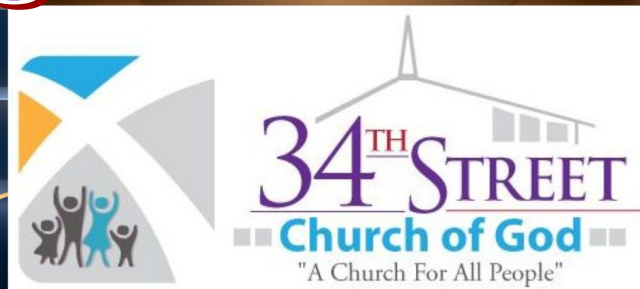


12 Steps To BETTER

Build • Equip • Train • Transform • Engage • Revitalize

2026

Fasting Devotional Guide



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Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In 2026 we have committed to “B.E.T.T.E.R.” (BUILD, EQUIP, TRAIN, TRANSFORM, ENGAGE, & REVITALIZE). As in prior years, this is the time of year that we come together as family and friends — near and far, onsite and online, in-person and virtual — to submit ourselves to the Lord through our corporate fast.

You are encouraged to invite others to join us as we seek to honor God by deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ. God is calling us to surrender and recommit ourselves to Him through this fast. He is calling us to Keep it real as we seek His face and commit our time, talents, and treasure to Him.

Let’s take this dedicated time of fasting and praying to seek God just as we did when we first came to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, when we first hungered and thirsted after Him. “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6).

We must remain focused and fixed on our goals to get the most from this experience of praying and fasting. It is our time to “draw near to God and He will draw near unto us” (James 4:8). We can do this by concentrating on these biblical disciplines: *fasting, studying the Bible, participating in communion and evangelism, praying, stewardship, serving, fellowshiping with the saints, and praising and worshipping* our true and living God. These disciplines will strengthen our relationship with God and allow us to live out the calling that He has placed on our lives through the various roles and responsibilities we are charged to fulfill.

Be encouraged! The daily activities included in this booklet are designed to help us model, message, and minister to our family and friends what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. God promises to equip us with the strength, power, endurance, peace, and knowledge we need to reconnect, renew, and recommit to the Great Commandment to make disciples of all men. I pray that we allow this time of praying and fasting to take root in our lives so that we can all produce the fruit of His Holy Spirit.

Grace and Peace,

Bishop Thomas Scott
Senior Pastor



Lent 2026

Today, we gather on the first day in the season of Lent. While many Christians around the world observe Lent, some may not fully understand why. So, we want to spend a moment telling you both what it is and why it is.

The highlight of the year for Christians is Easter, the day when God raised Christ from the dead. Lent is a forty-day season of preparation for Easter. Lent always begins on a Wednesday, called Ash Wednesday.

Why 40 days? Because, Jesus fasted and was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days. Lent, then, is our time of fasting, prayer, temptation and repentance. Lent is not required anywhere in scriptures, but it has been a custom, which Christians have practiced for most of the last two thousand years.

In many languages, the word "Lent" actually means "fast." This is where the custom of giving up something for Lent originated. However, just to confuse things, Lent is actually 46 days rather than 40 days. Why?

Because the 40 days of Lent are supposed to be days of fasting, which means days of discipline and self-restraint. But Sunday, the Lord's Day, should never be a day of fasting, but a day of celebration!

So each Sunday we suspend our Lenten disciplines and celebrate. Lent is 40 "fasting" days spread out over a total of 46 days beginning on Ash Wednesday

The focus of Lent was always threefold:

1. It was a time to prepare new converts for baptism through intensive classes and instruction.
2. It was a time for long-standing Christians to review their lives and renew their commitment to Jesus Christ.
3. It was a time for those who had fallen away to be restored to the faith.

In every case, it is a time for serious, disciplined self-examination, a time spent in intensive prayer and repentance before the cross of Calvary.

Put simply, Lent is a time to examine ourselves carefully. Here are some questions upon which you might pray and meditate during Lent:

- ◆ Am I sharing gladly what I have with others, especially the stranger and the poor?
- ◆ Do I have a gracious and patient attitude with others, especially those who irritate me?
- ◆ Do I feel the power of connection to God and the church in corporate worship?
- ◆ How is my devotional and prayer life progressing? Am I listening to God more and complaining less? Is it time for a change or a growth in my Bible study and prayer life?
- ◆ What are the flaws, failures and dysfunctions that still plague me?
- ◆ Am I as thoughtful and forgiving of family as others, or do I take my frustrations out on them?

