

PRAY 

21 DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING DEVOTIONAL 2019

 **FIRST**



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CHURCH.CA

PRAY

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FIRST



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INTRODUCTION TO 21 DAY DEVOTIONALS

I come from a long line of gardeners. My grandfather owned greenhouses and grew all kinds of flowers. My Dad always had a perfect garden filled with different flowers, vegetables and landscaped hedges. I still remember the blast of heat and smell of plants and blossoms that met me when I walked into my grandfather's greenhouses. I also remember cleaning up the branches and clippings on Saturday mornings when my Dad would prune his fruit trees. What these men accomplished when it came to gardens and flower beds was truly beautiful and amazing.

Sadly, I did not keep the legacy going.

Gardening actually makes me grumpy. I hate weeding and pruning and raking and digging. The only reason I cut my lawn is to keep the neighbors happy.

This is probably why I find it difficult relating to Jesus teaching in **John 15**. His gardening analogy didn't connect with me at first. However, as I have read and reread John 15 the one thing that sticks out to me over and over again is His call to abide or remain in Him. He uses the "vine and the branches" to show us that He expects our lives to be connected to Him so that we can be fruitful and productive.

Fruitfulness and productivity are the by-product of being connected to Jesus. It's impossible to become more like Jesus if you don't stay connected to Him.

For the next 21 days we are going to focus on connecting

(abiding/remaining) in Christ and discover the benefits and blessings that come when we live our lives abiding in Christ.

Let me give you a few reasons why ABIDING in Christ is important:

- Abiding connects us to God in fellowship.
- Abiding in Christ keeps us from withering and falling away.
- Abiding in Christ keeps us from being overcome by sin.
- Abiding in Christ grows our character and makes us godly.
- Abiding in Christ causes us to be successful (Fruitful) with our lives.

In order to connect with God and ABIDE or REMAIN in Him we need to invite the Holy Spirit to grow us. We need to stay connected to the vine as Jesus instructs us in **John 15**. For anything to grow certain things need to happen:

- We need to eat (read the Bible)
- We need to breathe (learn to pray)
- We need to keep clean (Confess our sin)
- We need a supportive environment (connection in community)
- We need to exercise (Serve others)
- We need protection (resist the devil)
- We need to be generous (give of our time, talents and treasures)

Growth takes time. The Bible says that we are to “*Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our savior, Jesus Christ*” (**2 Peter 3:18**). This implies process, time and intentionality. There is no short cut to spiritual growth but there is a path and the Bible lays out specific areas that God wants to address in our lives.

For the next 21 days we are going to take a journey together and invite God to show us the power of REMAINING or ABIDING in Him and how we can live a life that is fruitful and productive.

Take the time to read each day's devotional and then do the section that's titled "**FEED YOURSELF.**" Use a journal to write down the thoughts, insights and promptings that come from Jesus. Be sure to read the prescribed Scriptures and answer the following questions:

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** do you want me to confess?

I pray that you will lean into these next 21 days with hundreds of others who are all seeking to connect to Jesus in a fresh and powerful way. If you do, I know that He will meet you right where you are and then lead you to where He wants you to be.

Abiding in Christ,

Pastor Shawn

LET'S GET STARTED

PRAY

21 DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING DEVOTIONAL 2019

FIRST

PRAYER GATHERING SCHEDULE & EVENTS

Sunday Morning Prayer

8:15am in the Care Centre

Wednesday Morning “Drop-in” Prayer

in the Chapel

January 9, 16 and 23 from 7:00am - 9:00am

All Church Fast

January 22-24

This is a focused 3 day fast within the 21 day fast. We encourage all those who are able to join us in a 3 day food fast from January 22-24 where we will all focus together in our personal time praying for our church, families, community, our personal prayer goals and for a fresh experience of God in our lives.

A Day of Prayer

in the Main St. Chapel

Wednesday, January 16 from 6:00am - 5:00pm

Join us throughout the day in the chapel to pray for our church, community and nation. There will be prayer ministers in the chapel all throughout the day to pray with you and for you. Feel free to drop in for as long as you can.

Prayer Summit

Sunday, January 27

6:00pm

This Summit will be the concluding event of the 21 day fast. Join with your church to celebrate what God has done in our lives and church and to anticipate what he is going to do next.

PLEASE NOTE:

We will break our fast together by sharing in a light meal at 5pm in the Conference Hall.

Sign-up

You may sign-up online at www.prayfirst2019.ca to receive email updates with prayer requests and other information during the 21 days of prayer and fasting. You can also download the Main Street Church App for Pray First updates.

PLEASE NOTE:

Take a moment before you start this devotional and read the information and insights on the disciplines of fasting and journaling at the back of this booklet in

Appendix A and Appendix B



MY PERSONAL **COMMITMENT** & PRAYER GOALS

Decide how long you will fast and what kind of fast or fasts you will do. Some may do the full 21 days while others may fast for a certain amount of days or split up their fast during the 21 days. Whatever you decide make sure you write it down and then stick to it.

(See APPENDIX A for details on how to fast)

WHAT KIND OF FASTS ARE YOU GOING TO DO THIS MONTH? (Write down when you will do them)

FOOD FAST(S)

MEDIA FAST(S)

OTHER

**MY PERSONAL PRAYER GOALS FOR THE JANUARY 2019
“PRAY FIRST” 21 DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING**

**WHO WILL I SPECIFICALLY PRAY FOR BY NAME FOR THE
NEXT 21 DAYS?**

**WHAT SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES OR ISSUES WILL I PRAY
AND ASK GOD TO DO A WORK IN?**

**LIST ANY OTHER PRAYER REQUESTS THAT YOU MAY HAVE
AND PRAY FOR THEM DAILY**

**GO TO PAGE 102 TO WRITE OUT YOUR
PERSONAL PRAYER TARGETS FOR 2019**



START **HERE**

This Scripture will be the foundation of this devotional. Read this passage of Scripture every day. Become familiar with it for these words of Jesus will change your life.

JOHN 15 - Jesus, the True Vine

¹⁵ “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³ You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

⁵ “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷ But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! ⁸ When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

⁹ “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! ¹² This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. ¹³ There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide

in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. ¹⁶ You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other."

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. ¹⁹ The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. ²⁰ Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. ²¹ They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me. ²² They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Anyone who hates me also hates my Father. ²⁴ If I hadn't done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. ²⁵ This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: 'They hated me without cause.'"

²⁶ "But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. ²⁷ And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry."

DAY 1

ABIDE

When I was growing up there was a movement called WWJD. It stood for “*What Would Jesus Do?*” If you were a Christian you probably had the wristband with those letters written on it. The idea was that whenever you were faced with a decision or choice that you weren’t sure about you would look at your wrist and see those letters WWJD and you would ask yourself, “*What Would Jesus Do?*”

- If you saw someone being bullied and you were tempted to join in – just look at your wrist and you would know not to.
- If a peer was pressuring you to join the party and get drunk like all your friends were – just look at your wrist and you would hear Jesus saying, “*nope, not a good idea.*”
- If you were feeling bad about your disdain for cats? Just look at your wrist and Jesus would remind you that your feelings are completely normal and ok.

Having the wisdom of Jesus strapped to your wrist seemed like a good way to have Jesus on your mind at all times. The sentiment was good but the problem was that most people I knew had no idea what Jesus would do because they had not taken the time to study the Bible to see what Jesus did.

Jesus simply became the answer to questions and circumstances we weren’t sure about instead of a person we could turn to because we were connected to Him through a personal relationship. To abide in Christ is not only living our lives asking Jesus what we should do but it is to know Him so well that we naturally live our lives in response to who He is.

In **John 15** Jesus lays out for us what he expects for those of us who have chosen to follow Him. He wants us to do what He did but that means we need to be continually abiding in Him. That means we have to stay connected and read the Bible and pray and listen to His voice daily in our lives.

Abiding in Jesus is more than having a reminder on your wrist. It's about having His power, love and truth written on your heart.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL:

Lord, am I closer to you today than I was a month ago? Where have I changed or grown?

READ:

John 15, 2 Peter 1:3-11, Psalm 119:1-8

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** do you want me to confess?

MEMORIZE: (you will have three verses to memorize during the 21 days of Prayer and Fasting):

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

–John 15:4

JOURNAL



DAY 2

BEGIN TODAY'S DEVOTIONAL BY READING **ROMANS 7:14-21**

Do you ever feel like what Romans 7 just described?

This issue of sin is big isn't it? Sin weighs down and hardens hearts and blinds eyes. Sin holds you captive and messes you up and causes pain. Sin is the only thing that keeps us from staying connected to Jesus. Sin is huge – but I want to tell you that the bondages in your life can be broken, the lies you have been believing can be replaced with the truth and that you can truly live your life ABIDING in Jesus.

Repentance is the first step in all change! Lasting change, real change, God honoring change always begins with repentance. Now the truth is, some of you reading this have never repented. You might have prayed a prayer but you never truly repented of your sin. You look around and you wonder why others seem to grow in their love for God and they hear him speak and His Word is alive to them. You look at them and wonder “why is it different for them?” The reason? **Repentance**. Repentance is the first step in abiding fully in Christ.

So what is repentance? Is it a divine exercise in humiliation where God makes an example of us? Is it living our lives groveling and feeling condemned all the time? If this is what you think repentance is you got it wrong.

Repentance is simply turning from one direction to the opposite direction. It is letting go of one thing to cling to another.

King David figured out the power of repentance. It wasn't easy but it was freeing. The story is found in **2 Samuel 11**. David is at home in his palace while all his troops are out fighting their enemy – the Ammonites. David is doing what Kings aren't supposed to do. He is just relaxing in his Man Cave watching the game, eating snacks all laid back in his Laz-e-boy

recliner.

Then he gets up and walks out on his patio. His penthouse overlooks the city and as he looks around his eyes fall on a lady sun-bathing on her patio. Not a big deal except that she's naked and married. Being the King he sends for her, sleeps with her, gets her pregnant and then kills her husband to cover up his sin. He thinks he dodged a bullet. But then a prophet named Nathan shows up and calls David out on his sin.

And David repents. We see his response in one of his journal entries:

*Have mercy on me, O God,
because of your unfailing love.
Because of your great compassion,
blot out the stain of my sins.
² Wash me clean from my guilt.
Purify me from my sin. (Psalm 51:1-2)*

Did you notice his response? David doesn't run or make excuses. He calls on the mercy of God.

That is where a repentant heart begins. Repentance doesn't start with your sin, **repentance starts with your God!** People don't repent because they look at their sin. Your sin does not lead you to repentance. Your sin will just depress you and hold you captive. It will lie to you and tell you that your freedom will come in anything but Jesus. It will lead you in the wrong direction. All your sin can do is lead you to more sin and all sin wants to do is keep you from abiding in Christ.

David knew what he deserved for his sin. He deserved death. He committed conspiracy, adultery and murder. He had three counts of death chasing him but because he knew the character of God he knew that Mercy was on his side.

The Apostle Paul echoed David's approach in Romans 2:1-4 when he says that it is **"the kindness of God that leads us to repentance."** Really? Sounds like an oxymoron doesn't it. When was the last time you teamed up kindness with repentance.

