

Spiritual Preparations



For Individuals on the Prayer Preparation Team

Watch and Pray, Pray and Watch. Every day, as often as you think of it, and at least once in deliberately set-aside time, pray for renewal. All our prayers, like the Lord's prayer, should basically be for God's will to be done. Providentially, God's will is to bless us, to heal, and renew us, on an individual as well as group and social level, so that our life can be replete with all the good gifts the Lord wants to bless us with as we live under the sovereignty of God. So pray for renewal, but be open to how God knows this needs to happen in your context.

But then, watch, too. As Jesus asks his disciples, we're to watch and pray. Watch for signs of God's Spirit already at work among us. Note where renewal is already happening and ask how you can help clear the way for Christ's Spirit to move more freely among us.

Listen for God's Word. Sign up to [receive the daily lectionary online](#), and engage in a prayerful reading of Scripture. A prayerful reading of Scripture is a way of entering into a conversation with God that allows God to be the first speaker. So often our prayers are a conversation in which we are the only speakers and God does all the listening. This can be our default mode of conversation with God even during a worship service.

To prayerfully read scripture, find a place where you can sit comfortably and where you will not be disturbed for a period of about 15-20 minutes. Get the scripture ready. Open your Bible to the selected passage or find the text electronically. Before you read the passage, though, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to clear your head and release any tension in your body. Whisper a short prayer for illumination asking for the Holy Spirit to open you to God's living Word speaking through the scriptures and to protect you against the distortions of imagination.

After you've prayed, read the passage through once. Then go back and read it slowly. Imagine yourself as part of the story or the recipient of the message. What do you see, hear, feel, etc.? What is it that the Lord is speaking to you through this text? Pay attention to the words and images that come to you through the text. What is God saying to you through them? Allow your sanctified imagination to be open to the movement of God's Spirit and listen for what God's Living Word is saying to you. Then express your response to God.

You may also want to keep a journal so that you can look back over these 40 days of prayer and remember what you learned from it. After spending time in prayer each day write in your journal a response to these two questions: What did you hear? How did you respond?

For Meetings of the Prayer Preparation Team

Pray. Pray in general for the church's and/or community's renewal. Each week pray specifically for particular people. Dividing the whole group ahead of time, pray for a part of the whole group by name each week so that you will have prayed for all potential participants in a solemn assembly during your days of preparation. Be sure to leave room to pray for whatever people may not be on any list but who come to mind. In all your intercessions, be careful to respect any confidentiality.

Prayerfully read the following scriptures together. As you move through these 40 days of spiritual preparation for the solemn assembly, use the suggested Scripture texts below as a tool for listening. Fit these scriptures to your own schedule. During the last week, you may wish to have individual members engage in the special readings during their own devotional time rather than meet together each day.

40 Days Prior

Read Psalm 139. In an attitude of prayer read through the entire psalm a second time. Ask, "What does it mean to allow God to search one's heart?" Consider the ways in which you are open to the Spirit's scrutiny and the ways in which you resist the Spirit.

33 Days Prior

Read Mark 12:28 - 31. In an attitude of prayer read through the gospel passage a second time. What are the things that really matter in your life? How does your attitude toward God stand in comparison?

26 Days Prior

Read Joel 2:12 - 16. Read the passage very slowly. As you read, meditate on each phrase. The prophet is calling God's people to fervent prayer during a time of crisis. The people are tempted to blame God (and their godless neighbors) for their troubles, but Joel tells them to quit whining and take a hard look at themselves. He views the crisis as an opportunity for Israel to reorient their lives toward God. What application of Joel's exhortation can we make for our own congregation(s)?

19 Days Prior

Read Psalm 32. Read the psalm a second time. What joy do you find in repentance? What happiness do you find in forgiveness? If you find no delight in repentance or forgiveness, then consider this: what do you suppose the writer of Psalm 32 experienced that makes his situation different from yours?

12 Days Prior

Read Matthew 6:16 - 18. Prayerfully consider what type of fast you would be willing to practice. How would this fast enrich the preparations you are making for the solemn assembly? In what ways might fasting distract you from a meaningful time of preparation?

Five Days Prior

Read Matthew 11:28-30. Read the passage out loud. Listen to the passage as though Jesus were standing in the pulpit of your church on Sunday morning and issuing the invitation to your congregation (or presbytery). What burdens is your congregation growing weary of carrying? What might it look like for your congregation to put on the “yoke” of Christ? What is it that Jesus wants us to “learn” from him?

Four Days Prior

Read Revelation 3. Because we do not often read from Revelation, you would probably find it instructive to read the chapter from three or four different versions of the New Testament. One version that is especially helpful in its use of contemporary language is *The Message*. When John addresses the churches of Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira he speaks God’s message, accusing each church of neglecting or perverting Christian worship in some way. How is your congregation guilty of these or some similar dysfunction with regards to worship? How might the upcoming solemn assembly be used as an opportunity to reorient your worship in ways that honor God?

If you do not own a copy of *The Message*, then you can access it online through a number of Bible search engines such as [Bible Gateway](#). Select “passage lookup” from the menu bar. Type “Revelation 3” in the box that says “enter passage,” and select “The Message” from the drop down menu in the “Select version(s)” box.

Three Days Prior

Read Ephesians 4:1 - 32. As you read the passage a second time, think about all those who will worship alongside you at tomorrow’s solemn assembly. What springs up in you as you call to mind various ones be they “friends” or “enemies”? If you were to “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (vs. 4), what would you need to do that you haven’t yet done?

Two Days Prior

Read Philippians 2:1 - 11. Read it a second time out loud. Why do we call Jesus “Lord”? In light of Christ’s self-emptying, why is a solemn assembly important? What do you hope to get out of the service?

One Day Prior

Read Psalm 51. Read it again, more slowly than you did the first time. What verse, or part of a verse, best matches your expectations for the up-coming solemn assembly. Meditate on the verse or phrase you’ve identified. Listen to the Spirit through these words of Scripture.