HOW TO BEGIN OUR CORPORATE 40 DAY FAST

By following these eight basic steps to fasting, you will make your time with God more meaningful and spiritually rewarding.

STEP 1 **SET YOUR OBJECTIVE**

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, or for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

Through fasting and prayer, we humble ourselves before God so the Holy Spirit will stir our souls, awaken our churches, and heal our land according to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Make this a priority in your fasting.

STEP 2 **MAKE YOUR COMMITMENT**

Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast (Matthew 6:16 - 18; 9:14 - 15). For Him, it was a matter of when believers would fast, not if they would do it. Before you fast, decide the following upfront:

- ◆ What physical or social activities will you restrict?
- ◆ How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Scriptures

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

STEP 3 **PREPARE YOURSELF SPIRITUALLY**

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.

Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).

Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16, 17).

STEP 4 **PREPARE YOURSELF PHYSICALLY**

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment.

Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to God in prayer.

STEP 5 **FAST DAY**

Your time of fasting and prayer has come. You are abstaining from all solid foods and have begun to seek God through Jesus Christ.

Prepare yourself for temporary mental discomforts, such as impatience, crankiness, and anxiety. Expect some physical discomfort, especially on the second day.

STEP 6 **PUT YOURSELF ON A SCHEDULE**

For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with God. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with God, the more meaningful your fast will be.

When possible, begin and end each day on your knees with your spouse for a brief time of praise and thanksgiving to God. Longer periods of time with God in prayer and study of His Word are often better spent alone.

STEP 7 **END YOUR FAST GRADUALLY**

How you break your fast is extremely important for your physical and spiritual well-being. Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Suddenly introducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have negative, even dangerous, consequences. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day. If you end your fast gradually, the physical and spiritual effects will result in continued good health.

STEP 8 **A FINAL WORD-EXPECT RESULTS**

If you sincerely humble yourself before God, repent, pray, seek God's face, and consistently meditate on His Word, you will experience a heightened awareness of His presence (John 14:21). God will give you fresh, new spiritual insights. Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened. You will feel mentally, spiritually, and physically refreshed. You will see answers to your prayers.

It takes time to build your spiritual fasting muscles. If you fail to make it through your first fast, do not be discouraged. You may have tried to fast too long the first time out, or you may need to strengthen your understanding and resolve. As soon as possible, undertake another fast until you

FAST INSTRUCTIONS

PHYSICAL

- No food from 6am–6pm on fast days. Work to eliminate sweets, caffeine, or alcoholic beverages from your diet.
- 30 minutes a day of physical exercise Monday–Friday

SOCIAL/TECHNOLOGICAL

- Fast from one form technology (e.g. Social media (i.e. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snap Chat), Television and movies (cable and satellite TV, movie theaters Netflix, Hulu) or both. In its place, find a prayer partner with whom to pray daily. Engage daily in a period of silent meditation.

FINANCIAL

- Eliminate spending money on non-essential daily routine purchases* (i.e. cup of coffee, newspapers, etc.) during the fast. Eliminate spending money on non-essential personal items* (i.e. retail therapy, extra clothing, electronics, etc.) *Give an offering of \$40 during Lent. 34th Street Church will donate ALL offering funds given this year during Lent to a selected charity at the end of the fast.*

WHAT IS FASTING?

As you prepare to embark on this Lenten fast, you may be surprised to find out that scripture does not require Christians to fast. You might ask yourself, if scripture doesn't require us to fast then why should we?

While scripture does not require Christians to fast, scripture does reveal the importance of fasting. In the Old Testament, fasts were frequently called forth by leaders of a congregation during critical and despairing times (Jeremiah 26:9, Joel 1:14, Daniel 1:8).

In the New Testament, Jesus' earthly ministry is preceded by 40 days of prayer and fasting (Matthew 4). Likewise, in the early church, Christians would couple prayer and fasting as a means to hear from God, especially before making important decisions (Acts 13:2; 14:23).

Fasting is an opportunity for Christians to practice the fruit of self-discipline, by abstaining from personal pleasure and fixing their entire attention on God. Although many people will choose to abstain from food during their fast, food is not the only means of fasting. Believers can choose to abstain from anything that can potentially serve as a distraction in their pursuit of seeking God.

