help me to focus on Your love and Your goodness. Please help me remember the things I am thankful for when I want to choose my favorite snack or drink. Help me to remember that You will give me everything I need and that I can trust you.

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.

Weekly Exchange:

Fasting from food for an entire day is most often not recommended for children due to the nutritional needs of their growing bodies and a difficulty in connecting meaningful application to where they are in their journey. However, older children (Suggestion of 5th/6th grade and older) may be able to participate with your family if you choose to fast from food for one meal a day.

Other modifications to consider to include your children in a fast from food might be:

- Fasting from 1 or more snacks
- Fasting from certain foods or drinks (i.e. juice or soda – water only instead; avoiding sweets or dessert)
- Fasting from fast food

Activities:

- Read / discuss one of the recommended scriptures and/or pray with your children during what would normally be snack time or dessert time.
- Complete the cup activity outlined above.
- Read "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle –
 - The story of "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" reminds us of the story of Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a very religious man and was a leader of the Pharisees. He spent a lot of time studying the Scriptures, but there was still much that he didn't understand. Nicodemus came to Jesus late one night, because he was hungry. No, he wasn't looking for a late-night snack, he was hungry for spiritual food. He was hungry for the truth about the kingdom of God.
 - Think about the story of "The Very Hungry Caterpillar?" When he came out of his cocoon, he wasn't an improved caterpillar, was he? No, he was a totally new creation. A butterfly! That's the way it is when we let Jesus come into our heart. He doesn't just make us a better person. He makes us a new creation!
 - Consider having your kids create a drawing or other craft (many examples available online) of a butterfly to help us remember that we are a new creation in Christ Jesus!

Week 2 (March 11-17): **Becoming Dependent:** *moving to humility*

Weekly Exchange: Things of comfort & convenience (*The hope is that you identify people, places and things in your life that provide a sense of comfortability in your life and give those up for the week in order to connect with God and foster relationships in your life that matter. Helpful hint: these are things you may use to cope, numb or escape pain or frustration.*) For example, you may turn to sweets or Starbucks to ease the pain of a long night or day. You may find great comfort in treating yourself to a trip to the spa or beauty salon, the golf course or your favorite restaurant. Some may even turn to alcohol or drugs, instead of to the Lord to find peace. Instead of turning to your regular people, places and things for comfort, this week explore the idea of turning to God, who is the bread of life.

Weekly Text: John 6:25-69

Supplemental Passages: James 4:1-10; 1 Peter 5:5-8; Matthew 5:3-12; Philippians 2:1-11

For Reflection:

Think about the way that Jesus looked at people: as he glanced at Peter after his denial, as he penetrated the heart of the rich young man and the hearts of the disciples.

What would it take for you to have his eyes so that your look has a kingdom impact on those with whom you come into contact?

Remember John the Baptist's first meeting with Jesus? What about the amazement of all those who saw his miracles and other wonders? How he impressed the disciples, the mob in the Garden of Olives, Pilate and his wife and the centurion at the foot of the cross. . . .

Wouldn't you like to hear and be impressed by his manner of speaking, listening, for example, to his discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum or the Sermon on the Mount where his audience felt and experienced him as one that "taught as one who has authority."

Lean into his humble, and yet impactful, look, tone and actions.

[Thoughts inspired by *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits*, edited by Michael Harter]

Weekly Prayer

Faithful God of love,
you blessed us with your servant Son
so that we might know how to serve your people
with justice and with mercy.
We gather the needs of ourselves and others,
and offer them to you in faith and love,
seeking to be strengthened to meet them.

Shape us and transform us by your grace,
that we may grow in wisdom and in humility,

never faltering until we have done all that you desire to bring your realm of peace to fulfillment.

Holy One, creator of the stars and seas,
your steadfast love is shown to every living thing;
your word calls forth countless worlds and souls;
your law revives and refreshes.
Forgive our misuse of your gifts,
that we may be transformed by your wisdom
to manifest for others the mercy of our crucified and risen Lord. Amen.

