

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

20

FAST

21

21 DAY

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Dear Friend,

We're so glad you're participating in this time of prayer, fasting and personal devotion. After an unprecedented and challenging year, we have the opportunity to reset our spiritual compass and allow God to refresh every area of our lives.

This fast is designed to be flexible, so you can participate at any level. Whether you have some experience in fasting for several days or weeks, or if this is your first time, you can start where you are and experience what God has in store for you in a powerful way.

The guide provides practical tools to help you navigate your personal journey. As you read over the information, please consider how it applies to you and your circumstances and convictions.

We pray that you will experience the presence and power of God in an extraordinary way as you commit yourself to Him over this time. May the Lord continue to bless you and enlarge you as you seek Him first!

Matthew 9:15b (NKJV) But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

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Prayer

As you prepare for this time of fasting and prayer, it can be tempting to start thinking of a laundry list of prayers you'd love to see answered. Instead, try to keep it simple. Think about the top two or three things most pressing on your heart and focus on those with God.

Write these down in the space provided below, and be open to hearing what God wants to show you in those areas. The breakthroughs, miracles and answers to your prayers will be by-products of drawing closer to Jesus.

Make your primary goal to know Jesus more and experience Him. Give yourself to Him in total surrender and aim to glorify God with your life. Take time to pray each day. Don't overcomplicate this! Just talk to God. Have that place and time where you can seek Him daily. If you don't plan to pray, you won't. If you find it a challenge to disconnect from the busyness of your day, engaging in worship music is a great way to prepare your heart for prayer.

During this fast, I am praying and believing God for:



Fasting

Important Note: Fasting requires reasonable precautions. If you have any health concerns, please consult your physician prior to beginning your fast, especially if you are taking any medication, have a chronic condition, or are pregnant or nursing a baby.

As you prepare to fast, it's important to choose a fasting plan that works for you. Keep in mind that there's nothing more inherently spiritual about one type of fast. These are simply guidelines and suggestions on different things you can do.

Do not let what you eat or don't eat become the focus of your fast. Keep the main thing the main thing, which is drawing closer to God. Remember, this is a time to disconnect enough from your regular patterns and habits in order to connect more closely to God. Here are a few tips on this:

Start Where You Are

We are all at different places in our walk with God. Likewise our jobs, daily schedules, and health conditions are all different and place various levels of demands on our energy. Whether you've fasted before or this is your first time, start where you are. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but it's very important to know your own body, know your options and, most importantly, seek God in prayer and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. Remember, the goal of fasting is not just to do without food. **The goal is to draw closer to God.**

Choose Your Type of Fast

While preparing for your fast, it's important to choose ahead of time what type of fast, or what combination, you will pursue. Not only will this help you make the necessary preparations to implement your plan, but as you commit to a specific fast ahead of time and know how you're going to do it, you will position yourself to finish strong.

On the following pages we've listed some options and variations of fasts you can choose from. Please consider how each option may or may not apply to your personal circumstances and convictions.

The Bible describes various kinds and lengths of fasts. You can fast one type of food or all food, or some combination of foods. In this type of fast you omit a specific item(or items) from your meal plans.

For example, you may choose to eliminate all red meat, processed or fast food, or sweets. Most people can incorporate this type of fast relatively easily. It can also prove to be a great solution for people with specific dietary needs or medical conditions that may cause certain limitations.

Food fasts can also focus on consuming a specific type of food or beverage. Examples are juice or water fasts. They focus on simply consuming vegetable and fruit juices or water instead of solid food. Many people include whey protein in their liquid plan as well. This is one of the most popular and effective fasts. Even if you choose not to make your entire fast liquids-only, substituting one or two meals for liquids is a great alternative.

In addition to the food fast, many people choose non-food fasts to intensify their focus on God. Non-food fasts can also be good for those who are on very strict diets due to medical conditions and are unable to fast any kind of food or liquid. Non-food fasts can include refraining from luxury or pleasure items—things that take our time from or distract us from time with God. An example of a non-food fast is a media/entertainment fast, including television, social media, and the like.

The decision as to what kind of fast you choose is yours. You may choose to fast one day a week, one meal a day or in whatever way you feel led. This is your personal decision and should be prayerfully considered as it applies to your circumstances. Simply ask the Lord for guidance, and if health issues are a concern (for instance, you are pregnant or a nursing mother), consult your doctor.

Begin and Break the Fast Well

Depending on the type of fast you choose, it's very important to prepare your body ahead of time before beginning the fast. Take a week or so to transition into your fast, otherwise you could get sick. For example, if you would like to go on a fruits and vegetables or juice fast, start eliminating meat, white grains and refined sugars from your diet the week before. Also start to cut back quite a bit on dairy products and some of your caffeine intake.