HOW TO FAST?

Before embarking on a fast, participants should prepare themselves mentally, physically, and spiritually. Keep in mind, that fasting is not a form of dieting, and all participants should consult their primary care physicians before making any changes to their diet. We also suggest preparing your meals in advance, in order to maximize and focus your time and energy.

Remember, the objective of fasting is not only to eliminate things from your daily routine, but rather to replace them with prayer. If you usually eat breakfast at a certain time during the day, replace that time by spending time in prayer.

If you normally watch television when you get home from work, consider replacing that time with reading the word of God. As you fast, it is important to be consistent. However, if you break your fast by accident or even miss a few days, don't beat yourself up or give up. Rather, get right back to your fasting objectives. Remember, the objective isn't to be perfect, the objective is to be transformed.

BLESS MY FIVE

Pray for FIVE people specifically. Pray for their personal needs. Try to look at life from their standpoint. What are the worries and joys, pressures and decisions, dreams and fears that they face? Pray for those things.

Pray about their spiritual life. What are the things that are keeping them away from God? Pray that God would soften their hearts and bring them to faith in Christ.

If you are doing this as a group or with a friend, pray for their five friends also. Pray that the Lord would give opportunities to share something of His love with them.

Believe that these five people will change during the 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting.

THE YEAR OF BETTER!

40 Days of Fasting and Prayer

Wednesday, February 18, 2026— Saturday, April 4, 2026

Fasting brings us closer to God. Our hearts and minds must be focused towards God so that He becomes the full source of our strength during the fasting period. As Christians, we are strengthened and renewed.

“...Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day”
(2 Corinthians 4:16).

The fast at 34th Street Church will follow these guidelines:

FAST TYPE

From **Wednesday, February 18 – Saturday, April 4, 2026**, we will follow a modified Daniel Fast. We will primarily only eat fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains, chicken and fish. We will only drink water and 100% juices. We will refrain from eating meats, dairy, and sweets. (A sample menu is provided to give you ideas on how to structure your meals.)

One day every week, select a day when you will participate in a liquid fast by only drinking liquids such as water and 100% fruit juices.

Alternative: For those of you who cannot fast because of medical reasons, consider fasting certain types of food (sweets, soft drinks, etc.) or leisure activities such as your favorite TV program and/or social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.).

If you have any health conditions, please seek medical advice from your physician before beginning any corporate food fast at 34th Street Church.

Times of Fasting and Prayer

Wednesday, February 18 - Saturday, April 4, 2026 6:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Church-wide Prayer, Events & Activities

Monday-Friday mornings, Prayer Tele-Conference line from 6:00 a.m. - 7:00 a.m. EST

Tuesday Morning Meditation With Bishop 6:00 a.m. - 6:30 a.m. EST

Phone: (605) 475-4000

ACCESS CODE 689056#

HOW TO FAST SUCCESSFULLY

Isaiah 58

Fast – a religious discipline; abstinence from food or drink; to afflict the soul

Reasons for Fasts

1. For repentance to ward off present or future destruction and to supply a discipline of fasting and prayer (Jonah 3:4-10)
2. To humble ourselves (Psalm 35:13) NKJV
3. For protection of self, family, personal property (Ezra 8:21,23)
4. To draw closer to God (James 4:8)
5. To resist the power of the devil (James 4:7)
6. For deliverance from demonic possession (Matthew 17:20-21) NKJV
7. Healing (II Chronicles 7:14) NKJV of nations, individual, relationships etc.
8. To get extra help and blessings from God (James 4:6)
9. For direction from God (Ezra 8:21) NKJV
10. To Gain control of yourself (II Chronicles 7:14) Humble, seek, pray, and then you can TURN!

Different Types of Fasts

1. Partial (Daniel 10:2-3) No meat, certain items but not all 21 days
2. Complete/Total (Esther 4:16, Jonah 3:7)
3. Corporate (Jonah 3)
4. Personal (Matthew 4:1-2)

Hindrance to an Effective Fast

1. Wrong motives (Matthew 6:16), Adoration from others, trying to impress God (Isaiah 58:3)
2. Unforgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15)
3. Selfishness (Isaiah 58:3)
4. Continued Sin (Isaiah 58:4)
5. It becomes religious instead of relationship oriented (Isaiah 58:5)
6. Inconsistency (Matthew 7:7) NLT
7. Not having a goal

What Happens During a Fast?