CHILDREN'S EXCHANGE CORNER – week 2

Scripture Focus: John 6:68-69

Reflection Questions:

What is something that makes you feel worried or upset?
How can you talk to God about those things?
Where do you see God in the world around us?

Weekly Exchange:

Consider helping your children choose time this week in which they might normally play video games, play with friends, talk on the phone, or watch their favorite show and instead, spend that time outside in God's creation as a family on a walk or at the park talking about some of the prayers, questions, or scriptures in this guide. Or simply spend some time recognizing and talking about how you see God in the world around us (in nature, in people, etc.).

Weekly Prayer:

Lord, help me to focus on Your love and Your goodness. Please help me to trust You when I feel worried or upset. Help me to remember that You will give me everything I need and that You will never leave 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:

- Read / discuss one of the recommended scriptures and/or pray with your children during what would normally be a time of play or TV time.
- Complete the cup activity outlined above.
- Play a trust game with your kids. Describe ways that you as a parent trust God.
 - TRUST FALL: One partner stands behind the other and catches their partner as he/she falls back into their arms without taking a step.
 - TRUST WALK: Blindfold your child and lead them around an obstacle course in your home or yard and then switch and let them lead you.

Week 3 (March 18-24): **Becoming Aware: confessing and turning from**

Weekly Exchange: Social Media, Devices and Idle Talk (*The hope is that you lay down your devices, unplug from the background noise of social media chatter and use that time for communion with God, self-reflection and intimate community.*) This week turn off Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, any other social media site not mentioned here, digital games, television and radio. Instead, spend that time in stillness to self-reflect and see if the Lord will reveal areas of your life where confession and repentance are needed. Spend that time with friends and family discussing the passages below. If confession is needed, spend some time being accountable with someone you trust. If you identify an area that requires repentance, spend some time seeking forgiveness or granting it.

Weekly Text: John 8:1-11

Supplemental Passages: Matthew 5:21-26; Matthew 7:1-12; James 5:16; Galatians 5:16-26

For Reflection:

Remember that we do this heavy lifting of confession and repentance in the context of having experienced ourselves as sinners who are loved. God seeks to free us from everything that gets in the way of loving ourselves, others, and God. The focus is not simply naming our sins, which can itself become a form of self-preoccupation. Instead, we focus on who God is and who we are before God. With this posture, we discover the source of our liberation: the endless mercy of Jesus. We begin to see how sin has distorted our relationships. Recognizing how generous and faithful God is, we become dissatisfied with our meager, self-directed responses. We naturally want to reorder our values and make tangible changes with the help of God in order to become more like Jesus. We do this not out of duty or obligation, but out of love for Jesus our Redeemer, Lord and Friend.

Weekly Prayer

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me. Thank You, Jesus. Amen.

CHILDREN'S EXCHANGE CORNER – week 3

Scripture Focus: Galatians 5:22-23

Reflection Questions:

What do you think God says or thinks when He sees you?

Do you believe that God loves you? Do you believe that God likes you?

Weekly Exchange:

Pray about ways your family can “unplug” this week from your various devices, gaming systems, computers, etc. and consider alternative activities / discussions to engage in as a family (i.e. crafts, outside time, cooking together, going for a walk, etc.). During these times, perhaps prompt discussions surrounding forgiveness – including:

- Do I need to forgive someone who has hurt me? How do I do that?
- Do I need to ask for forgiveness from someone I may have hurt? How do I do that?

Sometimes in my home, we do “scenarios” where we set up a hypothetical situation, and we talk through how to navigate that and how the people involved might be feeling. This sometimes leads to talks later about a real-life situation that needs some attention to our heart posture.

