

Daily Devotional: For when trials come

Monday-Nail

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. -Isaiah 53:5

We begin by reminding ourselves that Jesus was not without suffering. The God we pray to is a God who has suffered just as we have, and beyond. This week, we begin by reminding ourselves of that suffering. Not to make us feel guilty, but to remind us that we are not alone.

Take the nail you received in church (if you weren't in church, use a nail or any other object) and carry it with you. Make sure you keep it somewhere that you will be confronted with it regularly throughout the day. Personally, I like to keep it in my pocket, but you can put it in your wallet, by your computer mouse (so your arm brushes it as you work) or sticking up on your chair. (just kidding on that one...please don't do that). Wherever it is, it should be somewhere that causes a degree of discomfort or awkwardness-it should interrupt your life in some small way. Be creative and find what works for you.

When you have those moments of interruption, pause-even if only for a moment, and be thankful for the suffering of Jesus, and the strength he gives us in our suffering.

Tuesday-Silence

Silence is something that we find less and less in our lives today, and it can often be uncomfortable. In silence we are confronted with ourselves-our thoughts, our emotions, and for some, our memories. But silence is more than just emptiness, it is an invitation and opportunity. An invitation to allow God to speak and an opportunity to experience him more fully.

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." -Psalm 46:10

God commands us to be still. The next part of that verse is part command and part promise. He instructs us to know that he is God, but knowing he is God is also something that comes from time spent in silence.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. -Mark 1:35

It was the regular practice of Jesus to go to quiet places and be still before the Father. We're going to follow him in that practice today. Find somewhere you can be undisturbed for 10 minutes. Maybe that's a place outside, or a room in your house. Maybe it's in the car in the

parking lot before you go in to work. As you do this, there are only two important things to do.

1. Guard the silence-make sure you go somewhere you won't be interrupted. Turn OFF your phone (not just on vibrate!) and turn off the radio or anything else that could be distracting.
2. You don't need to accomplish anything. If you can quiet your thoughts, great! If not, that's okay too. If you feel the need to share something with God, you can do that, but keep it brief. This is time to listen, not to speak. Perhaps pray the words of Samuel as a boy: "Speak lord your servant is listening". If you sit in the quiet for ten minutes, you've done it. It may not feel life changing or significant-but trust me, it is.

The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him. -Habakkuk 2:20

Wednesday-Outside

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. -Psalm 19:1-4

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. -Romans 1:20

Scripture isn't the only place we can go to learn about who God is. Scripture itself tells us that we can learn about God by observing creation. Spend at least 10-30 minutes outside today, in a way that you are able to observe creation and see what it tells you about our creator.

For example:

- Watch a sunset and think about what it means that God created such beauty in the world.
- Watch an anthill and think about how God created the world to work together in unity to accomplish a goal.
- Look at the turning leaves and reflect on how God calls us to different things in different seasons of our lives.

Thursday- Fast

⁴ Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. -Jonah 3:4-5

Fasting doesn't have to be complicated. The Ninevites fasted immediately after hearing Jonah's prophecy. They didn't have years (or even weeks!) of theological instruction, they simply obeyed the command to refrain from eating as an act of repentance and surrender to God.

¹⁶ "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. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ 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. -Matthew 6:16-18

Jesus instructs us to avoid a common temptation-don't put on a show when you're fasting. You don't need to go out of your way to show others how much you're suffering and how difficult it is.

² 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." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. -Acts 13:2-3

While we don't want to put on a show when we fast, we also should be careful about interpreting Jesus' words in Matthew as a command to keep our fasting a secret from everyone. We see clearly here in Acts 13 (as well as others) that the early church *often* fasted *together*. It is not only acceptable for others to know you're fasting, it is a critical part of discipleship and a central practice of the church.

Today, fast from food in some way. If you are healthy enough, that may look like refraining from all food from sunup to sundown. Perhaps you only give up certain foods like sweets and junk food. You can also do something like a bread and water fast, or a fast where you only have healthy shakes. Whatever you do, do it prayerfully and led by the Spirit. If you're too hungry and feel sick, eat something-it often takes time to build up the ability. If you're not hungry at all-thank God for his provision in allowing you to fast without pain.

Friday-Technology

"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything.

-1 Corinthians 6:12

Today's devotional is simple: we are, as a society, mastered by our technology. What does it mean to be mastered? We are bound, controlled, influenced, directed, and shaped by the technology that promised us freedom.

Today we are taking steps to break that control. Put technology in its place today. Here are some suggestions, but prayerfully decide what is right for you.

- Put your phone somewhere less accessible - Take your tv down and put it away for a week - Put your phone on black and white mode to reduce stimulation - check your phone once an hour and only once an hour- put a widget on your home screen that shows your screen time for the day -

A word of advice from personal experience: this is nearly impossible to do slowly. Trying to engage in slightly less screen time almost never works. There needs to be a firm, dramatic effort to put technology in its proper place. Also, make sure you plan on how to fill the void left by technology. If, for example, you take down your TV, make sure you plan a game or activity for the family to engage in instead of watching your favorite show.

Saturday- Get Together

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. -Galatians 6:2

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. -Romans 12:15

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

One of the greatest gifts God gives us to strengthen us is the church-not the building, not the events, and not the services-the people. Here is the challenge: sometime this week, get together with someone from church *outside of planned church events*. Ask if they have any burdens you can be praying for and share any of yours. You don't have to share your life story, or any information you aren't comfortable sharing.

Our world, especially after Covid, is frighteningly secluded and lonely. Making a choice to be with another person is nothing less than an act of war against one of the greatest threats to the mental and spiritual health of our generation.