

SOUL CARE REPLENISHMENT GUIDE

SANDALS CHURCH | Spiritual Formation

INSTRUCTIONS

These reflection/prayer prompts can be completed in less than 15 minutes and are designed to take up only a small part of your day, but also to accompany you throughout your day. They are meant to be simple and open—think about praying through them like drinking coffee in the morning. Coffee is your good friend, but when you're hanging out with a good cup, you don't tend to concentrate very hard on the experience of drinking it. You simply hold the cup and periodically sip, allowing your mind to slowly awake to what is happening around you. It accompanies you as you think about other things. In this way, these prayers are meant to be greeted, held, and then to recede into the background as you sip from God's presence throughout the day and allow a part of yourself to slowly awaken to his presence in you.

The morning prayer is designed to be prayed each day. The rest of the prayers/contemplative projects are designed to unfold each week: Week one will encompass the *Prayer of Releasing Work*, week two will cover a contemplative project on being *Real with Self*, the third week: *Real with God*, the fourth week: *Real with Others*. These exercises are not meant to be intense, difficult or necessarily hard-core practices. Instead, in this time you are encouraged to release the need to get things done perfectly, the *shoulds*, and instead focus on matters of your own heart.

JOURNALING

Keeping a journal throughout your replenishment time can be valuable in several ways: it can help you create a space of intentional time with God, it can help you process and frame what happens during those times, and it can provide you with a record of what has happened within you.

Choose a time in your day to sit down for a few moments to remember and write down what has happened in your day (or in your week) related to your reflection projects and experiences with God. What areas did you find your heart resisting, and what areas did you notice it opening up to? What was difficult, that you're going to need God's help with? What were your top three favorite things? What did you love?

If you aren't used to journaling, these don't need to belong entries - just capture what's going on in your heart. Think of these journal entries as small flags you are setting up along your path so that when your time of replenishment has come to a conclusion, you can trace back along the journey that you have made.

MORNING PRAYER

At the beginning of each day, spend a few minutes with God (preferably over that cup of caffeine). Picture him with you, like Jesus sitting in the seat across from you looking out at the same view, but attentive to anything you might say. Or picture God's presence in the Holy Spirit as present with you and as comforting as each sip of your drink. Or imagine the sovereign God of the universe bending low to behold you. Thank him for his presence. Tell him what you like about him.

What do you hope for today? What do you want today? Fun? Company? Peace? Ask for it, then open a space for it - you don't have to make yourself feel it, just agree that you are willing to accept and make room for it. Now, what do you need today? Repeat this process with your needs.

WEEK 1: *Prayer of Releasing Work*

This prayer is designed for the first day of your replenishment time. You can pray through it only once, or you can repeat the process whenever Soul Care thoughts pop up and start messing with your head.

Begin by making a list. First, write down the names of people that you have been guiding. Now open yourself into a time of prayer. Write down some details about what you have seen in them, for example: what have they suffered? How were they able to grow through group? What do they still need? Think about your own reaction to them and ask, for example: What about them was a struggle for you? What blessed you?

Now imagine that you are standing before God with that person—you can imagine the person there with you, a photo of the person, or just their name on a slip of paper. Talk to God about what you discovered about your time with this person. Thank God for allowing you to be a part of this season in their life. Then intentionally give that person back to God and thank him for his continued care for them. If it seems fitting, ask God to bless the people who will be a part of their lives next. Repeat for each person.

Next, focus on your own experience. Write down the things that have been difficult for you—the stressful things, the worries, the irritating logistics, the energy it takes to truly show up for another person, the relationships that were difficult. Now spend a few moments in prayer. Talk to God about what you have written. Share with him any hurt, frustration, or anxiety. Give them to him. This is his work that you do, and he can take partial ownership with you over these things.

Now, make a list of the things that you experienced that you enjoyed and loved. Thank God for these. Don't be afraid to give these things to him. He will give you more to love and enjoy during your replenishment time, and again if you repeat another cycle of care.

Daily prayer for the week:

God, please show me what I need to release today

WEEK 2: *Real with Self*

Recall the imagery of Jesus standing on a high hill, looking out over Jerusalem, and him weeping over the people (see Luke 19:41-44 and again in Matthew 23:37): Jesus stands on a hillside overlooking Jerusalem. Moved by what he sees, he speaks: *“How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace...How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me.”* (NLT)

Imagine him turning and speaking these words over you. You are one of his people. Allow yourself to rest in the truth that you are included in that compassion. Picture yourself sitting with Jesus, with his arms around you, or his wings covering and defending you. What do you feel? Peace? Protection?

Imagine Jesus speaking Psalm 139 to you; hear that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Ask him what makes you unique to him, what about you gives him joy, what he sees in you that evokes his compassion. What are your gifts, strengths, and weaknesses? What are your joys and sorrows? You matter deeply to him. Repeat that message to yourself as many times as you need to throughout the week. Be sure to make time to journal through your experiences, remembering that by journaling, you are creating small signposts to highlight your journey.

Daily prayer for the week:

God, please remind me of your love for me this week.

WEEK 3: Real with God

Read Psalm 22 (do this in its entirety, each day this week). Pay attention to what stirs in you each time you read this.