1. The devil comes to tempt you and attack you (Matthew 4:3)
2. You lose weight; your stomach shrinks
3. You may get depressed, lonely, etc.

Suggestions for Fasting

1. Set a goal (Daniel 9:3) NKJV
2. Don't make it obvious (Matthew 6:16)
3. Write down the date you start and the date you plan to end and journal results (Habakkuk 2:2)
4. Be patient (Habakkuk 2:3)
5. Start with something you can do
6. Pray when your head or stomach hurts
7. See your doctor before you begin a fast and don't over eat when your fast is over
8. Pray the last 30 minutes of your fast
9. Read the bible or a devotional when you are supposed to eat
10. Resist
11. Children can choose to fast from: sweets; games; phones; television (for a time or in moderation)

Why am I fasting?

What will I give up, for God, during my fast?

Consider joining or creating a fasting team of up to 10 people to encourage each other during this journey. List who will be on your team. Denote how and when you will communicate with one another?

PRAYER: THE WHAT, WHY & HOW

What is prayer?

Prayer is communication with the only true and living God. Prayer helps us to grow spiritually. As we pray we begin to build an intimate relationship with God. Through prayer we appeal to God for his mercy, grace, and love.

Why must we pray?

God's Word commands us to pray (Luke 18:1, 10:2). Jesus also prayed (Matthew 4:1-2). Jesus who is the Word, who is God, the Creator and Sustainer prayed before every major decision.

How must we pray?

One of the most important elements of effective prayer is praying to the Father in JESUS' name (John 14:13-14). We must also pray by faith, continually, with a pure heart, with thanksgiving, and assurance that our prayers will be answered (Mark 11:24-25) (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) (Philippians 4:4-7). There is no right or wrong way to pray. Prayer styles vary, and yours is uniquely designed for you.

Why do our prayers sometimes go unanswered?

Isaiah 59:2 It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore. (New Living Translation)

- Un-forgiveness (Mark 11:25)
- Self-indulgence (James 4:7)
- Doubt (James 1:5-8)
- Rejecting God (Proverbs 28:9)
- Un-confessed Sin (Micah 3:4)
- Disobedience (Proverbs 28:9)
- No love or compassion (Proverbs 21:13)
- Pride (Deuteronomy 1:43,45)

Christians do not realize the impact of sin in our daily lives. We have spiritual and emotional barriers to prayer because of our un-confessed sin. For God to answer our prayers we must confess our sins, humble ourselves, seek God, and turn away from those things that are not pleasing to God. (Psalm 65:2)

New to Praying: What should be included in our prayers?

Although prayer cannot be reduced to a formula, certain basic elements should always be included in our communication with God: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (ACTS).

THIS YEAR “2026” I BELIEVE GOD:

FOR MYSELF

Spiritual Revival * Physical Healing * Prosperity and Abundance * Rich Generosity

MY FAMILY

Restoration of Relationships * Household Salvation

MY CAREER/SCHOOL

Excellence * Promotion

MY MINISTRY

Victory * Group Growth * Salvation of Colleagues, Classmates, Bosses, Employees

BLESS MY FIVE

Pray for FIVE people specifically. Pray for their personal needs. Try to look at life from their standpoint. What are the worries and joys, pressures and decisions, dreams, and fears that they face?

Pray about their spiritual life. What are the things that are keeping them away from God? Pray that God would soften their hearts and bring them to faith in Christ.

If you are doing this in a group or with a friend, pray for their five friends also. Pray that the Lord would give opportunities to share His love with them. Believe that these five people will change during the 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting.

HOW TO FAST:

Drink plenty of water (8-10 glasses per day). Drink water about 30 minutes before a meal or an hour after a meal. Water dilutes your digestive enzymes. If you have a juicer, great! Begin to drink fresh juice of carrots, apples, etc. at your meals. Great ideas for juice combinations can be found at Health Foods Stores. These are more potent, as they are extracted from the fruit or vegetable. If you don't have a juicer at home, drink 100 juices purchased from the store. It is important that you continue to have three meals per day, along with your juice. This may not feel good at first, but your body will adjust. Select a few days within the 40 that you will not eat at all. Pray and ask for God's strength along the way. Now you are ready for the fast on **Wednesday, February 18, 2026 - Saturday, April 4, 2026**. Some sample menus will follow, but be creative.

