



Weekly Resource

May 4, 2020: Homelessness during COVID-19

Dear friends,

We humans are built for community. During this time of social distancing, it's crucial that we remain connected, holding one another in love and support. It's for this reason that **each week during the COVID-19 crisis, we'll be sending you a short resource** to use in a virtual meeting held over the phone or via video conferencing. This weekly resource is a great tool to stay connected with your current and past JFM small groups. It is also a great resource to use individually, or with groups of friends or family to stay connected and engaged in a meaningful way. These reflections will provide a time to pray together, check in with one another, and have conversation around a short passage.

In the meantime, we're offering tips and tools for facilitating all of our current programs through videoconferencing. While we hope that this weekly resource will spiritually sustain your community while in quarantine, [now is also the perfect time to start one of our regular programs](#). In fact, TODAY (May 4th) we're re-releasing Engaging Spirituality, which has been updated with new content, converted into three 8-week programs, and adapted for virtual use. The first program in the series is called [Out of the Light: Creating Sacred Space for Self and Others](#).

Last but not least, generosity is, at its core, a benefit to everyone. When you donate today, your gift helps us sustain individuals committed to making the world better. [Click here to help out](#). Also, please feel free to [forward this resource](#) to friends and family!

Thank you for continuing to care for one another during this time of heightened anxiety. Know that we are praying for you!

Stay well,

The JustFaith Ministries Staff



Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

When everyone has dialed in, begin your time together with these or similar words:

Welcome, friends! It's so good to be with all of you, despite that we can't be together in person. Today we'll begin with prayer and spend a few minutes checking in with each other. Then we'll have some conversation around a short reflection on homelessness during COVID-19 before closing in prayer. Most importantly, though, this will be a time to care for one another and to be the community we're called to be.

Let's take a few seconds of silence to pause, to listen to our breathing, and to be present in this space.

Pause for 30 seconds before beginning the opening prayer.

In this time when the world is whirling from the Coronavirus and we are filled with anxiety and fear for ourselves, our families and our neighbors, give us courage.

In this time when tending to our physical health means avoiding health care facilities, sustain us.

In this time when health care workers risk becoming patients, embrace them.

In this time when those whose health is compromised have to worry about compromising their health, protect them.

In this time when we are invited to show affection by not showing affection, hold us.

In this time when communal prayer must be done in solitude, comfort us.

In this time when basic needs must be met from a distance, fill the emptiness.

In this time when exercising our civic duty means staying away from the voting booth, unite us.

In this time when strength in numbers means breaking up our large group, embolden us.

In this time when technology is facilitating human connection, link us together.



And, in this time when Easter Sunday feels more like Good Friday, fill us with a boundless sense of hope and the audacity to believe we really do have the power to help bring healing to the world. Amen.

– Susie Tierney
Executive Director
JustFaith Ministries

Check-In Time (10 minutes or so)

Ask these open-ended questions. If you're by yourself, journal about them.

Note: If you're with a group, these questions have the potential to take up a lot of time. Some weeks may require more check-in time than others, depending on the needs of the group. To provide a shorter yet meaningful check-in time, choose ONE of the questions below, and ask participants to share a ONE sentence response.

- **Before we begin this week's reflection, let's take a few minutes to check in. How is everyone feeling?** (It will be a bit more difficult via phone to know if someone is being talked over or is trying to get a word in.... Be sure everyone has a chance to speak).
- **What is something you're struggling with this week?**
- **Where have you seen a sign of hope this week?**

Other optional questions include: What is something you've learned about yourself during this time of social distancing? Where have you experienced a "thin place" in the last week? Where have you seen beauty this week? What is one new behavior you'd like to continue doing when the virus has passed us by?

Reflection (30 minutes or so)

******Note: There is a lot of content in this reflection. Prioritize the sections that are most relevant for you and/or your group.**

Biblical Reflection

Begin with the following words:



We'll begin our conversation about homelessness and COVID-19 by reading [Luke 16:19-31](#). (If you're with a group, you can either read it yourself or ask a volunteer to read it for you).

Then ask (If you're by yourself, journal about these questions):

- Usually it's the important people who are named and known; meanwhile, people experiencing homelessness are often reduced to a label ("the homeless). In this passage, Lazarus has a name (which means "God helps"), while the rich man is just called "the rich man. "
 - What do you think this says about Jesus's priorities?
 - Do you know the names and stories of people experiencing homelessness?
- In this passage, Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, whose love of money and prestige keeps them from really hearing God's word. What is it in your life that keeps you from hearing God's word and truly living it out?
 - How can you use this time of quarantine to remove these barriers, so that you can more fully give and receive love and compassion?
- The gate where Lazarus lies keeps out those who are not in the rich man's inner circle. [Justo González's commentary on Luke](#) compares this gate to that of a luxury gated community.
 - Who is in your inner circle? Who are you keeping out, perhaps unintentionally?
 - During this time of COVID, and after the pandemic is over, how can you open your gate wide, so to speak?