But think about it. Doesn't that change everything for you and me? It should. You see, lasting change comes in our lives when we know who God truly is. When we understand his attributes. His love towards us. That he is full of mercy and unfailing love and compassion.

When you really know the heart of God for you – you will do anything to connect to Him.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord is there any sin in my life that I need to repent of?

READ: Romans 2:1-4

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Pray through your “Pray First” Prayer Goals that you wrote down beginning on page 102.

MEMORIZE: *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.*

–John 15:4

Join us tomorrow morning (January 9) for “Drop in Prayer” in the Chapel from 7-9am. Come and join others as we pray for our church and community. A prayer list will be provided.

DAY 3

CONFESS

We used to have a dog. It was a rat dog named Pepper. Sometimes I would take the dog for a walk but not very often. I told my wife right from the beginning that I wasn't going to walk the dog because I didn't want to be one of those people who walk around their neighborhood carrying a bag of poop. You've seen them. Some of you are them. You take your pet AND their poop for a walk.

Think about it. Your dog relieves themselves and then you pick it up... with your hand.... and then you take the bag and nicely tie it up and continue your walk. I see it all the time. People walking their dogs with a bag of poop in their hand - like it's no big deal.

What dog owners do physically many of us do figuratively. We walk around carrying but never dealing with our sin. There are way too many people walking around this world with a "bag of poop" in their hand. And they think, "It's just a bag. It's tied nicely. Everyone does it. It's what you do." The truth is we all have poop in our lives that all too often becomes normal to us. We rationalize. "Hey at least it's in a bag. It's not really that bad." But I'm here to tell you - "it is that bad!"

The problem is, is that a lot of us get comfortable with our guilt. We don't like it but we accept it. I don't know anyone who says - "hey I'm going to go pick up some poop! Want to join me?" No one enjoys that - but we all collect poop in our lives and instead of throwing it away we put it in a bag and carry it around like it's no big deal.

Here's the point: **Confession gets rid of the poop in our lives.**

Confession connects us to Jesus. Confession breaks the silence. Confession makes us honest. Confession removes our guilt. And best of all confession covers us with God's grace.

When you choose to confess you uncover your sin and when your sin is

uncovered do you know what God does – **He covers you!**

This has been the problem from the very beginning. When God created the world and when He created Adam and Eve they were naked. They were not ashamed. They were righteous and their covering was the beauty and holiness of God himself.

But then one day – they sinned and they lost God's covering. They realized they were naked and the first thing they did was try to cover themselves and their sin up and the human race has been doing the same ever since. But God says, "If you confess your sin. If you uncover yourself and come out from hiding and are willing to stop making excuses then I can once again fully cover you with my beauty and righteousness."

That's good news. No matter how ugly your sin is. No matter how deep you are into it or how big or small your sin is – if you come to Jesus and uncover by repenting and confessing – He will cover you! You don't have to spend your whole life trying to cover up your sin. You don't have to spend your life trying to deal with your guilt and shame – just confess it and He'll have you covered.

When you confess, God covers **YOU** - not your sin. His covering is not a cover-up. Jesus can **take** our sin because he **became** our sin when he died on the cross for our sin. On the cross Jesus was stripped naked and put to shame so that we could be clothed with His grace and His righteousness. Repentance and confession brings us into the truth and understanding that through the cross we are forgiven. The cross is where we are embraced with the deep grace of our God. And it is the grace of God that keeps us connected to Jesus.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: What sin or sins do you need to confess to the Lord today?

READ: Psalm 32:1-11

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?

DAY 4

CONNECT

Have you ever fallen asleep in church? It's OK if you have. I know people who get their best sleep in church. As a Pastor I see it all the time. In fact I have names for them. The *'shoulder padder'* are those folks who wake up at the end of the service awkwardly nestled into the shoulder of their nervous neighbor. The *"intercessors,"* lean forward, rest their head in their hands and pretend to be in "prayer" during the entire service. Finally, the *"bobble heads"* are those who cross their arms, lean back and attempt to balance their head on their shoulders hoping to give the appearance of being awake. Their constant head nodding is always fun to watch.

The Bible tells a story of a young man who fell asleep in church (**Acts 20:7-12**). There's a guest preacher named Paul who's scheduled to leave the next day so he feels obligated to pass on as much information as he can, regardless of how long it may take. (*Ever been in a service like that?*) Well, this kid begins to get restless. The room is packed and the air is hot and stale. He makes his way to the window at the back of the room, climbs up on the ledge, breathes in the night air, closes his eyes and drifts off to sleep.

Problem is, sleeping in window ledges can be hazardous to your health. What happened next is enough to put a damper on any session, seminar or service, because this kid falls out of the window, hits the ground and dies!

Paul, having lost the attention of his audience runs downstairs to where the young man has fallen. He assures everyone not to worry, kneels down, prays and brings him back to life.

That story reminds me of how easy it is to disconnect ourselves from Jesus. It happens in the same way we go to sleep. We begin by relaxing, causing us to become less and less aware of our surroundings, until we finally drift off. Before we know it we have fallen and killed something in our life such as a reputation, a marriage, or a career. No one makes this their

goal, it just happens over time where one day we wake up regretting what we have done or what we have become.

Have you ever done that? Crawled up on some ledge in your life and fallen asleep only to regret it later? Maybe you dropped your guard and took something or someone for granted. Maybe it was a burst of anger, a hurtful word or a broken vow, and now you are living with the consequences of your fall.

It's usually because there's been a disconnect. That's why Jesus tells us to Abide, remain and stay connected to Him. "*Remain in me and I will remain in you.*" (**John 15:4**)

To remain in Christ is to live life fully awake and fully aware. The Bible tells us to "Stay alert! Watch out...Stand firm." (2 Peter 5:9). God wants you to be wide awake in your marriage, your parenting, your friendships, your finances and your career. He doesn't want you to relax when it comes to your values, commitments and goals. He wants you to live life with eyes wide open. If you feel like it's too late, that you've already fallen asleep, fallen out the window and died in some area of your life. Know this, God can bring you back to life and give you a brand new start. Just ask Him. He specializes in waking the dead!

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord is there any area of my life that I am spiritually neglecting? Where do you need to wake me up?

READ: Proverbs 18:24, Psalm 25:14, Philippians 3:8

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Ask God to give you a greater awareness of His presence in your life as you go about your day today.

DAY 5

FRIENDSHIP

There's something different between knowing someone as a friend and knowing someone as an acquaintance. There is also a difference between being friendly and being a friend. One consists of a surface or shallow connection. The other has a connection that creates safety, peace, trust and comfort. Someone once said, "A friend is one who walks in when others walk out."

That is the posture of Jesus. He is always walking into our lives. Why? Because He wants to be your friend.

¹³ There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. (John 15:13-14)

Do you ever think of Jesus as your friend? We think of Him as Lord, Master, King and even servant. But I'm not sure many relate to Jesus as their friend. It feels almost disrespectful to call God a friend. But that is what He wants and He shows us what that means in **John 15**.

If you want to know whether or not you are a friend of God look at whether or not you OBEY Him. If you are not living in obedience to God then your friendship is weak. Jesus says that the key sign to being his friend is that we obey what He says. A good friend doesn't just avoid doing wrong or bad things. A true friend does the right things. God wants His friends to do what is right.

Now you may think this friendship sounds one sided. Why do we have to do the right things and be obedient in order to be Jesus friend? Because Jesus is the perfect friend. He always does the right things and never messes up. He is perfect in all His ways and because He is perfect you can always count on Him. You and I are the weak point in this friendship – yet Jesus still calls us His friend.

But Jesus doesn't want fair weather friends. There are a lot of people who like Jesus for what they can get from Him. When He walked this earth there was always a line up for His services. Free lunches, good wine, healings and miracles. When He did those things He was the most popular guy around. But when He started challenging those crowds and telling them they needed to love Him and obey Him and do what was right, many of them turned away.

If you want a friendship with God you need to make time for it. If you don't make time for your earthly friends, then they aren't really your friends. If God is going to be your best friend than you must give Him your best time. **Here's the point** – you will become a friend of God when you choose to become a friend of God.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, what kind of friend am I to you? What do I need to do or change to become a better friend?

READ: Colossians 3:12-14, Philippians 2:3

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Pray for a friend in your life who has a need. Maybe they need a healing, provision, salvation or wisdom. Whatever it is hold your friend(s) up in prayer today.

MEMORIZE: *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.*

–John 15:4

DAY 6

OBEDIENCE

Did you know that the only way you can have faith is to obey? Faith always involves obedience – otherwise it's not faith!

There is a story in **Acts 12** where the Apostle Peter is in prison and is going to be put on trial and probably have his head cut off the next morning and so the church decides to get together to pray for his deliverance.

As they pray an angel shows up in Peter's cell and unlocks his chains and leads him out of the prison to the street and then disappears. Peter thinks it's all just a dream until he comes to his senses and realizes, "*Wow. This is real.*" So he makes his way to the house where the prayer meeting for him is being held and knocks on the door. A young girl named Rhoda answers, sees Peter, shuts the door and goes and tells everyone that Peter is on the porch.

You'd think there would have been cheering, chest bumping and high fives all around as they celebrate God answering their prayer. But that's not what they do.

'You're crazy' they say. "Stop interrupting us. This is serious business praying for Peter to be released. Everyone back on your knees and keep praying."

They keep hoping for a miracle ignoring that their miracle is waiting outside the door.

Now you may read that story and conclude that those gathered for prayer had no faith. But I want to show you that it is a story of incredible faith. They had all gathered to do what God asked them to do. **PRAY!** They were asking and knocking and not giving up. They prayed in faith for God to do something and were surprised when He did. Have you ever found yourself in that place? Moments where you did what God asked you to do but not really all that confident that God would come through? But you

obeyed anyway!

You may not have realized it but you did something that was integral to exercising faith. You obeyed!

Here's the point: The key to faith is obedience. You can have a positive outlook on things or a negative outlook on things and still get the same results when it comes to faith. Why? Because faith is not exercised by how positive you are and it is not stunted by how negative you may be. **Faith is defined by how obedient you are!**

That's why Jesus said in **John 15:10** - "*When you obey my commands you remain in my love*" When you spend your life doing what Jesus tells you to do you end up living a life of faith AND you will rest in His deep love for you.

Do you desire more faith and trust in God? Commit to telling Him that your answer is "YES" to whatever He asks.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, is there any area in my life where I am not living in faith because of disobedience? Where do you want me to become more obedient?

READ: John 15, Luke 17:3-10, Proverbs 3:5-6

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: What prayer in your life are you having a hard time believing God will answer? Pray for it anyway. Exercise your faith by being obedient and praying for whatever situation that is on your mind and heart.

DAY 7

GODLINESS

In his book – *Outliers* – Malcolm Gladwell writes that the average professional or expert spends 10,000 hours practicing their craft before they reached expert level. Success takes work, practice and focus. It's no different when it comes to our relationship with God.

So what about you? How much time do you put into your relationship with God? **Do you have the habit of being godly in whatever you do and wherever you go?** I know, that's a humbling question. No one is godly in every situation. Yet, that is exactly what God wants from us.