Weekly Prayer

Lord, help me to focus on Your love and Your goodness. Please help me to forgive those who have hurt me and help me to be brave enough to ask for forgiveness from those I have hurt. Help me to remember that nothing can separate me from Your 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:

- Read / discuss one of the recommended scriptures and/or pray with your children during what would normally be a time spent on an iPad, phone, game system, TV, etc.
- Complete the cup activity outlined above.
- **HEAVY LUGGAGE:** Have your kids dress in thick and heavy clothing and/or pack bags/sacks with heavy items and have them carry them either a short distance or even every time they go to a different room all day at home. Discuss how sin and guilt are heavy burdens but forgiveness and grace bring relief and freedom.

Week 4 (March 25-31): **Becoming His:** *responding to love*

Weekly Exchange: Sleep (*The hope is that you would sacrifice some times of rest to position yourself before the Lord to be grateful. In addition, spend some time with those you love responding to the love of God in your life and in the world around you.*) For example, you might choose to set your alarm an hour or two earlier, stay up an hour or two later and/or devote an entire night or morning to prayer and reflection. Pick a few of those times to spend together with close friends or family serving others or sharing your reasons for why you love the Lord.

Weekly Text: John 12:1-19

Supplemental Passages: Romans 6:1-14; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Galatians 3:26-29

For Reflection:

God is not static. God—revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is dynamic, alive, always stirring, and always laboring to bring life to His beloved creation. God is love overflowing. In your reflection time this week, consider the activity of God in your life and your world. Marvel at how God creates in, through, and with us. Can you see and hear God laboring in the world around you? Can you appreciate how God has “labored” specifically in and through you? Can you recognize how the labor of others supports you in your living? Love sees clearly into the depths of reality. With your vision sharpened by these reflections, try to see in all things—in all creation and all people—the reflection of God’s very self. Recall specific occasions when you or someone else acted with justice, goodness, mercy, love and life. It is here that the resurrected Christ breathes new life into us and calls us to follow him.

Weekly Prayer

Caught between joy and despair, Lord,
we yearn for the fulfillment of your desire
beyond the brokenness and neediness of this life.
We offer thanksgiving for your presence with us
and petitions for the transformation
of the church and the world.

Life-giver, Pain-bearer, Creator of all things,
day by day you sustain the weary with your word
and gently encourage us to place our trust in you.
Awaken us to the suffering of those around us;
save us from hiding in denials or taunts that deepen the hurt;
give us grace to share one another's burdens in humble service.

Crucified and Risen One,
by your passion you strengthen us when we fall.
Teach us to love the broken and see those who suffer. May we love and serve them, as you
first loved and served us by your life, death and resurrection. Amen.

CHILDREN'S EXCHANGE CORNER – week 4

Scripture Focus: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Reflection Questions:

Name three things outside in nature where you have experienced God (see, hear, feel, smell, etc.) in a tangible way.

Name two people that have helped you learn and/or experience God and talk about those encounters with your family.

Weekly Exchange:

Just as with food, fasting from sleep is not a strongly recommended practice for growing children. Therefore, we would encourage families with young children to consider options that are already a part of your morning or nightly routine, and use this as an intentional time of more focused prayer and/or discussion this week.

[Examples: short morning devotional; prayer time in the car on the way to school; breakfast scripture reading; bedtime reading and prayer that is perhaps a bit different from your normal routine.]

Weekly Prayer:

Lord, help me to focus on Your love and Your goodness. Thank you for the amazing gifts you give us every day in Your creation. Help me to show Your love and kindness toward others everywhere I go.

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:

- Read / discuss one of the recommended scriptures and/or pray with your children during morning and/or evening routines or when driving in the car together.
- Complete the cup activity outlined above.
- Get ready for school to praise/worship songs chosen by your kids.
- Psalm 148 Praise Necklace
 - Read Psalm 148 together and have kids listen for and say out loud all the aspects of nature that bring praise to God in this scripture.
 - Have children choose a colored bead to represent each thing they name to make a bracelet, necklace, or bookmark to help them remember to thank God and give Him praise.