The same principle applies to breaking your fast. When your fast is over, add foods back in very gradually. Please don't break your fast with a greasy cheeseburger! Because your body is so cleansed and detoxified, you will most likely get sick if you do that.

There are also several supplements you can take that will help support the detox process during your fast. Your health-food store can give you recommendations.

Final Fasting Tips

Here are some other ideas that can help make your fasting experience more pleasant and helpful:

- **As you select your type of fast, make a fasting calendar that fits your plan.** Determine what each day and week will look like.
- **Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need.** Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give into temptation. Choose well when selecting products, stick to raw food as much as you can and limit artificial ingredients.
- **Make it a priority to stay connected to church during your fast.** Interacting with other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.
- **If you mess up, don't get discouraged.** Just get right back on track and keep going. God's mercies "are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23). He wants you to finish, and He will give you the grace and strength to do it.

May the Lord bless and keep you as you navigate this fasting adventure!

Personal Devotion

Reading your Bible is about connecting to God in a more powerful way. It's not about duty but about relationship. We engage with God as we read His Word and we experience His presence. His Word is living and active! We are drawing closer to the Lord and positioning ourselves to hear from Him through the Scriptures.

Choose the time and place where you're going to read your Bible every day, and come prepared to hear what God wants to tell you. To get the most out of your devotional time, here are three simple keys:

1. Read Consistently

It's better to read a little every day than to try and knock out two hours of Bible reading or devotions in one sitting. Digest what you read as you take in just enough to absorb. If you miss a few days, pick up at the next reading, but stay with it and don't give up. If you need a daily Bible devotional, you can download one from our website (church-redeemer.org/fast).

2. Read Prayerfully

Talk to God as you're reading. Don't rush through. If you come across something you don't understand, pause for a moment and ask God about it. Reading prayerfully is making space and time to talk to God and giving Him time and space to talk to you. Taking time to meditate on God's Word is just as important as reading it.

3. Read Expectantly

You are about to partake of the bread of life, so foster an attitude of expectancy. Believe that God is going to speak to you through His Word. With meditation on the ideas and thoughts recorded in your journal, be prepared to do something with what He shows you. A great, simple way to journal your devotionals is to use the SOAP method.

4. SOAP Method

Scripture
Observation
Application
Prayer

The SOAP method is used like this.

S for Scripture. Read prayerfully. Take notice of scriptures that catch your attention and mark them in your Bible. When you're done, reread the verses you marked and look for one that particularly speaks to you. Write it in your journal.

O for Observation. Focusing on that scripture, tune in and listen to what God is saying to you through His Word. What is it about this scripture that specifically stands out? What does God want to reveal to you or teach you? Ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide and show you what God is saying.

A for Application. Think about how this verse applies to your life right now. Perhaps it provides instruction, encouragement, revelation of a new promise, or correction. Use your journal to write out your thoughts.

P for Prayer. Wrap up your SOAP time in prayer. Talk to God about what you've just read. This can be as simple as thanking Him for revealing a truth from the scripture, or it may be asking Him for greater insight or wisdom as to how it applies to your life. Remember, prayer is all about relationship. It's a two-way conversation, so be sure to listen to what God has to say.

That's it! SOAP. It's as simple or deep as you want it to be.
If you want to go deeper in your study, here are additional tips:

- Reread the daily passage in a different Bible translation or paraphrase.
- Use online resources, such as those available from crosswalk.com.
- Use a commentary, such as those at biblegateway.com.
- Cross-reference your daily reading, using the footnotes in your study Bible.
- Research words in their original language using a Strong's Concordance.

We pray that your passion for God and His Word will be ignited and you will develop a greater hunger for His presence as you seek Him!

Romans 12:11 (NIV) Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

The Next 21 Days and Beyond

We are excited for what God is going to do in your life during this fast! We encourage you to be intentional about the next twenty one days, believing that you will experience God in a fresh way.

The principles you will practice over this time of fasting are easy to sustain long-term. Prayer, fasting and personal devotion can be incorporated into your everyday life. Simply make the practices you have learned a priority each day.

Fasting is a lifestyle you can continue. We encourage you to establish a frequency and consistency of fasting. Identify what works for you, commit to it and make it a part of your life.

Most importantly, make a commitment to living life full of passion for God.

Keep the fire for Him burning in your heart and do whatever it takes to feed your spiritual hunger for the Lord!

Day 1: Future Plans

James 4:13-16 (NIV) Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.

Many people expend a great deal of time and energy planning for the future. A pastor once said, “We’re all fascinated with the future because that is where we will live the rest of our lives.” Contemplating the future can be healthy and good. But, if not done the right way, it can also produce some negative spiritual side effects.