Look at what Paul wrote to Timothy – “*train yourself to be godly. “Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.” 9 This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it.*” (1 Timothy 4:7-9).

Paul wants Timothy to become godly and the implication is that it takes time and training to become a godly person. The fact is, godliness doesn't just happen. In order to stay connected to Jesus we play a part. Godliness is also the only thing that will last in our lives. It promises “...*benefits in this life and in the life to come.*” But godliness will cost you.

If you want to pursue a relationship with God and have His character and His attitude it's going to cost you something. It's not an easy way. To know Jesus means that you are going to have to give things up. In fact if your decision to follow Jesus has cost you nothing then you haven't encountered or embraced Him. Jesus said – “*If you want to follow me you must deny yourself.*” (Matthew 16:24-26) It's no longer about yourself, your desires or your urges. Jesus makes it clear that if you want to find your life you have to first lose it. That's not fun. But anyone who loses their life for God's sake will find it. Godliness involves sacrifice.

So what does that mean for you? This might be good advice for a young preacher 2000 years ago, but how do I receive it and apply it?

You do what Paul told Timothy to do. You discipline yourself and you practice and apply what you know about God. The more you grow in knowledge the more you can apply to your life.

Godliness is an action. It is a life of devotion to God and it is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus. It's a life long journey.

So here are a few questions to ask yourself at the end of each day as you train for living a godly life.

- Do I want everyone to know what I said today?
- Do I want everyone to know what I did today?
- Do I want everyone to know what I thought today?
- How did I handle my difficulties today?
- Were my thoughts and motives pure today?

Here's the point: Godliness begins and grows with daily decisions. Take some time each day and add these questions to your life to help determine how you are growing in godliness.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, in what area or areas of my life do you want to help me become godlier? What is one character trait that you want to more fully develop in me?

READ: 1 Timothy 4:7-16, James 2:14-19

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Pray that God would give you opportunities this week that He would use to develop you into a more godly person.



DAY 8

THANKFULNESS

I've got a question for you. How often are you thankful? Do you tend to give thanks only at thanksgiving or family gatherings? When the stuffing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie are all gone are you still thankful? When you bite into that sandwich filled with leftover turkey are you still overcome with gratitude for everything you shared on thanksgiving weekend? Or have you moved on?

It's easy to do. To ease back into taking our life, friends and families for granted. People do it all the time. For a few days every year we all stop and think and reflect on how we're blessed to live in a free country and how we're better off than most of the world. We thank God for our health, our homes, our kids, and afternoon football. When we sit down and eat our turkey dinner surrounded by the smiles and banter of the people we love, we're reminded that we really do have a lot to be thankful for.

But then the pressures of life start up again and our thankful hearts are quickly overcome with the sin of forgetfulness. We forget what we have - causing us to strive for more. We forget what we are - and so we work to become what everyone around us says we should be. Before we know it we find ourselves leaning into the pressures around us replacing our heart of thankfulness with a spirit of entitlement.

It's true isn't it? Our culture is not naturally thankful. Turn on the news and most of the stories are about people fighting for their rights. They want more money, more time off, smaller class sizes, larger pensions and less work hours. I'm not saying we should never take a stand and fight for things we believe in. All I am suggesting is that when you do, have some perspective. Be thankful. Your life isn't as bad as you think it is.

When we remain and stay connected to Jesus, thankfulness will become a natural response and posture in our lives.

I want to challenge you to practice thankfulness. What if for the next week

when you wake up you thank God for something or someone in your life. If you really want to get radical try thanking God for the hard things in your life because you realize that God often does His best work through trials and struggles?

The Bible tells us it's God's will for us to be "...*thankful in all circumstances...*" (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**). I know, it sounds ridiculous but God knows that when we learn to be thankful in every circumstance we end up living our lives with a right perspective. God knows that a thankful heart is the perfect cure for an entitled heart and this will only transpire as long as we stay connected to Jesus.

So, why not start now. Go ahead. Name something that you're thankful for. I'm serious. What is it? Now say it. Write it down. Tell someone. And then do it again tomorrow and then again the next day. Keep practicing thankfulness. It'll not only change your outlook it'll change your life.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Make a list of all the things you can think of that you are thankful for. Keep writing until you run out of things to write.

READ: Psalm 100:1-5, Psalm 107:1, Psalm 136:1-3, Luke 17:11-18

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Use the list of things you are thankful for that you just wrote down and go through them thanking god for each circumstance, thing or person on your list.

MEMORIZE: *Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

–1 **Thessalonians 5:16-18**



DAY 9

SUCCESS

What is necessary for living a life of success? Money? Knowing the right people? Being at the right place at the right time? **What do you think?** And does God want you to be successful? If so, what does success look like? I'm sure we could have a spirited conversation on this topic but let me just tell you what the key to success in all of life is – **confidence!** When we are confident we are successful. The problem is that fear, either of failure or the unknown or a combination of the two keep us from being confident.

Lack of confidence has been the demise of many opportunities for success. **So how do you become confident?** Connect to Jesus! He said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing"* (**John 15:5**). Did you catch the last part of His statement? Apart from being connected to Jesus we can do nothing! What does that mean? We all know people who don't know Jesus and who are wildly successful. They are rich, smart, influential and even use their success to do good things.

But that's not what Jesus is talking about. You can have success in this world without being successful for God. That's why many Christians put a lot of stock in their own abilities and materialism. Money, stuff and comfort is how the world defines success whereas God defines success when we use our money, stuff and willingness to become uncomfortable to build His kingdom.

The world's definition of success involves putting our confidence in ourselves. Success God's way is putting our confidence in Him. That means for many of us we may have to change how we think, act, spend, talk and play.

Paul writes in **2 Timothy 3:1-4**;

"You should know this... that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and

ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God.”

There is a whole lot of self-confidence wrapped up in that passage. Maybe you see yourself in this description somewhere. If so, God has better plans for you. He wants you to be successful in a very different way than how the world tries to define it.

Success in God’s eyes is finishing the task He has given you to fulfill on this earth.

“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” (Philippians 1:6)

God has a plan for your life and He wants you to complete it. You were created with purpose and your purpose is to glorify God. Don’t miss out on what God has planned for you by settling for what you can accomplish on your own.

His purposes are eternal and they are fulfilled by staying connected to Jesus in every area of your life.

Want to experience godly success? Remain in Jesus and then do whatever He tells you.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, what are the purposes and tasks that you have created me to fulfill? Where in my life am I confusing godly success with worldly success?

READ: John 15, 2 Timothy 3:1-4:22

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Visit your prayer goals on page 10 and pray through your lists.

MEMORIZE: *Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

-1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Join us tomorrow (January 16) for A Day of Prayer in the Main Street Chapel from 6am to 5pm. Join us throughout the day in the chapel to pray for our church, community and nation. There will be prayer ministers in the chapel all throughout the day to pray with you and for you as well as a prayer focus sheet to follow. Feel free to drop in for as long as you can



DAY 10

GOSPEL

You may already know what the word “*Gospel*” means but if you don’t let me remind you. **Gospel** means “*Good News*.” The Gospel is what we share with those who need to know the good news of who Jesus is. The Gospel is the message that Jesus died for our sins and offers salvation to all as a gift. The Gospel is what we are called to “go into all the world” and proclaim. The Gospel is good news!

But the Gospel is for more than just those who don’t believe or know.

The Gospel is also for those who are already following Jesus. So often the Gospel is seen as the springboard for following Jesus, but the Gospel is not just our first step to knowing God but it is the entire journey. The Gospel is not only how we begin our walk with Jesus but it is also what we need to continue to grow in Jesus. In the Gospel, this good news are all the resources we need for Christian growth.

Jesus said “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.”

(John 15:1)

If a plant is going to grow and be productive it will need to be pruned. The process of pruning can look ugly. A plant can actually look like its dead. But a Gardner who knows what they are doing will never cut away anything that would kill the plant. They know exactly what to cut away – but it can look like a disaster.

That’s what God does in our lives. He uses the Good News of the Gospel as the pruning shears in our lives to makes us more like Him. He cuts away things that we love more than Him and strips away things that we depend on more than Him. He will do whatever needs to be done to infuse the Gospel into our hearts.

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.” (John 15:4).

Jesus is committed to making sure that we stay connected to Him. He is the vine and the vine is where the life is for the branch. Another word for “remain” is “abide.” We are to abide in Christ. The Greek word for “Abide” literally means to “*make your home in.*” We are to make ourselves at home in Jesus and then the Good News of His Gospel will flow into and through us. To make ourselves at home in Christ (Abide in Him) is not about a list of rules to follow but it means to rest in Him. It is not about the things you are to do for Him but it’s living and resting in the thoughts He has about you.

When we remain or abide in Christ we are living in His grace!

Abiding in Jesus is not living your life striving to do things for God but living your life in response to what God has done for you.

That is the good news of the Gospel.

As you continue to live for Jesus focus on what He has done for you instead of what you can do for Him. When you do you will find that your life begins to change and you will become more and more like Jesus. Then, what you do will be a direct result of what God has done and is doing IN you.

That’s the Gospel and that’s Good News!

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, where do I need the Good News of your Gospel to penetrate my heart? Where to I need it to teach me and lead me closer to you? Is there an area of my life where I have not let the Gospel form me? Lord, please tell me what you think about me?

READ: Romans 1:16, Colossians 3:1-16

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?



DAY 11

PERSEVERANCE – PART 1

The older I get the more I need to be aware of my health. Staying in shape does not come as easy as it used to. What happened naturally as a teenager through normal activity now has to be scheduled into my life. And so every week I have as part of my schedule visits to the gym.

I don't always like the gym. It's early. It's painful. I sweat a lot. But the more I go the healthier I become. The key to being healthy is to persevere.

I know in my life there have been times where I exercised for a while and then gave up. I've been told that many people give up just before they begin to see the changes they were hoping for in their bodies. Why do they give up? Because they end up being led by their emotions rather than their choices. They lack perseverance.

What is true in exercise is also true in the Christian life. If you want to grow and become spiritually mature you will have to learn to persevere.

Jesus didn't mince words when he said, *"Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned."* When you commit to connecting your life to Jesus you will be able to persevere and be faithful through the struggles, doubts and trials that will come your way.

Now let me be honest with you for a moment.

Sometimes I don't feel like being nice to people. Sometimes I don't feel like being friendly. Sometimes I want to be a grump. I want to be a grouch. Sometimes I don't feel like serving my wife. Sometimes I don't feel like putting her first. Sometimes I don't feel like helping my kids out. Sometimes I don't feel like talking to you. Sometimes I don't feel like reading my Bible. Sometimes I don't feel like talking to God.

Do you ever have similar "sometimes" in your life?

But do you know what I'm discovering? When I don't feel like it is usually the time I need to do those things the most. And when I do those things even when I don't feel like it, God does something inside of me and he grows me up a little each time I persist in something even when I don't feel like it. That's the secret of spiritual growth and maturity.

Are you are thinking of giving up on something?