Homelessness and COVID-19: What Our Homeless Neighbors may be Experiencing

If you are videoconferencing or by yourself, watch the video ["St. John Center for Homeless Men" \(3:18\)](#). (If you're talking over the phone, skip the video and go straight to the questions). Ask/journal about:

- Maria Price, Executive Director of the St. John Center for Homeless Men in Louisville, KY, states that the clients she serves are experiencing heightened anxiety because of the general lack of access to services. Like any of us who feel we have so few options, they feel stuck between a rock and a hard place. That brings on feelings of grief and loss.
 - Do you resonate with Maria's statement? Where have you encountered "stuckness," grief, or loss during the pandemic, and how do you deal with these feelings?



- Maria elaborates on the reasons why folks experiencing homelessness feel “stuck” during these times. Appointments for housing options have been cut. Government offices are closed, making it difficult to obtain the necessary documentation for getting a job or renting an apartment. (On top of that, many clothes closets are closed, meaning folks have been wearing the same thing for three weeks). Clients know that they will be stuck in homelessness even longer than they had originally anticipated.

Let’s pause for a moment to imagine what that grief might feel like, and to hold in our hearts those who are experiencing homelessness right now.

Pause for 1 minutes of silent one minute of silent meditation. Conclude with this prayer:

Holy God, you were born not in a palace but in a stable. You reside among the poor and the outcasts; help us to seek you there. We lift before you those who are experiencing homelessness. Equip us to extend our love, compassion, and resources, that they may find refuge. Amen.

- What are organizations in your area doing to support people experiencing homelessness? How can you come alongside these organizations to support their work? (If you don’t know the answers to these questions, how can you find out?)

COVID-19, Homelessness, and Loneliness

Robin Barton, a social worker at [Triune Mercy Center](#) in Greenville, SC, helps connect people experiencing homelessness to resources and community. Because services are currently limited to food to-go bags, Robin has asked Triune’s guests to share a phone number if they have one, so that she can provide encouragement and guidance as they navigate decisions in this new world. (Partly because organizations like Triune and the [St. John Center](#) can offer this level of support, donating to these organizations is currently more appropriate than giving out stuff yourself).

In addition to the [CDC’s guidance](#) about COVID-19 and homelessness, Robin recommends Brené Brown’s *Unlocking Us* podcast episodes on [loneliness](#) and [grief](#), which, she says, “apply to our homeless folks even more than ourselves.” (I, Kristin, listened to them as well... they are super helpful, and I ditto Robin’s suggestion! Skip ahead to 3:30 and start there, as the first few minutes is an ad).

Optional (If your meeting is only an hour, you probably won’t have time for this part):

Read aloud the following excerpts from *Unlocking Us* and discuss or journal about them. Alternatively, you can copy/paste these questions into an email, so that group members can journal about them on their own.

Dr. Vivek Murthy speaking: “When I was surgeon general I began visiting communities across the country. I didn’t ask people about loneliness. Actually I asked



them a very open-ended question, just ‘how can I help.’ But as they described many of the concerns they had – whether it was substance use disorders or violence or chronic diseases like obesity that they saw ramping up in their communities, what I heard were these stories of loneliness. And people wouldn’t say ‘I’m lonely,’ but they would say things like ‘I feel like I’m carrying this entire load all by myself. I feel like if I disappeared tomorrow, nobody would even care. I feel like I’m invisible.’”

- Recall a time when you felt lonely. Who or what did you turn to?
- How might loneliness be manifesting itself in your community?

Dr. Vivek Murthy: “I think the reason we don’t hear about [loneliness being a deep-seated issue for so many people] is that.... 1. There’s this deep stigma around loneliness. The shame that comes with loneliness makes us think that if we are lonely, we’re not likeable, that we’re broken in some way. And that prevents us not just from admitting it to other people, but also from admitting it to ourselves.... The second reason [is that loneliness] doesn’t always look like the person at a party sitting alone in a corner. Loneliness can manifest itself in different ways – it can manifest as social withdrawal, it can manifest as anger, it can manifest as irritability. It can show up in different ways and it can lead to different types of illnesses.”

- How do you express loneliness? (for example, does it look like social withdrawal, anger, or irritability?)
- How do the people you love express loneliness? Challenge: ask them, so that you know how to better show care and support.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes-ish)

Then say: **Before we join in the closing prayer, let us pause to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is as close as our very breath.**

Pause for 30 seconds

Continue with the closing prayer:

**May we who are merely inconvenienced,
remember those whose lives are at stake.**

**May we who have no risk factors,
remember those most vulnerable.**

**May we who have the luxury of working from home,
remember those who must choose between preserving their health or
making their rent.**



May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close, remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips, remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market, remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home, remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country, let us choose love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

AMEN.

“Prayer for Pandemic”
By Cameron Belim, Seattle, WA

Then, in these words, invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to briefly share it:

We are disciples on a journey.

We are the body of Christ, broken for the world.

We hold one another as we carry the concerns of our neighbors.

If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.

Leader: We pray also for the members of the JustFaith community across the country. Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that together we might participate with you in the building of your Kingdom, in order to create a more just and peaceful world. Amen.