Today’s passage addresses the topic of planning. Here the writer does not condemn business or planning, he simply gives us a warning about the way we do these things. We are reminded that the spiritual danger lies in how we plan our future—whether we plan it with or without God in mind. The believers in this passage made the mistake of being boastful and presumptuous in their future planning. The Apostle James issued them a pastoral correction.

Planning is an important part of a responsible and productive life. Scripture underscores its value. However, presumption and boasting are never to be a part of our approach to planning. When we fashion the future without consideration of the sovereignty of God, temporary nature of time and the brevity of our existence, we always get into trouble.

A necessary spiritual ingredient for wise and proper planning is dependency on God. Our plans should prayerfully proceed from a heart that relies on and is surrendered to Him. We should be fully committed to God’s plans above our own.

This means that we must learn something about God’s perspective on life and His priorities for life. Before establishing a direction for our future, we need to know how God thinks—what is really important to Him. We also need to be flexible enough to adjust our plans as we gain greater insight in His plans. We must never be so invested in what we want that we are unwilling to yield to what God wants.

Good plans are only our best effort to see into and prepare for tomorrow. We need to always do this prayerfully, sensitively and with the willingness to exchange our agenda for His. This kind of planning is positive!

- 1. The Bible warns us about two kinds of planners—the non-planner and the presumptuous planner. How can you avoid being either one of these?**
- 2. What can you do to begin making wise but flexible plans for your future?**

Day 2: Managing Time

Psalm 90:12 (NLT) Teach us to make the most of our time, so that we may grow in wisdom.

Ephesians 5:15-17 (NLT) So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

In our 24/7 society we know what it's like to battle the clock. Time is an important part of our world. Our vocabulary is filled with references to time. Activities can be described as time-consuming or time-wasting. We use time charts, timetables, timelines, time pieces and time sheets. The time management industry is continually producing technologies and resources to assist us in balancing our personal and work schedules.

One thing is certain: time moves forward unrelentingly. Because of this, we must occasionally stop and evaluate how we are handling this precious resource.

In Scripture, the terms for time include two major concepts. One is the passing moments of life measured by a clock or calendar. The other is the opportunities these passing moments provide.

In Psalm 90:12 we find a prayer that Moses offered to God. He asked God to help him use his time wisely. What a wonderful prayer!

The Apostle Paul picked up this theme in Ephesians 5 and encouraged us to prayerfully and carefully consider how we use our time. He taught us to make wise choices with the opportunities God gives us every day.

There is a story told of Queen Elizabeth I of England, one of the richest and most powerful women of her day. It was recorded that she declared on her deathbed, "All my possessions for a moment of time." At the end of her life, Queen Elizabeth realized that all the possessions in the world mean nothing if you have exhausted or wasted your time.

Time is spent or it's invested. When it's spent, it's gone. When it's properly invested, it yields us great dividends.

1. Are you spending time or investing it?

2. In what ways are you "spending" time rather than "investing" it?

Day 3: Go for the Goal

2 Timothy 2:15 (NLT) Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

Goals are great. They provide direction, challenge our progress and motivate us to get to where we need to be.

To have a truly significant life we need clearly defined, biblical goals. They need to be practical and demanding, but attainable. They should also be measurable. We should set spiritual markers along our life journey and measure whether we are truly making positive movement toward them. These goals should not be complicated or confusing, but simple and straightforward.

Let's start with the basics:

1. Personal Bible study. Set a time each day to read your Bible and stick with it.
2. Personal prayer. How can you be more consistent and persistent in praying each day?
What goals can you set to help make this happen?
3. Growing in the character of Christ. What practical steps can you take to become more like Jesus in your attitudes and actions?
4. Relationship development. What relationship skills do you need to improve and how do you plan on improving them?
5. Time management. How can you be more productive and fruitful with the time God has given you?
6. Contribution to your local church. What new steps do you need to take to become more connected, more useful and fruitful in the congregation where God has planted you?

What kind of goals do you have in your life? What objectives and priorities are really important to you?

- 1. Take a few moments to record your responses to the questions above. Map out a plan to start actively pursuing these goals.**
- 2. Also share your plans with someone that will lovingly encourage and challenge you to keep going toward them.**

Day¹: Reasons to Rejoice

Romans 5:1-5 (NIV) Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

Contrary to some popular misconceptions, the Christian life is not a drudgery to be endured. In fact, dour-faced believers do a disservice to our great Savior and misrepresent His salvation.

Instead, the attitude and atmosphere of our lives should be rejoicing. We have every reason to rejoice and none to complain or worry. Romans 5 is one of the many places in Scripture where we find significant grounds to be glad and joyful.

We rejoice because “we have been justified through faith” and “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 1). What joy fills our hearts when we really know that we are right with God—that He fully loves and accepts us because of Jesus. We also “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (verse 2). This points to the eternal reality that we will be with the Lord forever enjoying His presence and grace.