Maybe it's your marriage. It's just getting too hard. Some of you are getting ready to give up on school because it's just way too difficult. Or maybe you're ready to throw in the towel on your kids and the dreams and hopes you had for them. Maybe you are ready to give up on the hope of ever getting married. Some of you think your finances are out of reach. You think there's no use doing a budget because it will never get any better. Some of you feel like your health situation is not going to get resolved. It's pretty hopeless so you justify your feelings of bitterness and anger towards others and God. Giving up is the rational thing to do.

But what if God is up to something else in your life? What if He is using what you are going through to develop perseverance in your life? What if you ASKED Him to develop perseverance in your life in the midst of your struggles?

I've found that when you're in those pressure situations, when you feel like quitting, when you feel like throwing in the towel, that's when the Holy Spirit does some of his best work in developing perseverance in us. He will encourage you. He will whisper to you in those times. His still small voice will come to you and say, "Come on, don't quit. Come on, keep going. Persevere. You can do it!" Perseverance means you see the project through to the bitter end. So don't jump ship when the waves of adversity are crashing all around you and making the ride very uncomfortable. Stay at it. Persevere. Just finish.

Don't disconnect from your Savior. He is for you and He is with you. Your breakthrough is just around the corner.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, where in my life am I tempted to give up and quit? What are the areas of my life where you want me to persevere?



DAY 12

ASKING PRAYER

But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! -John 15:7

Most people are not comfortable with asking others for something, especially when it comes to asking for help or for a favor. We fight feelings of shyness, fear of rejection, being a burden or just a strong sense of independence. We all have our reasons for not asking.

I remember sitting down with a group of wealthy business men while studying for my Master's Degree and asking them about giving and generosity. In this case all these men had a gift for giving and had modelled generosity. Collectively they had given away millions of dollars to fund Kingdom work all over the world. I asked them what the best way was for people to approach them for financial help. All of them confirmed that the best way to get money from them was to simply ask clearly and ask boldly. They shared that they seldom gave money to people who only communicated a vision or a need. They wanted and waited for people to clearly ask. If people failed to ask they didn't give. When people boldly asked they gave something almost every time.

Sounds a lot like what we read in **James 4:2** – “...*you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.*”

I think God loves to hear big clear bold asks of Him. He doesn't respond well to reluctance and when we are reluctant or feel like a burden we will never boldly ask God for anything. Which is sad because prayer is essentially asking. Asking is the very essence of praying. You aren't really praying if you are not asking.

So, I want to challenge you to begin asking. When you pray be bold. Be clear. Ask God for what you need. He loves that.

We need to remember that God is able to fill every request we place on

Him. He is eternally resourceful and incredibly powerful. There is nothing He can't do and there is no need He can't supply. He is the answer to your sickness. He is the answer to your struggle and has the exact breakthrough you need to overcome. He has all the answers to your questions and is able to provide whatever you lack.

So keep on asking. Don't give up. Keep your most important requests on the frontline of your prayer life. When Jesus tells the story of the persistent widow in **Luke 18** the writer prefaces the parable with these words, "One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up." There is something about a commitment to asking that deepens our prayer life and that draws us into a greater dependence on God. This is not the only place Jesus teaches us to keep asking. In **Luke 11** He tells another parable of a man who keeps knocking on his neighbors door until he gets the bread that he needs to feed his guest. All throughout Jesus ministry he seems to persistently ask us to be persistent in asking Him.

So why not try it. Whatever you have stopped asking God for or God to do, put it back on your list and start asking and then ask some more. Don't stop asking.

"And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." (Luke 11:9-10)

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, is there anything in my life I have given up on asking you for? What is it in my life that you want me to keep asking and bringing before you?

READ: Matthew 11:24, Matthew 7:7-11, John 15:7

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?

DAY 13

PERSECUTION

“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.” (John 15:18-19)

If you are going to follow Jesus it will end up costing you something at some point. We shouldn't be surprised though. Jesus told us himself that we will be hated because of Him. But why? Why should we expect the world to hate us?

Simple. **Because you are not of this world!**

This world is not your home. If you feel comfortable or “at home” in this world you should take some time and carefully examine your relationship with Jesus. He told us that we are not to live like this world is our home.

The world will hate you because you follow Jesus.

The world hates Jesus because of what He says and does. He exposes hypocrisy. He calls out sin and He tells us that He is the only way to God. We know these to be acts of Jesus love for us. The world sees it as an attack on who they are.

- If the world rejected Jesus, it will reject you.
- If the world hated Him, the world will hate you.
- If the world persecuted Him, the world will persecute you.

Plan for it. Expect it. But don't live in fear. When it happens you are blessed.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. *“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven.” (Matthew 5:10-12)*

All around the world Christians are paying a high price for following Jesus. Consider the following:

- 322 Christians are killed for their faith every month.
- 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed every month.
- 772 forms of violence (beatings, kidnappings, rape, arrest, etc.) are committed against Christians every month.
- Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or neighbors because of their faith
- At least 7100 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons in 2015.

Take some time today and pray for your brothers and sisters around the world who are paying deeply for their commitment and love for Jesus Christ.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, am I more comfortable with this world or the world to come? Do I put more hope in this life or the life to come?

READ: 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 Peter 4:12-14, Matthew 5:44

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Thank God for the freedom we have in our country to believe in Jesus. Pray for those around the world who are paying a great price for their devotion to Christ. Ask God to help you live with a greater urgency for the Gospel and that God will hold back the persecution that is coming so that we can spread His message and truth freely.

For more information on the persecuted church visit www.vomcanada.com

MEMORIZE: *Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

-1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



DAY 14

PRAISE

What do you think of when you hear the word “PRAISE?” I’m guessing probably not much. It really isn’t a word that we use often in our vocabulary. Yet I can guarantee that you did some praising recently. For many of the men reading this you gave praise to your favorite football team on Sunday afternoon. For the ladies you praised the new outfit your friend picked out. As parents you praised your kids for something they did or didn’t do. We all gave praise to something or someone throughout our week.

But what about God? Did your praise Him?

Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD or fully declare his praise? (Psalm 106:1-2)

Praise the LORD! Let all that I am praise the LORD. I will praise the LORD as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God with my dying breath. (Psalm 146:1-2)

When was the last time you intentionally PRAISED the Lord? All throughout Scripture we are told to Praise the Lord. Praise is a key component to staying connected to Jesus. To praise is to “*express warm approval or admiration.*” “Praise” is something we do as well as something we express. Praise keeps us connected to Jesus and helps us live with an awareness of His presence helping us to experience Him in our lives (**see Psalm 16:11**). When we praise the Lord we are filled with His peace and power (**see Philippians 4:6-7**) and we learn that praise is a powerful spiritual weapon against the forces of evil (see 2 Chronicles 20).

You were created to Praise the Lord.

But how? **How should we Praise God?**

- With our whole heart.
- **Psalm 9:1** says, “I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done.”
- With our voices and our posture. We are to sing, clap and shout our praise. We also praise God by bowing down before Him and declaring His great attributes.
- **Psalm 147:1** says – “Praise the LORD! How good to sing praises to our God! How delightful and how fitting!”
- **Psalm 47:1** says, “Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise!”
- **Psalm 134:2** says, “Lift your hands toward the sanctuary, and praise the LORD.”
- **Psalm 95:6** says, “Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker...”

If you truly want to experience the presence of God then learn to give Him praise through the means that He tells us to do so. Praise Him with all of your heart. Praise Him with your voice. Shout His name and tell Him how great He is (if you’re by yourself go ahead and try it). Don’t be shy. I’ve seen and heard many of you shout out your praise to your favorite sports team. In fact, many of you don’t care what people think when you shout and clap and fall on your knees when a point is scored. Don’t you think Jesus deserves at least the same passion and praise you give to your favorite team?

Put some worship music on and lift your hands to Jesus. Fall on your knees and bow before Him. Give Him praise today with your life, your voice and your posture. Start praising God in your secret place and let that carry over into your public worship.

“Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name” (Hebrews 13:5)

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, what is one visible expression that you want me to begin to step out and praise you with?

READ: Psalm 150:1-6

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

DAY 15

FORGIVE

In **Matthew 18** Jesus tells us a story about millions of dollars, a few thousand dollars and a very upset King. In His story there is a guy who owes the King 600 million dollars. We don't know how he got into such a hole but it's a deep one. Then there is another guy who owes roughly \$10,000. Now in those days you could not declare bankruptcy. If you owed money you had to pay it and if you couldn't pay it your lender had the right to throw you into what is called a 'debtors prison.' There were two main solutions for paying a debt: the sale of the person's property to pay the debt or be sent to debtor's prison. Debtor's prison was not a punishment so much as a means to get the debtor's relatives and friends to pay off his debt.

In light of the how incredibly large this guy's debt was, there was no way his family and friends could pay it. He could never work it off and the sale of his estate wouldn't even come close to covering such a massive debt. So his property and lands were seized to be sold for what the King could get for them and his family was ordered to be sold into slavery -- a common fate for those who couldn't pay a debt.

So, you can imagine in those days most people lived within their means. Not a lot of credit cards being racked up.

But in Jesus story, this guy begs and pleads to the King who has a moment of mercy and says to his employee, "*Your debt is forgiven. You don't have to pay it back.*" This should have been a good day for this guy. Instead of kicking the dog when he got home he probably should have kissed it. This guy just got handed to him a miracle. Not only does he not have to pay the debt back but his wife and kids were saved and he got to keep all his stuff. But for some reason the depth of forgiveness towards him doesn't sink in. On his way home he runs into a colleague who owes him \$10,000 and he freaks out and demands that the guy pay him. But the guy can't. So he has him thrown into debtor's prison.

Word gets back to the King. He's not pleased and finds his ungrateful employee and reinstates his debt. The employee is thrown into prison where he will stay until he breathes his last breath.

What happened in this parable? The king forgave a debt that could not be repaid. That's what God did for us. He paid our debt which we cannot pay back and so Jesus pays it for us. God forgives our sin and gives us back our life. Then, people do us wrong and we forget the debt that we have been forgiven of.

In this story Jesus gives us a clear picture of what His Kingdom is like. He begins his story by setting the tone and then ends it by telling us that our Heavenly Father will act the exact same way as the King did in this story if we do not forgive. That's why forgiveness is so important to God. In fact it is not just an important thing but it is an essential thing when it comes to living and entering God's Kingdom.

It's why you need to be connected to Jesus. If you aren't – you will never understand the power of forgiveness.

Here's the point that Jesus wants us to wrestle with: **Forgiveness always begins with a look in the mirror.**

There are times when I look in the mirror and all I can see is the wrong that was done to me. That is what overwhelms me and it clouds the true reflection of what I need to see. Sometimes – I just need to take the time and walk through my life and remind myself of all the sinful things I have done. When I was cruel to people, the little lies I have told. I think of those moments when I thought the worst of a person or even hoped the worst for them. And when I take the time to do that, the reflection in the mirror becomes a whole lot more clear and I see my 600 million dollar debt with incredible clarity and the few thousand dollars owed to me doesn't seem all that important anymore.

The secret to forgiving others is to get a well-polished mirror.

And when you look in that mirror ask Jesus to help you see what He sees. Connect to Him. Seek Him. Ask Him. He is faithful to forgive and is willing to help you do the same.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord is there anyone I need to forgive? Show me to see what you see when I look at my life?

READ: Matthew 18

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** do you want me to confess?