TYPES OF FAST

There are three types of fast mentioned in the Bible. The Partial Fast or Restricted Fast means to abstain from certain foods and liquids. Daniel 1:8-16 tells the story of Daniel and how he purposed in his heart not to eat meat or drink wine for a certain number of days. This story illustrates the benefits of this type of fast.

The Normal Fast or Natural Fast is the second type of fast in the Bible. This means to abstain from all foods, solids and liquids, except water. Luke 4:1-4, is the story of Christ's fast in the wilderness. Deuteronomy 8:1-3 further emphasizes that the word of God is just as essential as bread (food).

The third type of fast is called the **Absolute Fast** or **Total Fast**. Since this involves abstaining from all foods and liquids (including) water, it should **never exceed three (3) days and should never be undertaken without a clear command from God**. This is the type of fast undertaken by Queen Esther, Mordecai, and other Jews as Esther prepared to approach her husband, King Ahasuerus. In Esther 4:14-16, we see the seriousness of the situation confronting her and sense her commitment to do what was required of her. The ultimate fate of the Jews was at stake.

The following schedule is for the **Normal Fast (Juices and Water)**:

PARISHIONERS

A-E
F-J
K-O
P-T
U-Z

DESIGNATED DAY/TIME

Monday, 6:00 AM - Monday, 6:00 PM
Tuesday, 6:00 AM - Tuesday, 6:00 PM
Wednesday 6:00 AM - Wednesday, 6:00 PM
Thursday, 6:00 AM - Thursday, 6:00 PM
Friday, 6:00 AM - Friday, 6:00 PM

SUGGESTED FOOD FOR DAILY PARTIAL FASTING

FOODS TO EAT

ALL FRUITS

WHOLE WHEAT, RYE, OATS

ALL VEGETABLES

SEAFOOD, POULTRY,
CHEESE, EGGS

MILK, FRUIT JUICES, POSTUM
OVALTINE, HERBAL TEAS

FRUIT

BUTTER, HONEY, TURKEY MEAT

RICE, POPCORN, PASTAS,

FRUITS

BREAD

VEGETABLES

MEATS

BEVERAGES

DESSERTS

SEASONINGS

MISCELLANEOUS

FOODS TO AVOID

NONE

BREAD/CRACKERS MADE
WITH WHITE FLOUR

NONE

BEEF, PORK, VEAL

CARBONATED DRINKS,
COFFEE, TEA, ETC.

PIES, CAKES, CANDY
SHERBERT, ICE CREAM

NO HAM HOCKS, BACON,
SALT PORK, WHITE SUGAR,
ETC

NO JUNK FOOD

2026 Fast Sample Menu for Most Men, Women, & Young Adults

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Breakfast	Creamy Fruit Smoothie	Fried Potatoes, onions	Cinn Hot Apples	Rice & Beans	Hash Brown Potatoes	Rice & Beans	Fried Potatoes
	Fried Potato w/tofu	Tomatoes Slices	Baked Pineapple Rings w/ walnuts	Tomatoes Slices	Melon	Tomatoes Slices	Light Apple Juice
Snack	Water	Soy Milk	Water	Soy Milk	Water	Soy Milk	Water
	Almonds & Raisins	Peanut Butter & Apple	Hummus Dip w/Chips	Popcorn	Fruit - Apple	Fruit Salad & Nuts	Fruit - Apple
	Water	Water	Water	Water	Water	Water	Water
Lunch	Broccoli Spears	Hearty Salad	Vegetable Chili w/Tofu	Chunky Minestrone	BLACK BEAN & WILD RICE SOUP	Rice & Mushroom Salad	Vegetable & Rice Soup
	Baked Potato 3-bean chili & mushrooms	Soup (potato, veggie, minestrone, or lentil)	Rice	Oven French Fries	Mashed Potatoes w/ Mushrooms & Vegetables	Cabbage & Diced Potato Soup	Baked Sweet Potato
	Soy Milk	Apple Juice	Grape Juice	Soy Milk	Papaya Juice	Soy Milk	Soy Milk
Snack	Tortilla Chips & black bean spread	Baby Carrots & Walnuts	Banana w Peanut Butter	Celery Sticks w/ Peanut butter dip	Fruit salad w/ fruit dip	Marinated Cucumbers	Fresh Fruit
	Soy Milk	Water	Soy Milk	Water	Soy Milk	Water	Soy Milk
Dinner	Brown Rice & Lentil Stew	New Orleans Red beans	Seasoned Navy Beans Stew	15-Bean Soup	Black Beans & Fried Rice	Corn and Navy Bean Chowder	Tempeh Chili
	Side salad w/vinaigrette dressing	Rice	Grilled new potato & green bean w/ garlic	Seasoned Mixed Greens	Mexican Corn	Oven Fried Vegetables Fries - Zucchini, Squash, Sweet Potato	Wild Rice
	Sliced peaches	Coleslaw w/apples	Baked Banana & Passion Fruit	Sweet Potato Salad	Sliced Pears & Peaches Salad	Cucumber & Tomato Salad	Broccoli Mandarin Orange Salad
	Water	Water	Water	Water	Water	Water	Water
Snack	Stove popped popcorn	Fresh apple w/ soy butter	ROASTED HONEY COVERED NUTS	Potato Chips	Tortilla Chips & Salsa	Nuts, seeds ad raisins	Caramel Popcorn w/ nuts
	Papaya Juice	Soy Milk	Cranberry Juice	Soy Milk	Soy Milk	Orange juice	Soy Milk