In the meantime, we face suffering of various kinds, but even these cannot thwart the experience and expression of joy in our lives. “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure” (Romans 5:3, NLT).

Don’t let anything rob you of the joy that is yours in Christ! Make the choice to rejoice in Him—and let the world know there is a great reason for that smile on your face.

1. Why do you think some people have the misconception that Christianity is dull and joyless?

2. Why can we as believers in Jesus rejoice even in the midst of sufferings and trials?

3. What especially helps you maintain your joy when you are going through difficulties in your life?

Day 5: Ambassadors on Assignment

2 Corinthians 5:20 (NIV) We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

As members of the kingdom of God, we acknowledge and worship the Lord as our King. He is clearly in charge and we are not. He is sovereign and we are dependent on His grace.

Amazingly, however, the King calls us to a very high privilege and responsibility of representing Him to others. "Christ's ambassadors" are commissioned to tell people about the King's love and offer of reconciliation. He wants everyone to come into His Kingdom and live under His rule, and He built the Bridge so that all may cross over. Everywhere we go and in everything we do, we are to convey this message.

The Apostle Paul tells us that "the love of Christ compels us" on this mission (2 Corinthians 5:14, NIV). Because of His great love for us we must do everything we can to persuade as many as possible of His great love for them.

Has the love of Christ touched your life? Has He reconciled you to the Father? Then you have a message and a mission!

There is no greater purpose for our lives than sharing the Good News with others that the God of the universe wants to come into a personal relationship with them. And nothing pleases the Father's heart more.

- 1. What do you think it means that we were "reconciled" to God through Christ?**
- 2. What does it mean to be "Christ's ambassador"? What message and mission do these ambassadors have?**
- 3. What are some practical ways you can begin to fulfill your role as a good ambassador of Jesus Christ?**

Day 6: Standing Firm in the Fight

Ephesians 6:10-12 (NIV) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

"This is war!" As you read through Ephesians 6:10-18, can you hear the Apostle Paul sound this battle cry? He knew that Christians need to understand and respond to the reality of spiritual warfare that rages against Jesus' followers.

War is always a struggle of life and death. It's a serious matter. In spiritual warfare, nothing less than eternal destinies are at stake.

While we might want to avoid the conflict and carnage that war represents, we really have no choice about this battle. We're already positioned on the front line. When we came into the family of God, we also enlisted in His army—and became prime targets of our adversary.

The question is not whether to engage in the battle but how to win it. Paul gives us the answer. In summary, we must "be strong" and "stand firm." Our strength, however, is not in ourselves but in God. Likewise, we do not take our stand with worldly weapons but in the armor of God.

We are strong in the Lord when we surrender to Him and depend on His power. Then we can take up each piece of armor He provides. Spiritual disciplines like prayer, memorizing and speaking out God's Word, proclaiming the gospel and exercising our faith in Christ defeat the devil and take ground for the kingdom of God. The love of Christ through us overcomes hate. His compassion conquers fear and distrust.

The great news is that Jesus has already won the victory through His cross (see Colossians 2:13-15)! Now He calls each of us to engage in battle so that more and more people can experience His victory in their lives.

1. What is "spiritual warfare"? How would you describe this in your own words based on Ephesians 6:10-18?

2. What is Jesus' role in this spiritual warfare?

3. What is our role in spiritual warfare as followers of Jesus? What can you do to be more effective as a warrior in His army?

Day 7: Satisfaction Guaranteed

Isaiah 55:1-2 (NIV) Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

What really satisfies you? So much of our lives are spent pursuing what we think will fulfill us, only to find out these things fall far short.

That leads God to ask, through the prophet Isaiah, “Why spend your money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:2a). Good question! The answer is that we are often deceived by the world around us and our own sinful, selfish nature into believing that something other than God Himself will satisfy our soul.

Isaiah knew better. “Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:2b). We are invited to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8), that a relationship with Him is the richest fare of all.

There’s no substitute for a personal, growing relationship with God. Everything else in our Christian life flows from this foundation. And this is not something mysterious and mystical. It’s available for each of us to live in and enjoy every day as we believe, trust and obey the Lord based on His Word. He promises that this will be a deeply satisfying and fulfilling way to live (see John 10:10).

Why look for satisfaction anywhere else with a guarantee like that?

- 1. Why do you think we so often seek satisfaction in things and people rather than God?**
- 2. What have you pursued in your life that you thought would bring fulfillment but left you empty?
What did you learn from this experience?**
- 3. In what ways does God satisfy our deepest longings? How has He satisfied you?**

Day 8: From Hurting to Helping

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

The Bible often speaks about God as our “Redeemer” (see Job 19:25; Isaiah 44:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30). What does it mean that He redeems our lives? One key aspect of redemption is that God takes what is hurtful, harmful and intended for evil and turns it around for good. Joseph captured this eloquently when he said to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20).