PRAY: Ask God to give you a heart of forgiveness. Ask Him to show you how great His forgiveness for you is. Ask Him to help you forgive where you are struggling to forgive.

MEMORIZE: *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

-Colossians 2:7

All Church Fast – January 22-24

Join with us for the next three days for a focused 3 day fast within our 21 day fast. We encourage all those who are able to join us in a 3 day food fast from January 22-24 where we will all focus together in our personal time praying for our church, families, community, our personal prayer goals and for a fresh experience of God in our lives.

Ask Jesus to show you at least 3-5 things or areas to pray for and then take some extra time within the next three days to pray more persistently.



DAY 16

LEGACY

When I was in college I noticed that there were a bunch of guys that seemed to always have all the latest music playing on their stereos. I learned they had joined a music club where all they paid was 1 penny plus shipping and handling for 12 CD's giving them all the cool sounds of the 80's (although I'm not sure 'cool' and '80's' go together). It looked like a great deal to me even though a few of my friends told me it was a scam and to read the fine print. I ignored them and immediately went to the student lounge to search the seat cushions for loose change. After I found enough for shipping and handling I picked my 12 CD's, sent my penny and signed up. Before long I was playing and enjoying the sweet sounds of my youth until I began to get letters from the record company demanding that I buy another 24 CD's at regular price within the next 2 years. It was one of those moments that led me to live the next two years regretting what I thought was a good decision at the time.

Have you ever done something like that? Made a decision that resulted in long term frustration? It happens all the time, every day people make decisions that they still are paying for today. That's why it's important to make sure our decisions help us **become** more rather than just get more.

Let me explain. One day when you are gone your kids and your grandkids are going to talk about you. When they do, what do you want them to say? "*Grandpa was a great golfer.*" "*Mom sure knew how to cook a turkey.*" "*Dad really worked hard.*" Now, those things are not necessarily bad but if that's all they have to say about you, then you probably lived your life getting and doing more rather than becoming more. Doing more may create some memories, but becoming more is what leaves a legacy. When you leave a legacy people remember you not for what you did or for what you had but for what you were. They'll remember how you treated other people; how you extended forgiveness or how you thought the best about others. Legacy leavers are people who are remembered more for who they were not simply for what they did or what they had.

So how do you live your life in such a way that you leave a lasting impact? Jesus tells us in **John 15:16**, *“I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit...”* Staying connected to Jesus is how you will become more rather than having all your focus on getting more. The Bible says that God wants to *“...point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus”* (**Ephesians 2:7**). In other words even though you may have regrets you don’t have to live with them.

By uniting with Jesus you trade your frustrations for God’s grace and kindness building a foundation of influence that will outlive your life.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord what changes do you want me to make in my life so that I live my life **BECOMING** more rather than just trying to get more? Is there anything specific you want me to change or where you want me to give and invest my time and money in order to leave a legacy that honors you?

READ: Psalm 145:4, Matthew 6:20-21

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Pray through your prayer goals on page 10. Pray that God will use your life to make a lasting and eternal impact for Him.

MEMORIZE: *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

-Colossians 2:7

Join us tomorrow morning (January 23) for “Drop in Prayer” in the Chapel from 7-9am. Come and join others as we pray for our church and community. A prayer list will be provided.

DAY 17

REWARDS

When you play a game do you play to win or do you play to participate? I hope you play to win. Now I know what you may be thinking, “life is not always about winning.” I agree, but only as it pertains to earthly things. When it comes to eternal things – Jesus wants you to win! I know this because the Bible talks a lot about rewards and finishing races. Here are a few examples:

- **1 Corinthians 9:24** - *Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!*
- **Philippians 3:14** - *I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.*
- **Colossians 3:23-24** - *Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 24 Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward.*
- **James 1:12** - *God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*
- **2 John 1:8** - *Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked so hard to achieve. Be diligent so that you receive your full reward.*
- **Revelation 22:12** - *“Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds.”*

Have you ever thought about how you are “running the race” God has given you and how to finish it? Do you want to finish it? Look at what Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 4:7-8**:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.

When Paul speaks of finishing the race he is talking about completing everything God had prepared for him in advance to do (**Ephesians 2:10**) and that he wasn't disqualified along the way.

God's will is that you finish the race He has called you to. He wants you to complete the tasks He has given you. He wants you to be fruitful and effective and think about this – God wants to reward you for finishing the race.

A lot of people struggle with this idea of rewards. But the Bible tells us that many will receive them. Heaven and eternity with Jesus is the ultimate reward for all who would accept and receive His gift of salvation. But once we do we are rewarded for how we lived our life on earth. What did we do with the time, talents and treasures God gave us to steward?

How are you using what God has given you? How are you running the race He's put you in? I pray you will steward God's gifts in your life and that you will finish the race you're running so that you can kneel before your Savior and receive the reward He has for you because of the good deeds you've done.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, show me where in my life I am not running the race as I should. Am I running the path you want me to run or am I running my own race?

READ: Colossians 3:23-24, Romans 2:6, Philippians 3:14

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Ask the Lord for strength and a desire to run the race He has put you in. Ask Him for clarity and to show you the right track that He wants you to run.

MEMORIZE: *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

-Colossians 2:7

DAY 18

FRUITFULNESS

Did you know that Jesus wants you to be effective? He wants to use your life to get things done for him? He never intended for us to live our life just existing. He wants us to be fruitful.

“When you produce much fruit you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.” (John 15:8).

It was early in the morning and no one was saying much as they made their way back to Jerusalem. Jesus was ahead of the group who were all wondering why they couldn't have taken a few moments to have some breakfast before leaving. But then, just a few minutes into the trip Jesus stops and walks over to a fig tree to eat some figs.

The disciples were glad and began to make their way over to help themselves as well when they hear Him raise his voice and say, *“May you never produce fruit again!”*

They all froze. Jesus words caught them off guard. *“Was he talking to that fig tree?” “I guess Jesus isn't a morning person after all”*. As Jesus backed away from the tree one of the disciples walked over and saw that it had no figs on it. But that wasn't all he noticed. The fig tree had withered. It had literally died in front of them.

Clearly talking to your plants may not be as effective as we think.

When Jesus saw their amazed and confused faces He turned to them. They could see that this was going to be another one of those teaching moments. As Jesus spoke He wasn't angry or upset as they first thought. He just wanted to make a point.

“I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. You can pray for anything,

and if you have faith, you will receive it.”

Here’s the point: Jesus wants His disciples to understand that He is into things producing what they were designed to produce.

The problem is that many of us who claim to follow Jesus have a hard time producing what we are meant to produce because we have forgotten who and whose we are. My productivity or my fruitfulness is based upon an understanding of who I am. Who am I? I am a child of God and Christ is IN ME and I am IN CHRIST.

Remember what Jesus said in **John 15:4**? *“Remain in me and I will remain in you.”*

When we get a hold of that truth it changes everything. If you are a Christ follower you have the resurrected Jesus living IN you. This is why self-help doesn’t work. Self-help is actually an oxymoron.

Self-help can’t help and so we get frustrated because when we turn to **self-help** it does little to help. Our self may give some suggestions but they are of very little help because self can’t help. And if you ask self to help and let **self-help** when self offers help you’re going to be disappointed because you are at some point going to have to ignore self and ask someone else to help you get out of the hole that self put you in.

Self is unreliable, undependable. Self cannot be trusted or counted on. Self can’t bail you out. Self can’t deliver you or set you free or change your life. You can promote self as much as you want but in the end self can’t help and if it could then God would have just given us all a gift card to Amazon where we could order all the self-help books we wanted.

Instead – Jesus came, conquered death and said *‘I’ll deliver you from your SELF’*, which means you are capable through Christ. Now, imagine if every Christ follower reading this took hold of this truth? That because Christ is IN you then you are CAPABLE. Talk about productivity, impact and fruitfulness.

Christ through you can do everything that God wants done. You and I are capable through Christ. **Whatever He calls you to do, he will equip you to do.** You’re not that good on your own, but with Him you can do everything He calls you to do. That’s the way He planned it. You were never meant to just exist. You were created to bear fruit.

In the front of my Bible I have written a statement of truth. It’s a simple statement and every time I open my Bible I am reminded of this truth.

This is what it says – **“EVERYTHING I NEED – GOD IS! GOD IS – EVERYTHING I NEED!”**

It is the same for you today. I want you to reflect, and embrace this truth in your life. What are the things in your life that are keeping you from being fruitful and effective? What is it that is holding you back from living the kind of fruitful life that God has created you for?

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, is my life producing what you intended for me to produce? What areas of my life am I being unproductive? What do you want me to do or change so that I can become more productive and fruitful? Please show at least one action step you want me to take.

READ: Galatians 5:22-23, Galatians 6:8-9, Luke 6:43-45

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Visit your prayer goals on page 10. Pray through your lists today.

MEMORIZE: *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

-Colossians 2:7

DAY 19

PERSEVERANCE - PART 2

In baseball when a pitcher starts and finishes a game it's called a Complete Game. That doesn't happen very often. Pitchers are paid millions of dollars a year to start games without any expectation to finish. All they need to do is give a quality start and then around the fifth or sixth inning the coach calls the bullpen and relieves them. Wouldn't it be great if life was like that? If all that was expected of you and me was to have a quality start and then be relieved? How many wives would like to be provided with a relief husband once in a while? How many parents would welcome a relief teenager into their home when their own gets out of line? How many employees would love the benefit of bringing in a relief boss now and then? You get the picture. But that's not life is it? Life is more than simply having a quality start. **What's most important in life is how you finish.**

The Apostle Paul highlighted this truth when he wrote to the church in Corinth, *"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified."* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

The Christian life is a call to persevere and finish well. Yet, many who begin well fail to finish the race before them. That's why most people live with some kind of regret. Regrets surface in our lives because of the things we never finished. People say things like, *"I wish I finished my degree"* or *"I should have kept up with my exercise program."* Then there are the more serious regrets like choosing not to forgive that friend when things went sideways or giving up on your marriage when it got bumpy. Very seldom are our regrets about how we started and more about how we never finished something.

It's different with God. He's a finisher. The Bible says that *"...God who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally*

finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns” (Philippians 1:6). In other words, God doesn't need to be relieved. He always finishes the game. That's the assurance we have when we give our life to God. Now this doesn't mean that you will not have problems or that your heart will never get broken. It doesn't mean that you will never fail or have to wait or wrestle with doubts and disappointments. After all, that's life! What it does mean is that you can be certain that God is still pitching. He is still on the mound and is committed to finishing the game.

He calls us all to persevere and finish. Your legacy and even eternity depends on it. So don't quit. Keep going. God wants to remind you that he has begun a good work in you. Your regrets don't have to get the last word in your life. In spite of your choices, feelings, thoughts or actions when you surrender your life to God you can be certain of this one thing - He always finishes what He starts.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, what is one thing you are asking me to complete? What is one thing I can finish in the next month?

READ: Hebrews 12:1-13

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Ask God to show you what He wants you to specifically pray for today. Listen quietly and then respond in prayer as He speaks.