Guidelines/Suggestions

Whole Grains: Brown Rice, Staples: White Rice, Wild Rice

Legumes: Any dried (or canned) bean, Lentils, Soybeans (edamame), and Tempeh

Vegetables ALL, 100% vegetable juice

Fruits ALL (excluding canned in syrup), 100% juices

Nuts/Seeds Peanuts, Pecans, Walnuts, Sunflower seeds (or Almonds, Hazelnuts, Cashews)

Oils: Olive oil (or Canola, Sunflower, Safflower)

Liquids: All water excluding flavored or sweetened, Soy milk

Proteins: Tofu, Tempeh

Sweeteners: Honey, Maple syrup (or pure agave sweetener)

All natural herbs, spices and seasonings, Miso

The Sacrifice: Foods/Ingredients to Avoid

Meat, poultry, fish, meatless Soy burgers w/ dairy added

Caffeine, carbonated beverages

Sugar: sugar, fructose, sugar substitutes, etc

Grains: flour, oatmeal, barley, bran

Margarine, shortening

Milk, milk products, butter

Honey roasted nuts, containing sugar

High fat (fried) foods

Foods containing excessive preservatives/additives



FASTING FOR SPIRITUAL BREAKTHROUGH

- 1. THE DISCIPLES' FAST:**
Fasting to break addictions.
Matt 17:20, 21
- 2. THE EZRA FAST:**
Fasting to solve problems and seek protection.
Ezra 8:21-23
- 3. THE SAMUEL FAST:**
Fasting to win people to Christ and to get God to pour Himself out on Mankind.
1 Samuel 7:1-8
- 4. THE ELIJAH FAST:**
Fasting to break every yoke.
1 King 19:2-18
- 5. THE WIDOW'S FAST:**
Fasting so that others needs will be met.
1 Kings 17:12
- 6. THE SAINT PAUL FAST:**
Fasting for wisdom and insight from God.
Acts 9:9-19
- 7. THE DANIEL FAST:**
Fasting for good health and obedience towards God.
Daniel 1:12-20
- 8. THE JOHN THE BAPTIST FAST:** Fasting for a stronger testimony and influence.
Matthew 3:4, Luke 1:15
- 9. THE ESTHER FAST:**
Fasting for protection from the evil one.
Esther 4:16

■ OPTIONS

Below are options that can be utilized to assist in your fasting for a spiritual breakthrough.

OPTION #1 Abstain from all foods and drinks
Focus: Fasting for wisdom and insight from God.
(The St. Paul Fast)

OPTION #2 Fruits and Vegetables only
Focus: Fasting for good health and obedience towards God.
(The Daniel Fast)

OPTION #3 Abstain from sodas and sweets (desserts, pies, cookies, cake, candy, etc.); Natural sweeteners and fruits are okay
Focus: Fasting to solve problems and seek protection from the evil one. (Ezra and Esther Fasts)

OPTION #4 Abstain from all types of fried foods and breads
Focus: Fasting to win people to Christ and to get God to pour Himself out on mankind; Fasting so that others' needs will be met; and Fasting for a stronger testimony and influence. (Samuel, Widows and John the Baptist Fasts)

OPTION #5 Abstain from meats and sweets
Focus: Fasting to break addictions and every yoke.
(Disciples' and Elijah Fasts)

Bread Alone

“But He answered, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” - Matthew 4:4

READ

The fourth chapter of Matthew contains this famous interaction between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness. Jesus was just finishing a forty-day fast, and He “was hungry” (Matthew 4:2). What Jesus affirms during this exchange is an eternal truth and one that still bears upon our lives today: Food is not the only thing that sustains us.