We all experience hurts, at least from time to time. Some level of pain and heartache is inevitable in this world full of sinful people (like us!). But God wants to turn our pain into a blessing for someone else. He desires to redeem our hurting into helping others.

God is in the business of healing and we find our comfort and strength in Him when we are hurting. Then He wants us to take that same comfort we have received and give it away. In essence He says to us, “I helped you through this experience, now go and help someone else who is struggling.” In this way we extend His compassion to more people and put a human face to His divine love.

Has the Lord helped you through a painful trial? Has He comforted and healed you in some way? Great—now you are uniquely equipped as a messenger of healing and comfort to others. Now the Lord is calling you to reach out to hurting people with the hope that only our compassionate Redeemer can offer.

1. How do you respond when someone hurts you? What can you learn about this from Joseph based on Genesis 50:20?

2. In what ways has God healed and helped you?

3. How do you think He could use that experience to help others who are hurting?

Day 9: Silence

Psalm 4:4-5 (NIV) When you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord.

Silence is a strange thing. We have come to accept the conspiracy of noise around us as normal, so a lack of noise makes us a bit nervous. In a world where we are constantly cell-phoning, multi-tasking and text-messaging, we are not used to silence. It feels awkward, unproductive—like we should be “doing something” instead.

But silence can be an oasis for word-weary travelers. The Lord invites us to be silent so we can search our hearts, and sense His heart as well. “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10) is a call to deeper relationship and revelation that cannot be found in busyness.

Fasting adds strength to the discipline of silence by muzzling outrageous claims of our appetites. Not only can we survive on less than “three square meals” each day, we can thrive and direct our energies more profitably toward God as we temporarily deny our stomach. Silence with fasting helps mute internal and external voices, leaving room for God’s voice to speak to our hearts.

- 1. How difficult is it for you to be silent before God? Why do you think this is challenging?**
- 2. How can silence help you tune your heart to hear God’s voice and receive His grace?**

Day10: The Call to Inconvenience

Luke 9:23-24 (NIV) Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."

Life can be messy. Things don't always go as we expected or hoped. Jesus even prepared us to anticipate that "in this world, you will have trouble" (John 16:33).

At times like this, it's good to remember that Jesus was the most inconvenienced person on earth. He told His disciples this would be the case: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Luke 9:22). But His inconvenience was also the means of our eternal comfort and salvation—"He was whipped, and we were healed!" (Isaiah 53:5, NLT).

Likewise, God calls us to inconvenience, denying ourselves for the benefit of others He wants to bless. "If we are distressed," Paul told the Corinthian believers, "it is for your comfort and salvation" (1 Corinthians 1:6a).

And this call to inconvenience isn't just for special occasions, like a mission trip or an outreach event. It's a summons to live every day with a "missions mentality." It means daily surrender of our right to convenience in order to engage in service to God and the people He puts in our path. When we choose to live this way, Jesus promised we would experience something far greater than convenience—the "abundant life" (John 10:10) that only comes to those who follow Christ to the cross.

1. What do you think Jesus means when He says disciples must "take up their cross daily"?
2. What should this look like in your life?
3. In what sense is an "inconvenient" life also an "abundant" life when you are following Jesus?

Day11: Plentiful Promises

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

What gets you up in the morning and puts fuel in your tank for the day? What keeps you going when things get tough? How do you maintain joy and peace? Through His Word God has given us an abundance of promises to live by.

Promises are powerful! In Jeremiah 29:11 the Lord says, "I know the plans I have for you ... to give you a future and a hope." When we believe and know that He has purposed and promised a good future for us, we have hope to live by every day.

In addition to this Scripture, we have hundreds of other promises from our God. Here are just a few powerful ones: Jeremiah 33:3; Proverbs 3:5-6; John 1:8-9; 2 Peter 1:3-4.

The Lord uses these to sustain us through troubles, to deliver us from depression, to build our faith when we doubt, to equip us for ministry, to make us holy and to lead us to victory in any and every circumstance (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Of course, these promises will not benefit us if we do not know and believe them. Make a commitment to look for God's promises as you read His Word. Memorize and meditate on specific promises you can apply to your life and in ministry to others. Believe that God will keep His Word and watch how He fulfills His good purposes in you.

- 1. How can believing God's promises make a difference in your life?**
- 2. What promise in Scripture has been especially meaningful to you? Why?**
- 3. Choose two of the promises listed in this devotion and work on memorizing them this week.**

Day12: Breakthroughs

James 4:7-8 (NLT) So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

Do you have any bad habits you would like to break? The struggle to overcome bad habits can be tough and extremely frustrating. Sinful patterns are often very persistent and challenging to change.