MEMORIZE: *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

-Colossians 2:7



DAY 20

TESTIFY

I wonder what went through his mind as he wrote those words that day. I'm sure his mind drifted back 30 years earlier when he spent three and half years with Jesus. He had watched Jesus heal people. Jesus teachings had changed his life. Then there was that day he actually got to walk on water. None of the other disciples could claim that on their resume.

But as great as all those things were, it was not those memories that came to Peter's mind as he wrote those words that day. I'm sure his hand trembled a bit and his heart raced as he put words to paper.

"...if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it." (1 Peter 3:15)

There's a story behind these words. Thirty years earlier before he wrote them Peter did something that I'm sure in his mind secured a place for him in hell. Someone asked him if he knew Jesus. Peter was sitting by the enemy's fire warming himself. He had just finished following the group of religious leaders who had taken Jesus prisoner. They had taken him to the High Priests home to put him on trial because they were tired of Jesus calling himself God and forgiving people's sins. To them that was blasphemy. And so the day had come. Jesus was arrested and was now being beaten, kicked and spit on.

Peter's blood was boiling. This was his friend. He had been handpicked by Jesus and had learned so much from Him. He cared for Him. And as he stared through the flames of the fire he could see the religious leaders and others giving false testimony in a mock trial about Jesus. And as they accused and shouted at Him, others were punching Him with their fists and spitting in His face.

It took everything to hold him back. All he could do was watch and wonder and wait.

Then it happened. The question came. She was probably no older than

13 or 14. She had been staring intently at Peter as he warmed himself by the fire. That's where we pick up the story.

“So they arrested him and led him to the high priest’s home. And Peter followed at a distance. The guards lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter joined them there. A servant girl noticed him in the firelight and began staring at him. Finally she said, “This man was one of Jesus’ followers!”

But Peter denied it. “Woman,” he said, “I don’t even know him!”

After a while someone else looked at him and said, “You must be one of them!”

“No, man, I’m not!” Peter retorted.

About an hour later someone else insisted, “This must be one of them, because he is a Galilean, too.”

But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Suddenly, the Lord’s words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.” And Peter left the courtyard, weeping bitterly.”

(Luke 22:54-62).

In that moment Peter was flooded with regret and shame and guilt. As Jesus is being beaten, mocked, falsely accused, and whipped – Peter – one of the men who had walked with Jesus for just over three years – denies Him. He says whatever he can to make sure they don't know that he knows Jesus.

But then, three days later Easter happens. Jesus who had been crucified rises from the dead. Jesus mother and some other women go to the tomb to grieve but when they get there the stone is rolled away and an angel greets them. He tells them that Jesus is risen and then says *“Go and tell the disciples, including Peter.”* Jesus wants to make sure that Peter knows He's alive because Peter is about to get another chance to tell the world who He is.

Peter runs to see for himself and then sees Jesus resurrected. For 40 days

he would walk around with the resurrected Christ. He would see the scars in his hands and his feet and for 40 days everything would become crystal clear. During those 40 days Peter would experience the redeeming power and forgiveness and grace of Jesus as He puts him back on track. And from that moment on Jesus would become the center of Peter's life.

When Peter penned those words - *"If someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it"* I can't help but think he had on his mind that moment when he denied Jesus. That moment when he didn't contend for what he believed. But it's different now. He lives the rest of his life doing what Jesus asked.

"But I will send you the Advocate - the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry." (John 15:26-27)

Peter lived his life in obedience to these words from Jesus. His life **TESTIFIED** to who Jesus is. But it didn't start out that way. I hope you can see that Peter was just like you and me. He was the guy at one point who did not know what to say and who didn't want to say anything and who in the end actually denied the one he served and knew.

Ever felt like Peter? Ever found yourself speechless and scared wanting to run from the opportunity to share your faith? In fact, you get nervous just thinking about it. Don't worry. You're in good company. The guy that God used to start the church is the same guy that denied Jesus. He is the same guy that pretended not to know Him when asked. He's the guy that literally turned his back on the one who saved his life. So be encouraged - there is hope for you and God wants to do the same work in you as He did in Peter.

Peter did not just write some words that day. Peter was not a man just telling us what to do. There was a story behind his instructions. He knew what it was like to be confronted with the Lordship issue in his life. He wept bitter tears knowing he had denied His Savior and God. He doesn't want you to make the same mistake. He wants you to make sure above all else you have settled the Lordship issue and then he wants you to be prepared and ready to give a reason for your faith.

Who can you testify to today about the love and grace of Jesus Christ? Ask Him. I know He will help you.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, who on my prayer list do you want me to pray for and share the Gospel with?

READ: Psalm 40:9-10, Romans 10:9-15

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** do you want me to confess?

PRAY: Pray for those on your prayer list who you are praying to respond to the love and forgiveness of Jesus. Pray that God will give you opportunities to share your faith with them.

MEMORIZE: *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

-Colossians 2:7

JOURNAL



DAY 21

LOVE

“This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.” – Jesus

I have a blunt and uncomfortable question for you. Here it is: “*Who do you hate?*” Who is it that you really don’t like? Who is that person that you can’t stand? Who is it? Who comes to mind?

Why don’t you like them? Is it the way they dress? Is it because they make more money than you? Do you think that they think they are better and smarter than you? Is it their background, their culture, where they are from? Maybe you don’t like them because they are lazy or what they said or how they look or what they did?

OK, next question. ***“Do you think God feels the same way about them as you do?”***

Before you answer that question you need to understand something about God. He knows what ***‘they’*** did. He knows what ***‘they’*** said. He knows how ***‘they’*** hurt you, ripped you off, ignored, dumped, trashed, stole, abused and discredited you. He knows your story. He knows your pain. He knows, and if He knows should He feel the same way about that person as you do? You may want to ponder that for a moment before you answer. I’ve discovered that most people express hatred based upon what they know. They know they’ve been hurt and they know what that person did and their knowledge becomes the fuel that feeds their hatred. After all, ***knowing something is always easier than loving someone.***

It’s the opposite for God. His knowledge does not limit His love. God doesn’t base His love for me on what He knows. Because God knows that I don’t measure up, He knows that I fail and hurt people. He knows that I can be inconsiderate, impatient, selfish and angry. He even knows the times in my life where I have demonstrated hatred. God knows all this because God knows everything and amazingly He still loves me.

In fact the Bible says that “*God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners*” (**Romans 5:8**). In other words God made the decision to love you and me in spite of what he knows about you and me. **Read that sentence again.** It should encourage you and challenge you to evaluate your life. You may think you’re justified in your hatred because of what you know, but that path only leads to a life of bitterness, resentment and un-forgiveness – which is really a miserable way to live. Yet, so many people do. Why? **Because knowing something is always easier than loving someone.** Maybe it’s time to surrender what you know so that you can be free to love the way God loves.

“This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.” – Jesus

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, is there anyone that I hate? Anyone I have not forgiven? Show me Lord.

READ: Matthew 5:43-48, 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, 1 John 4:8

After reading the assigned Scripture(s) ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions. Write what He shows you in your journal.

- What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** to you want me to confess?

PRAY: Ask the Lord to fill your heart with love. Read Matthew 5:43-48 again and then pray blessing over those who are your ‘enemies.’”

MEMORIZE: *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

-Colossians 2:7

TESTIMONY OF GOD'S POWER & FAITHFULNESS IN MY LIFE

Write down a testimony or story of how God has worked in your life these last 21 days. Did He answer a prayer? Did He do a work in your heart? Did He grow your character in some way? Did He lead you to opportunities to share His love and truth with someone? Whatever He did write it down to remind you of His power and faithfulness in your life.

(Be sure to share what God did with your spouse, Life Group or friend).

JOURNAL



PERSONAL PRAYER TARGETS

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4.

PRAY FOR THOSE IN AUTHORITY AND THOSE UNDER YOUR AUTHORITY.

MY GOVERNMENT

PRIME MINISTER _____

NATIONAL LEADERS _____

PROVINCIAL LEADERS _____

CITY LEADERS _____

MY FAMILY

SPOUSE _____

CHILDREN _____

PARENTS _____

SIBLINGS _____

EXTENDED FAMILY _____

MY CHURCH

LEAD PASTOR _____

PASTORAL AND CHURCH STAFF _____

MY LIFE GROUP LEADER _____

MY SMALL GROUP MEMBERS _____



PERSONAL PRAYER TARGETS

MY LIFE

EMPLOYER _____

CO-WORKERS _____

EMPLOYEES _____

TEACHERS/PROFESSORS _____

THOSE I INFLUENCE

CLOSE FRIENDS _____

THOSE WHO NEED GOD

1. PRAY THAT THE FATHER WOULD DRAW THEM TO JESUS

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him (John 6:44).

2. BIND THE SPIRIT THAT BLINDS THEIR MINDS

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).

3. LOOSE THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION (SONSHIP)

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

4. PRAY THAT OTHER BELIEVERS WILL CROSS THEIR PATHS AND ENTER INTO POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Matthew 9:38).

5. LOOSE THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION ON THEM SO THEY MAY KNOW GOD BETTER

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (Ephesians 1:17).



APPENDIX A

WHAT IS FASTING?

The goal of fasting is to experience God.

To learn what it means to practically put Him **FIRST** in our life. Fasting is to voluntarily abstain from eating/drinking for an extended period of time. “*Eating*” and “*drinking*” can represent anything that is holding you back. What you “consume” in terms of social food, intellectual food, spiritual food, and emotional food. Fasting helps you identify the things that distract you from growing in your relationship with God?

You may not even realize you have an addiction. For example, if you “have to have” coffee every day, and you are not willing to give it up, you are addicted. Maybe your fast needs to just be about coffee. Ask God and He will show you. Try to identify the things in your life that you are relying on that have nothing to do with God.

Everyone doing a physical fast should consider consulting a physician first. If you have medical issues, consider fasting TV, media, or social media. The point is that there is something God wants you to separate yourself from for three weeks so that you can see Him more clearly. Don’t cheat yourself by removing yourself from the fast entirely.

There are other benefits to fasting (breaking addictions, losing weight. etc.), however if you make those benefits the reason for fasting you will not experience God in the way He intended. A fast is not for YOUR needs or desires but to help you focus on the fact that your life is all about Jesus. A fast gets your eyes off your needs and on to your greatest need – the presence of God.

Here are some examples of fasting in the Bible:

- Special revelation - **Exodus 34:27-28**
- In times of war - **Judges 20:26**
- Courage and wisdom - **Esther 4:3,16**
- In times of grief - **Nehemiah 1:4, 2 Samuel 1:12, Samuel 31:13, 1 Chronicles 10:12**
- Spiritual recuperation - **1 Kings 19:1-9**
- Mourning - **Daniel 10:1-3**
- Repentance - **Jonah 3:5, Daniel 6:18**
- Ministry preparation - **Matthew 4:2**
- Spiritual power - **Mark 9:29**
- Ministry commissioning - **Acts 14:23**
- Set aside self for holiness - **1 Corinthians 7:5**
- Spiritual discipline - **1 Corinthians 11:24-28** (*Paul "fasted often"*)



PREPARING FOR FASTING

1. Prepare your heart. In **2 Chronicles 7:14** we read, *“if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”* The challenge for us is to open our hearts to Jesus and be willing to do what He says. Take time to confess and repent of your sin. Ask Jesus what he wants you to change in your life. What direction does he want you to walk? How much time does He want you to pray and read His Word. Tell God that you want to be fully surrendered and submitted to Him and His ways.