In these verses, David expresses his anger, frustration and sorrow with and against God. The fact that he wrote this into our Bible means that we, as followers of God, can also express the fears and frustrations that we experience in our relationship with him. It's okay if what we logically know of God and what we currently feel are different - what's important is to invite God into that experience. So take a few moments to allow yourself to read and sit in this place. Ask God to help you access this space within you so that you can invite him into it. Then share what you have found.

David also reflects back on times where God has been with him and his ancestors, how he delivered them and was present with them. Spend some time reflecting back on your life with God. When has he rescued you? When has he felt especially present with you? What has he given you?

Most of the middle of this psalm is spent on David talking to God about what he now struggles with. He talks about his environment and the enemies who surround him. He also talks about his needs and what he is experiencing. Allow his words to lead you into a time of reflection on what you are currently experiencing within you, especially in your relationship with God? When do your bones feel like water? Where do you need God to give you his strength? Where do you need his intercession? His protection? His grace?

Notice, in the midst of this psalm, David acknowledges the eternal nature of God's love for his people. Where do you need to rest in God's sovereignty this week? Spend time praying through the end of the psalm, and again, pay attention to what is stirring in your heart. As you feel your heart moving, don't hesitate to pause and journal through your thoughts and feelings, similar to what David did all those years ago.

Daily prayer for the week:

God, I trust your plan, even (and especially) when I can't see the totality of it.

WEEK 4: *Real with Others*

Begin by focusing on how you can more fully share your life with your spouse, your family, and your friends. How have they blessed you recently? How have they challenged you? What do they bring you? Joy? Love? Truth? Ask God to renew your heart and mind, reigniting your love for them. Imagine your heart like a reservoir that waters a garden, or a fire that can be used to light a candle. Allow God's love for these people to fill and ignite you, and then pour out of you. Out of that love, how can you serve them better?

Ask God this week to prepare your heart for what is next to come in your service to him. What steps do you still need to take in order to be ready for this next season? Where do you need your love for these fellow people to increase? Where does your wisdom need to deepen, or your ability to challenge others well? Ask God to build these things in you so that you can better do his work. Remember that it is his work, his investment, and these are first his people. He will invest in you and help you. Now, take action this week to intentionally work on these things, and remember to include these in your journal this week.

Finally, ask God to prepare the people with whom you will be working, in this next season. Ask him to prepare them for the work he is planning on doing in their lives, as well as preparing you for the work he is intending to usher in through you. Ask God for eyes to see the people he loves so dearly, and for your compassion for others to be full.

Daily prayer for the week:

God, please increase my love for others as I work toward seeing them as you see them.

GO: *Prayer for Re-Entry*

Pray through this reflection exercise as you are about to re-engage with Soul Care. Take out your journal. As you read over what you have written, what does each entry tell you? Sit still for a moment and call up your favorite moments with God in or out of prayer. Now ask yourself: "What has my time with God been?" and "What do you have for me as we move forward?" Think about where you are going next, re-entering ordinary time, as a road trip with some plans and some detours. And God with you every mile.

CONTEMPLATIVE EXERCISE:

The Compassion of Jesus

SANDALS CHURCH | Spiritual Formation

Find a place where you can be alone, free from distractions. Take a moment to breathe—breathe in slowly, hold your breath, and then slowly release. Do this several times. As your body relaxes and your heartbeat slows, allow your thoughts to settle.

Read (15 minutes)

In Luke 19:41-44 and again in Matthew 23:37, Jesus stands on a hillside overlooking Jerusalem. Moved by what he sees, he speaks: *“How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace...How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me.”* (NLT)

Imagine that you are there on the hillside with Jesus. Picture a place similar to Southern California. Look out over the landscape. What do you see? What does the dust smell like and the hot dry grasses? Feel the sun on your face. Is it early or late afternoon? Is there a breeze?

Imagine that you are standing with Jesus, talking with him and observing him. Ask him to share what he is thinking as he looks out over Jerusalem. Is he seeing the tapestry of his plan for Israel? Is he seeing all the people he has sent out to help, all the opportunities that some people have taken to come to him and all the opportunities that many others never took? Is he seeing the work that he is about to do—the sacrifice that he is about to make for them—that will change forever the way that people approach God?

Reflect (15 minutes)

Continue to stand next to Jesus. But, instead of seeing Jerusalem, allow yourself to think about your own people. The scene is the same; they are his people, now, too. Know that his heart beats for them as well, that he longs for them and plans for them. This is his job—to see, to hold, to plan, to weep and to continue his work. Allow your heart to rest in this moment.

Feel the magnificence of a God who can orchestrate a plan for all people from the beginning of time until the moment of Jesus’ death. Feel also the gentleness of a God that can weave a plan for each individual from before their birth, orchestrating

the paths that will bring people to him. You get to be a piece of this, but you do not have to be all of it. You might feel some of what Jesus feels when his heart is moved to care and to weep. But you do not have to be Jesus. Thank God. You simply have to be there with him.

Engage (15 minutes)

You are still standing next to Jesus. You have heard how he longs to teach his people peace and to cover them with his wings. You have seen how carefully, daringly and gently he plans for them. That includes you. As you feel comfortable, turn to him and allow him to be there for you, as well. You are also the one he loves and longs for and plans for. Ask him to share his heart for you and his thoughts of you. Ask him to simply be with you in this moment. Ask him to teach you his peace. This is the culmination of his plan for you—that you can come to him and be with him, in work and in rest. Spend the last part of your time simply resting there with him.