God wants to free us from negative, destructive habits. The Bible provides instructions that set us on the path to freedom. Today's passage lays out some practical steps that are useful in getting this process started.

Freedom begins with humility. Humility is the act of placing oneself under the authority of another, demonstrating submission and obedience. The opposite of humility is pride. Breaking free from destructive patterns begins with submitting to God. To place ourselves under His authority we must let go of the reins of our life. We must seek to follow rather than trying to lead. To find freedom, we need to be led to freedom, and that involves humility. Only Jesus can lead us to liberty.

We must also resist the devil. The act of spiritual resistance must be forceful and determined. In prayer, we must come against the dark influences that keep us in bondage to bad habits. We must actively and aggressively renounce and resist every contaminated seed the devil attempts to plant in our lives, in the name of Jesus Christ. We must take a stand in prayer against the forces of evil that have trapped us in destructive life patterns. As we engage in this spiritual battle, the Bible promises us victory!

But this resistance is not enough. It must be combined with a commitment to purposefully draw near to God. As we push away the negative influences through prayer, we must embrace God's presence and power to live the right way.

Putting these steps into practice enables us to recognize and refuse the bait of temptation. It empowers us to get rid of the bad habits and to begin building good habits. Try it. It really works!

1. What bad habits do you need to break?

2. What principles from today's study do you need to put into practice in order to overcome them?

Day13: Self-Control

Galatians 5:22-23 (TLB) But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: ... self-control.

Self-control is an important part of spiritual and emotional maturity. People with self-control go a lot further in life than those who lack it. They do better in relationships and are ultimately happier. They make holy and healthy decisions about what they will and will not do.

One of the reasons self-control is so unpopular, and somewhat rare, is because it involves invoking a negative—placing some restriction on a personal and pressing urge, desire, preference, inclination or habit. It requires us to forcefully demand of ourselves certain actions that usually are the opposite of what we really feel like saying, thinking or doing.

Whether it be refusing to “speak our mind” to someone about something, refusing to react with anger to some hurt or inconvenience we experience, choosing to say no to some enticing temptation, choosing to watch what we eat, choosing to commit to a meaningful exercise program, or choosing to get up earlier regularly to pray and study God’s Word, all of these decisions require the enforcing of boundaries and regulations on ourselves. They involve self-control.

While we all understand the importance of obeying external laws and the consequences that can accompany disobeying them, when it comes to ourselves—our personal choices—we would rather have no laws, no boundaries, no restrictions enforced on us by us. We want to “be free” to speak, think and act exactly as we want, any time we want.

What we fail to recognize is that an unrestricted, undisciplined life—a life void of appropriate self-control—leads to the exact opposite of freedom. It breeds bondage. Lack of self-control deceitfully holds out a promise of freedom, but ultimately disappoints us. Without self-control we cede the control of our lives to very destructive forces.

The Bible teaches us that this important quality called self-control is something that requires supernatural power to develop and maintain. For it to be a consistent part of our lives we must learn to live in the power and control of the Holy Spirit daily.

When the Holy Spirit is in charge of us, He enables us to enforce holy and healthy discipline on ourselves. He helps us to accept and welcome the boundaries that are beneficial to us—spiritually, mentally, relationally, emotionally, physically and financially.

There is no question that the enforcement of self-control is challenging. As we choose to follow the Holy Spirit’s lead instead of our own, we are sure to encounter resistance from our sinful nature. Scripture clearly reminds us that our flesh is constantly warring with the Spirit of God within us. Victory over our sinful nature requires a persistent pursuit. We must possess a level of faith that perseveres until the battle is won. It’s a battle worth winning!

1. What are your most significant struggles with self-control?

2. What have you learned from today’s study that will help you win this battle with these struggles?

Day 14: What We Really Need

Matthew 4:1-4, 11 (NLT) Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted there by the Devil. For forty days and forty nights he ate nothing and became very hungry. Then the Devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread." But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.'" ... Then the Devil went away, and angels came and cared for Jesus.

What needs do you have in your life? All of us have certain legitimate needs. A need is something that is required, necessary and essential to life and health. It's something we cannot successfully do without.

In today's passage we find Jesus in a time of need during His earthly ministry. After fasting for forty days in the hot wilderness of Judea, Jesus experienced what any person would experience—intense hunger. While He was the Son of God, He was God in flesh. His physical body had to have food to survive. His humanity was taxed to its limits. His physical needs were screaming for attention.

In this crisis moment, the devil showed up with a suggestion. He offered Jesus a solution for His needs. He showed Jesus a way to satisfy His legitimate hunger. All Jesus had to do was use His power to miraculously change the desert stones into bread. All Jesus had to do to address His physical craving and pain was to follow the devil's advice.