2. Check your motives. **Ephesians 3:1** says, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”* God’s heart is to assign spiritual blessings to His children. The problem is many of his children never discover those blessings. Fasting prepares you to hear and receive what God has for you. Maybe God wants to bless you with the spiritual blessing of wisdom, a fresh anointing in your life, powerful and effective prayers, a teaching gift or words of discernment and encouragement. His blessings are endless. Fasting helps us eliminate the things in our life that steal our focus on God and helps us see things about ourselves and God that we never knew.

3. Prepare your body. There are a lot of different fasts that you can choose to take part in (they are mentioned later in this article). When you choose to fast food be prepared for changes physically. You may initially feel sick or tired – **don't give up.** Press through those initial stages. Remember, this is not a game to see if you can eat less or how long you can resist posting on Facebook. Rather, it is all about experiencing God in a powerful and fresh way in your life. As you continue to fast, you will realize that you don't experience hunger pains as often as you thought you would. Without a preoccupation with food, you will be surprised at your ability to be sustained for a number of days without eating food and how you will take advantage of your time to seek Jesus more diligently

4. Order your schedule. As you begin your fast decide when and where you are going to take time to meet with God. As someone once said, *"People who don't make appointments with God end up being disappointed with God."* The question you are going to have to answer and settle is **"when you fast will you seek God, listen to Him and give Him the time He deserves?"** If you are fasting meals use those times to spend praying, reading God's Word and journaling. Don't let yourself become distracted – be intentional about spending scheduled time with God – if you do you can expect to hear Him clearly.



FASTING GUIDELINES

- Explain to your family in advance what you are doing.
- Request privacy from those who find out what you are doing.
- Ask them not to discuss it with you until your fast is over.
- Never complain or brag about your fast, and avoid talking about it.
- Establish an accountability partner for prayer & encouragement.
- Stay away from negative people.
- Spend as much time as possible alone in solitude and prayer.
- Acknowledge that your flesh cannot be trained, but must be crucified.
- Journal as you pray and meet with the Lord. Write down the miracles God does in your life!



TYPES OF FASTS

COMPLETE FAST

- **Drinking only liquids, typically water and/or light juices.**
- **Broth or soup may be included as options.**

SELECTIVE FAST

- **Removing certain elements from your diet.**
- **The Daniel Fast** - abstaining from meat, sweets, or bread; drink water and juice, and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables.

PARTIAL FAST (a.k.a. The Jewish Fast)

- **Abstaining from eating any type of food in the morning and afternoon.**
- **Fast during specific times of the day, e.g. 6AM-3PM, or from sunup to sundown.**

SOUL FAST

- **Common for:** anyone new to fasting food; those with health issues that prevent them from fasting food; those wanting to refocus specific areas of life that are out of balance.
- **Suggestions:** abstain from engaging in social media, shopping, watching television, etc.



DEALING WITH DOUBTS

Fasting is counter intuitive to what your body has come to expect. Your mind and your memory will initially try to convince you that what you are doing is not normal. Your body has been trained to eat at certain times every day and to feed the urges that you have always paid attention to. Your mind and your memory will do everything it can to bring you back into line with what has always been normal. This is what it means when Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:24** that *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*

Your “flesh” will encourage you and even beg you to give up and feed it. It is at that point that you will be faced with a decision: Do you give up or keep moving forward? When you feel as though you want to give up, you must ask yourself a few questions. Is the pain you are experiencing worth the prize you are pursuing? Is the prize you are pursuing worth the pain you are enduring? If you do give up, where and to what will you go back to? In **John 6:66**, the disciples were asked by Jesus if they wanted to go back to their old lifestyle. Peter said, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of life.”*



DEALING WITH PEOPLE

Should you tell people that you are fasting? Since fasting is a discipline of self-denial and consecration unto the Lord, constant discussion about it will be a distraction. Jesus said this about fasting in **Matthew 6:16-18**, *“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

Those are words worth heeding in order to experience the maximum benefits that come from fasting. Keep it between you and God as best as you can. If your fast lasts only one to seven days, it will be easy to conceal it. As time goes by and you begin to lose a considerable amount of weight, it will become more difficult to avoid questions about your appearance. Do your best to avoid looking dehydrated and keeping yourself well groomed. Eventually there will be those who find out that you are fasting, but you can turn this situation into an edifying one. There is a balance between drawing attention to yourself and giving glory to God. You have to decide when and how to discuss it, because your testimony can be used to encourage others to fast.



SAMPLE MENUS

SAMPLE MENU 1 FRUITS, VEGETABLES, JUICES & WATER

- **Breakfast** - Fruit smoothie with protein powder
- **Mid-morning Snack** - Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables
- **Lunch** - Raw vegetable salad with light dressing and vegetable broth soup
- **Mid-afternoon Snack** - Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables
- **Dinner** - Fresh salad with light dressing and steamed grilled vegetables

SAMPLE MENU 2 LIQUIDS ONLY

- **Breakfast** - Fruit smoothie with protein
- **Mid-morning Snack** - Herbal tea or vegetable broth soup
- **Lunch** - Raw juiced vegetables
- **Mid-afternoon Snack** - Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with protein
- **Dinner** - Vegetable juice or vegetable broth soup

SAMPLE MENU 3 MODIFIED DANIEL FAST

- **Breakfast** - 1 - 2 servings whole grains with fresh fruit juice
- **Mid-morning Snack** - Fresh fruit or fresh chopped vegetables
- **Lunch** - 1 - 2 servings whole grains; fresh salad with legumes and light dressing
- **Mid-afternoon Snack** - Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with protein
- **Dinner** - 1 - 2 whole grains; fresh salad with legumes and light dressing



THE DANIEL FAST

The concept of a Daniel fast comes from **Daniel 1:8-14** where it says, *“But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods. Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel. But he responded, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded.”*

Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. “Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,” Daniel said. “At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king’s food. Then make your decision in light of what you see.” The attendant agreed to Daniel’s suggestion and tested them for ten days.

Because Daniel and his three friends were servants of a pagan King (King Nebuchadnezzar) who ruled Babylon they were expected to follow the rules of the palace. They were to learn the beliefs, customs, laws and practices of the Babylonians which included their eating habits. Being Jewish, much of the dietary menus of the Babylonians were not in agreement with the Mosaic Law and thus labelled “unclean” to them. As a result Daniel asked if they could be excused from eating the meat that was most likely sacrificed to Babylonian false gods and idols.

They were granted permission to do this and in the end were seen as more healthy and fit than the others who ate the Babylonian food. Thus, the Daniel fast is simply a fast that consists of eating only fruits and vegetables and abstaining from meat. It is one example of how to deny yourself in order to grow closer to God. It is not a fast that is commanded in Scripture but rather an example of a fast that can be practiced in your life.

FOODS TO INCLUDE

All fruits. These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned. Fruits include but are not limited to apples, apricots, bananas, blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, cantaloupe, cherries, cranberries, figs, grapefruit, grapes, guava, honeydew melon, kiwi, lemons, limes, mangoes, nectarines, oranges, papayas, peaches, pears, pineapples, plums, prunes, raisins, raspberries, strawberries, tangelos, tangerines, watermelon



THE DANIEL FAST

All vegetables. These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned. Vegetables include but are not limited to artichokes, asparagus, beets, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chili peppers, collard greens, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, ginger root, kale, leeks, lettuce, mushrooms, mustard greens, okra, onions, parsley, potatoes, radishes, rutabagas, scallions, spinach, sprouts, squashes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, turnips, watercress, yams, zucchini, veggie burgers (an option if you are not allergic to soy).

All whole grains. Including, but not limited to, whole wheat, brown rice, millet, quinoa, oats, barley, grits, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat tortillas, rice cakes, and popcorn. All nuts and seeds, including, but not limited to, sunflower seeds, cashews, peanuts, sesame. Also, nut butters, e.g. peanut butter and almond butter.

All legumes. These can be canned or dried. Legumes include but are not limited to dried beans, pinto beans, split peas, lentils, black eyed peas, kidney beans, black beans, cannellini beans, white beans. All quality oils. Including, but not limited to, olive, canola, grape seed, peanut, and sesame.

Beverages: Spring water, distilled water, or other pure waters.

Other: Tofu, soy products, vinegar, seasonings, salt, herbs, and spices.

FOODS TO AVOID

All meat and animal products. Including, but not limited to, beef, lamb, pork, poultry, and fish.

All dairy products. Including, but not limited to, milk, cheese, cream, butter, and eggs.

All sweeteners. Including, but not limited to, sugar, raw sugar, honey, syrups, molasses, and cane juice.

All leavened bread, Including Ezekiel Bread (it contains yeast and honey) and baked goods.

All refined and processed food products. Including, but not limited to, artificial flavorings, food additives, chemicals, white rice, white flour, and foods that contain artificial preservatives.

All deep fried foods. Including, but not limited to, potato chips, french fries, corn chips.

All solid fats. Including shortening, margarine, lard, and foods high in fat.

Beverages. Including, but not limited to, coffee, tea, herbal teas, carbonated beverages, energy drinks, and alcohol.



AFTER YOU FAST

Ending your fast properly is just as important as beginning your fast properly. Just as you prepared yourself to begin a fast, you must prepare yourself to stop or break your fast. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself as you end your fast:

- **What are the key lessons I learned?**
- **What new habits or disciplines do I want to keep?**
- **What new dietary rules will I follow?**
- **What foods will I begin eating and not eat anymore?**
- **What dreams and visions have I seen pertaining to my personal walk with the Lord or my ministry?**

DECIDE TO MAKE FASTING A PART OF YOUR LIFE

Before you end your fast make a decision to practice this discipline on a regular basis. This is vital if you are going to apply and live out the lessons learned during your fast. **1 Corinthians 11:24-28** says that Paul “*fasted often.*” But why? You must view fasting as a new way of life, not just a vacation from the old way. According to **2 Corinthians 5:17**, “*The old is gone and the new has come.*” Fasting regularly will help you maintain a level of discipline and spirituality that is necessary to hold the ground surrendered by Satan.

Regular fasts will keep the flesh in submission and serve as a reminder as to who is in charge of your life. Choose a regular fasting schedule to follow. There are those who have chosen to fast one twenty-four hour period per week. Others fast sun up to sun down, one day per week. You must pray and design a format that you feel God wants for you, a system that you can be faithful to and consistent with.

PHYSICALLY

Controlling your eating habits when you end your fast will be important. Once you begin to eat again, if you are not careful, you will feel uncomfortable. Your stomach will feel bloated and full. Introduce solid food slowly. There is a very good chance you will experience stomachaches and diarrhea from the shock on the digestive system.