Jesus' response was a resounding "NO WAY"! While there was no particular sin in Jesus turning stones to bread, there was sin in listening to and following the devil's suggestion. Jesus would not allow Satan to dictate how His needs were met. Jesus refused to fulfill His legitimate needs in an illegitimate way. Jesus was determined to live His life according to God's Word, not the devil's advice. Jesus refused to forfeit His future destiny and purpose to satisfy a pressing need Satan's way.

There are many lessons in this passage for us. We all have legitimate needs—things we hunger for in life that are important and necessary. We can be sure that the devil always has suggestions, advice and options for us to follow to fulfill these needs. In the extended times of waiting for our needs to be legitimately met, Satan comes along and offers us the option of doing things his way rather than God's way. He tempts us to let his words guide us rather than God's Word.

How many people over the centuries have forfeited their future destiny and missed fulfilling a portion of God's purpose because they listened to the devil's advice rather than living by God's Word. When the tempter came along offering a plan for meeting their needs their response was to entertain his ideas rather than forthrightly dismissing them. The results were disastrous.

There is a warning in this story for each of us. We must remember that the devil stalks us looking for an opportunity to seduce us into following his suggestions rather than seeking, trusting and obeying God's Word. Satan shows up at our most vulnerable moments and entices us with a way out—an option for satisfying our spiritual and emotional hunger. If we are not careful and discerning we will fall for his ploy.

The end result of doing life the devil's way is always more pain. It always results in forfeiting a dimension of our God-ordained destiny.

What do we really need? We really need to trust God to meet our needs. The story of Jesus' temptations ends with angels taking care of Him. God did not fail Him. God will not fail you!

1. What are the most pressing needs in your life right now?

2. What suggestions is the devil offering you to satisfy these needs? What will be your response?

Day15: Community

Acts 13:2-3 (NIV) While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

God works not only through the fasting of individual Christians, but also when we fast as a community of believers. In Acts 13 God spoke when the church in Antioch prayed and fasted. As a result, Saul (who became the Apostle Paul) and Barnabas were sent out on a mission trip that significantly impacted their world with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Fasting together as the people of God is a recurring practice in the Bible. For instance, in Nehemiah 9:1 all Israel gathered to fast and honor God. The King of Judah called the whole nation to fast in 2 Chronicles 20:1-4 at a critical moment in their history. Before a dangerous journey back to Jerusalem, Ezra had the exiles fast and pray for safety (Ezra 8:21-23). Esther likewise instructed all the Jews to fast when they were under the threat of execution, and God delivered them miraculously.

While you are fasting today, pray for your church and community. Think about what it means to be part of a community of believers and seek God’s will for the lives of others around you, not just your own life. Pray for friends, family and neighbors. Pray that God would raise up servants and leaders in His church. You never know how the Lord will break through and advance the work of His kingdom as we seek Him together.

1. What is the value of fasting and praying together as a community of believers?

2. How does God use the church—His people—to help you grow in Christ?

Day16: Brokenness

Psalm 51:17 (NIV) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

We often think of broken items as useless and not worth anything, and we may even regard broken people the same way. But God has a different perspective. He receives us in our brokenness and accepts our contrite hearts as a pleasing sacrifice.

Fasting not only helps us break free from strongholds of our fleshly appetites; it also brings us to points of brokenness and humility in our hearts. As we fast, the Holy Spirit can break us of independence and pride and show us our sinfulness in the light of God's holiness. This leads to a broken spirit that is pliable and responsive to the Lord.

Scripture says that God is "close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). He binds us up, heals our wounds and sets us on a pathway of restoration as we allow Him to work. Through fasting and prayer we can see brokenness turn to blessing as we offer ourselves completely to God.

1. In what ways do you think God wants to use brokenness in your life?

2. How can this prepare you to help broken people that God wants to heal?

Day17: Secrecy

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV) 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.

Somewhere inside each of us is a Pharisee-like drive to be recognized and applauded for our good deeds. We want people to think the best of us, so we all tend to engage in what one author calls “impression management.” In subtle and not-so-subtle ways we draw attention to what we are doing to make sure others leave the conversation with an inflated impression of us and our goodness.

The antidote to this is the practice of secrecy. Jesus commands us to avoid making it obvious when we are giving, praying and fasting. Instead, we engage in these disciplines before God with a reckless disregard for the impression others may or may not receive about us. We are motivated by a desire to be more like Jesus who sought only to please His Father and not people around Him.

This deals a death-blow to our pride and forges humility in our hearts. It trains us to resist the applause of people and seek only the approval of God, knowing that He will reward us in His time and His way.

1. Why is it so important to desire the Lord’s approval rather than the applause of others?

2. How can the discipline of secrecy help you overcome pride and cultivate humility?

Day18: Faith

Hebrews 11:1, 6 (NIV) Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ... And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

These verses make it clear that faith is the foundation for a relationship with God. If our goal is to know and please Him, we must believe what He has revealed about Himself.