AFTER YOU FAST

EMOTIONALLY

Satan will be working to take back the ground he has surrendered over to the Lord and he will use your emotional vulnerability to accomplish his goals. It could be an intense time of discouragement leading to depression. Remember to be mindful of this and to eat wisely once you break your fast. In **1 Kings 18-19**, when Elijah is challenged by the 450 prophets of Baal who all followed Jezebel in a most vile and immoral religion. God confronts and defeats them through one man, Elijah. But after this great spiritual victory, Elijah finds himself running for his life from one woman, Jezebel. She had threatened his life and he felt all alone. He became incredibly discouraged and asked God to end his life. Elijah experienced a supernatural and spiritual high, followed by an emotional low. You very well could experience this same type of roller coaster ride. Be aware of this and hold firm to the victory you have in Jesus.



RECOMMENDED **READING**

A Hunger For God – by John Piper

Fasting – by Jentezen Franklin

Fasting For Spiritual Breakthrough – Elmer L. Towns



RECOMMENDED **TEACHING ON PRAYER**

Pastor Shawn taught a series on prayer called “ALL ACCESS.” You can listen or download this series at <http://subsplash.com/mainstreetchurch/s/58d6fe1/>

Pastor Shawn taught on the power and purpose of fasting last year. You can watch or listen to this message at <http://subsplash.com/mainstreetchurch/v/f7ad13f>



APPENDIX B

WHAT IS JOURNALLING?

HOW TO FEED YOURSELF: DISCOVERING THE DISCIPLINE & JOY OF JOURNALING

Everyday all across North America, probably even the world there is an epidemic of hunger that could be easily remedied if parents, spouses and families became more aware of what was happening in their own kitchens. The culprits are usually teenage boys or grown men, yet women have also been known to take part in this activity. In fact it happened the other day in my kitchen where I found my teenage son in a daze. He didn't even notice me when I walked in because he had leaned deep into our fridge hypnotized by the refrigerator light shining in his eyes. I asked him what he was doing but instead of answering my question he just backed out, looked at me and said "**THERE'S NOTHING TO EAT!**"

He'd fallen for the lie that so many do believing that the refrigerator served nourishment instead of only storing nourishment. But of course that's not how it works. After he opened the fridge doors and nothing happened all he could do was conclude that there was nothing in there to eat. But that wasn't true because his mother and I had just finished shopping at Costco and knew that there was enough ham and cheese in that fridge to feed a small European Country.

The problem wasn't that there was no food, the problem was that there was no one there to make food for him. What he was really saying was, "*There's nothing prepared for me! There's no one making me anything to eat and serving it to me while I sit on the couch drinking my favorite beverage and watching my*

favorite show!”

What happened physically in my house that day is what happens to a lot of Christ followers spiritually. They live their lives nutritionally delayed in a spiritual sense. You can spot these people because they say things like, *“I’m not being fed! I’m not being nourished. I need some meat to chew on.”* That’s code for, *“When is someone going to feed me spiritually?”* When I hear that statement it reminds me of a verse that’s not found in the Bible – *“Jesus was teaching the multitudes when a couple of people approached him afterwards and said, ‘We’re just not being fed by your teaching.’”*

You won’t find that anywhere in the Scriptures, but you will hear it in churches all over the world.

It’s human nature for many of us to feel and think this way which is why it’s important to understand the following principle: **You will only grow spiritually as you invite God to nourish you.** In other words, your spiritual development is based upon you receiving nourishment from God Himself.

It’s so easy to become that person who just stares into the fridge hoping that their sandwich will magically prepare itself or that someone else will come along and make it for them. It’s also easy to have that same kind of approach to your spiritual life. If you wait and expect someone to always feed you spiritually you’ll be disappointed and you’ll never consistently hear the voice of God speak to you.

Someone once said that *“you are what you eat.”* There’s some truth to that – especially when it comes to our spiritual growth. Ask yourself this – *“What would happen if you only consumed food once a week?”* You would eventually wither away and become sick. *“Healthy”* would not be a word people would use to describe you. It’s the same when it comes to our spiritual diet. Many people seem to only eat spiritually once a week.

Why is that? Why do so many Christians depend only on church services and activities to feed their spiritual hunger? Do we really think that God wants to only speak and challenge us

once a week? The fact is - God wants to feed us every day of our life not just on the weekends.

It's shouldn't be a surprise that so many feel spiritually empty when they fail to spend daily time with God. Too many people expect the Pastor or the church to feed them. But here's what we all need to understand when it comes to our spiritual growth. Your Pastor does not exist to feed you. The job of your Pastor is to equip you to feed yourself.

"Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ." – Ephesians 4:11-12

Pastors do not have special privileges with God. You are just as capable of hearing God's voice as your Pastor is. You are both on the same playing field when it comes to your relationship with God. Pastors and leaders do not have a special hot line or secret door to God. What they have is what you have. We all have the same opportunity to hear and respond to God's voice in our lives.

So – how can we hear the voice of God in our lives? How does God speak to people today?

Some would say through the church, some would say He speaks through other people or that He speaks through circumstances. Those are all true but I would suggest that He speaks the loudest and most clearly through His Word and our interaction with it. Your understanding of God and your ability to hear His voice comes by consistently and obediently taking the time to read and respond to his Word.

It's kind of like making a sandwich. You need to go into the fridge and take out the ingredients and put them all together so that you can enjoy it. That takes time and preparation – but in the end it's worth it because it tastes good and satisfies your hunger.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote...*"When your words came, I ate*

them; they were my joy and hearts delight.” (Jeremiah 15:16 – NIV). When you sit down with God’s Word and eat it and digest it you end up growing in your spiritual formation. One of the best ways to hear God speak and grow spiritually is through the discipline of journaling.

Journaling is the discipline of consistently reading and responding to the voice of God in your life as you interact with His Word – the Bible.

Journaling is a practical tool for hearing and responding to the voice of God in your life because **YOUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IS FIRST AND FOREMOST BASED UPON YOU RECEIVING NOURISHMENT FROM GOD HIMSELF.**

When it comes to reading the Bible many approach it the same way they approach the fridge. They just open it and hope they get fed. That approach will cause you to believe that “*there’s nothing to eat*” leaving you hungry and disappointed. A more effective approach is to take the time to put the ingredients together so that what you are about to digest is appetizing. It’s time to stop drinking only milk and put together a proper meal spiritually. Journaling helps create a balanced spiritual diet that will position you to learn who God is and equip you to hear His voice more clearly.

Journaling is a discipline. It takes time to take root in your life, but when it does you’ll discover a new clarity in hearing God’s voice. Journaling creates a record of God’s work, power and leading in your life. When God seems to be silent, your journals will remind you that He isn’t. When you don’t think God answers prayers, your journals will remind you otherwise. When you are tempted to think God has no plan or direction for your life, your journals will show you the truth.

So if you are ready to commit to this spiritual discipline let me recommend **Five Things to Bring When You Journal:**

- **Bible** - If journaling is new to you, you may want to use a Bible that is easy to read, like the New Living Translation of the Bible. This is the version that we teach and encourage study from at Main Street Church.

- **Pen** - (highlighter, etc.)- When you are reading through the Bible, feel free to mark up the passages that leave an impression on you. Circle words or underline sentences that speak to you as you are reading. (You're allowed to write in your Bible). A tattered, marked up Bible is a Bible that someone is reading.

- **Journal** - Of course this is an important part of the process. You can use any kind of wordless book, be creative and find something that appeals to you. Journals are available from the church office for \$5.00.

- **Reading Schedule** - We encourage you to download the YOUVERSION APP or go to www.youversion.com. Here you will find dozens of reading plans as well as an array of Bible Translations that you can choose from. Just go to your APP store and search for YOUVERSION. You can also download other Main Street Church Devotionals (including this one). There are many to choose from on different topics that will help you establish the discipline of journaling.

- **Daily Planner** or blank paper - As your journaling you will discover that your mind will be flooded with other thoughts (get an oil change, call the school, pay the Hydro bill, etc...). Simply take a moment to write them down as they come to your mind so that your mind remains uncluttered and focused. The devil wants to get your focus off spending time with God and he will often do it by reminding you of good and important things.

Keep in mind as you start this discipline it will take time for it to begin to change your life – there is process involved and so you have to pace yourself. Here is an outline that you can use to begin the discipline of journaling and start becoming spiritually nourished by feeding yourself:

Begin by writing in your journal what you are thankful for.

- Prayers of thankfulness.
 - o Focus on an attribute of God and write out a

prayer of thanks (e.g. God I am thankful that your love never fails...)

- o Write a list of what you are thankful for today
- o Read over your thankful list and ask Jesus to help you see how faithful He is in your life.

Pick a Bible Reading Plan or a book of the Bible.

- Read a portion of Scripture each day.
 - o After reading ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions:
 - What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?
 - What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
 - What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
 - What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
 - What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
 - What **sin** to you want me to confess?
 - o Write down in your journal what Jesus shows you or impresses upon you as you answer these questions. Make sure you obey anything the Lord asks of you.

Ask Jesus to show you what and who He would like you to pray for today.

- Write out your list
- Write out your prayers
 - o As God answers your prayers make sure you write it down in your journal.

Write out a prayer of surrender to Jesus and ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit today.

When you learn the discipline of journaling you discover that through this process God comes alongside you and personally trains and equips and makes you into the person He purposed you to be. God says – I will meet you any day, anytime, anywhere

and I will mentor you and nourish you so that you can become spiritually mature. **Journaling is you making a commitment to be mentored by God Himself.**

Journaling is not keeping a diary, it's not an outline of your daily events, it's you responding and interacting with the voice of God in your life as He speaks to you through the Scriptures. Of course this is not the only way to spend time with God – but it's a good way that nourishes your soul and your life if you give it a chance. The reason we want to continue to put such an emphasis on this discipline is because statistics show that most people do not have a consistent devotional time with God – and we want to change that stat. We believe that it's our responsibility to equip you to hear God's voice for yourself and the discipline of Journaling will accomplish that in your life.

Remember – your spiritual development is first and foremost based upon you receiving nourishment from God Himself. You play a part in your spiritual growth. You are called to persevere and to press into the Lord. Journaling is a powerful tool to do just that. God uses journaling to keep you focused when other things vie for your attention. God uses journaling to encourage you when you face trial and hardships. God uses journaling to satisfy you when you feel spiritually dry. Journaling is a utensil God provides for you to feed on His Word and grow you spiritually.

Journaling removes the temptation to rely on others to feed you spiritually and sets the groundwork for you to feed yourself. Our prayer is that you will be led by God to a place where you never have to say “there's nothing to eat” because you have been fully satisfied in the grace and truth of Jesus from spending consistent and intentional time with Him.

OUR VALUES

We are whole life, faith filled, all in risk takers

We'll never insult God with small thinking & safe living

We are all about the local church

The local church is God's "Plan A" to reach the world - He has no "Plan B!"

We will do anything short of sin to reach people who don't know Christ

To reach people no one is reaching, we'll have to do things no one is doing

We will contribute more than we consume spiritually

The church does not exist for us. We are the church and we exist for the world

We will keep short accounts

The greatest weapon we have against the Devil is repentance and confession

We will be relentless with truth and grace

We will teach and model the hard truths of Jesus so that we can experience and model the deep grace of Jesus

We will practice irrational generosity

We truly believe it is more blessed to give than to receive

We will intentionally listen to the voice of God

We recognize that the voice we listen to the most will determine the direction of our life



main street
CHURCH