One important revelation we find here and throughout Scripture is that God “rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” He invites us to believe not only that He exists but that He is actively calling us to a deeper, more intimate and rewarding life in Him. Even though we cannot see Him, faith assures us it is well worth the effort to seek the Lord diligently through prayer and fasting.

This has been the experience of great men and women of God through the centuries—faith, prayer and fasting working together as we draw near to God. Andrew Murray, noted missions leader and devotional writer, summarized it this way:

Faith needs a life of prayer in which to grow and keep strong, ... prayer needs fasting for its full and perfect development. ... Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible; fasting, the other, with which we let loose and cast away the visible.

“Though you have not seen him,” the Apostle Peter writes, “you love him; and though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8). There is unimaginable blessing in a life of faith that lets go of the visible to embrace the invisible and glorious God.

1. How can fasting help build your faith in Jesus?

2. What is God asking you to believe Him for during this time of fasting?

Day19: Temptation

Matthew 26:41 (NIV) Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak.

In this verse, Jesus instructs His disciples to stay alert and on guard through prayer. However, we also learn here, and from our own experience with temptation, that even when our spirits are willing, our bodies are weak. Our physical desires and weakness in resisting them often hold us back from spiritual victories over temptation.

This is where fasting adds a practical dimension to prayer in our struggle against temptation. The physical act of resisting food can help us connect with the spiritual act of resisting sin.

As we focus on the Lord instead of feeding our stomach, we learn that He is our strength and the source of real satisfaction. We experience the reality that feasting on His Word is so much better than catering to our fleshly appetites.

Let's ask God to help us connect our fasting from food (or whatever you are fasting from) with the act of resisting these temptations. Foregoing that hamburger might be just the thing that strengthens our spiritual resistance and enables us to emerge victorious in our battle with sin.

1. What temptations to sin are strongest in your life right now?

2. How can prayer and fasting help you over these temptations?

Day20: Tests

James 1:2-4 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

Our initial response to tests and troubles can sometimes be complaining, frustration or even questioning God. But James tells us we should consider these opportunities for great joy. Spiritual maturity comes when we go beyond merely accepting our tests to joyously embracing them.

Tests also develop endurance in our lives and James says we should let endurance grow. Instead of asking God to prematurely lift the test, ask Him for perseverance and increasing spiritual strength in the midst of it.

Certain tests are so severe that we will only endure by pressing into God through prayer and fasting. As we do this, He will enable us to meet the challenge and persevere.

No matter how intense the test may be, nothing can separate us from our Father, and His love and power will carry us through.

1. How does God develop spiritual maturity in you through tests and trials?

2. What are you learning in this season about trusting God through your trials?

Day 21: Masterpiece

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT) For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

The dictionary defines a masterpiece as "a work of outstanding artistry, skill or workmanship." When we think of masterpieces we think of great creators, some of the most talented artists and musicians our world has ever known—Picasso, Van Gogh, Beethoven, Mozart and the like.

When God thinks about masterpieces, the Bible says He thinks about you! The Apostle Paul reminded us that, when God created us, and especially when He created us anew by our faith in Jesus Christ, He made us His masterpiece.

What does it mean to be God's masterpiece? It implies several things. It means that:

- **God imparted to us the best of Himself.** A masterpiece is a reflection of an artist's best work. A masterpiece is the result of a creator putting his or her best effort into their creation. God did this with each of us.
- **God planned our purpose—He has a reason for our being.** A masterpiece is the result of planned and purposeful action. It's the result of the creator's vision. He or she sees something on the blank canvas or in the rough piece of rock that others don't see. They hear something coming from an instrument that others don't hear. They bring this vision into reality. This is what God has done with each of us.
- **God wants to express His creative nature through us.** The work of an artist is an expression of their creative nature. Their work is an extension of what is on the inside of them. Masterpieces are outward expressions of an artist's thoughts and emotions—their heart and soul. A masterpiece inspires and releases creativity in others. This is what God does in and through us. He expresses His creative nature through us and uses us to inspire others.
- **God wants to communicate a part of Himself to the world through us.** A masterpiece is a message. It tells a story. It says something about the creator. It communicates his or her message to the world. It tells us about an artist's nature. God created each of us to uniquely communicate a part of Himself to a world that desperately needs to know Him. Through each of us, God wants to declare His message of love and life.

The Apostle Paul stated the main reason God made us His masterpieces: "He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

God created us so that we could and would effectively fulfill the work He ordained for each of us to do. He has given us all the resources we need to do the work He planned for us. He simply waits for us to catch His vision and get busy fulfilling it!

1. What does it mean to you to be God's masterpiece?

2. List some of the reasons God made you. What will you do to daily remind yourself of your God-designed purpose?