As we fast, we are forcing ourselves into a position of weakness and humility. God designed us to take in life giving nourishment through food and water, but as we are fasting, we focus upon the deep truth that God's word is actually more vital to our living than bread. However, this is a lesson not learned lightly, but through experience.

We are generally controlled greatly by our bodily impulses. We have impulses to eat, sleep, drink, or even go to the restroom. When we fast, we deny our flesh control over this extremely important aspect of our life. As we hunger for food, we are constantly aware of our weakness. Fasting is a way to connect to God in a more powerful way than ever before because we are placing our total dependence on God for everything that we need.

REFLECTION

When we surrender ourselves to fasting, we are offering God our worship. Fasting allows us to choose between following our own goals and satisfying our own desires (weight loss, get in better shape, etc.) and fulfilling God’s will and purpose for it (consecration of ourselves and connection to Him). God wants to set us free physically and spiritually, and this can happen when we do the things that Isaiah wrote about:

1. Let go of the bonds of wickedness (iniquity, sin)
2. Undo (reverse the effects) the heavy burdens
3. Free those who are oppressed (emotionally, mentally, or spiritually), and break the chains which may be holding them bound (restraints/chains)

RECITE

I am fasting because I want to be closer to God.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Heavenly Father, I humbly come before you in thanksgiving for my life and for sustaining my life with Your Word. I love you, Lord God, and I thank You for all of my blessings. I ask for a closer relationship with you. I ask for your strength to complete this 40-day fast. In the mighty name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Don't Listen to Negativity

Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it attacked me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God." - 1 Samuel 17:33-36 NIV

READ

In the scripture, although everyone else doubted that David could conquer the giant, David knew the God he served. And just as the Lord rescued him from the paw of both the lion and the bear, allowing him to strike and kill them, the Lord would do the same for David when he fought the giant. David refused to allow negative comments turn him from what he knew the Lord could do for him.

We all have areas in our life we are praying and believing God to bless us in, whether it be our relationships, health, career, finances, marriage, or some other area that is significant to us. The Lord has heard every one of your prayers, so put your Armor of God on and know when all is said and done, the goodness of the Lord will prevail.

When others try to discourage you or speak negativity in your direction, don't buy into it. There will always be people who only view the negative side of things. These people see the glass as half empty in most situations and are determined to have others think like them. But you are a person who sees the glass as half full because you believe God for your blessings. God has not forgotten about you. His goodness, mercies, grace and favor are upon you.

REFLECTION

Although Satan is a clever spirit, he is not an intellectual one. He can try to get inside your head with negative thoughts, but no strong man can enter your house unless you first allow him to. But you know you serve a powerful God Who will never leave nor forsake you.

RECITE

My Father will never leave me nor forsake me, and I know He is not a man that He would lie. I refuse to allow negative thoughts and attitudes to keep me from what God is trying to do in my life. I am victorious!

PRAYER FOCUS

Father, I thank you for your constant presence in my life and the strength and courage to fulfill your will. I thank you for your power. Because of You, I know I am a conqueror. In Your name, I pray. Amen.

Faith

“The Lord answered, 'If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'May you be uprooted and thrown into the sea,' and it would obey you.”

- Luke 17:6 NLT

READ

Sometimes, we wish, worry, and wonder why our lives are at a standstill and nothing seems to go our way. Our lives are moving too slowly with little to no progress or not moving at all, and it seems like it will be too long before you reach the top of the mountain. We struggle trying to make ends meet while paying bills, supplying food, or raising a family. We also may continue to remain discouraged about our circumstances, while not realizing there is a greater and higher power that is beyond comprehension and understanding that controls our every existence.

Sometimes, we feel like the burdens, worry and stress won't leave because with each new day, a new problem occurs: an eviction letter, a utility shut-off notice, or the car is down and there is no way to get to work. No matter what problems surface, we must remain hopeful and know that God will provide and make a way for us even in the midst of our adversity. When we build our faith, we please God. We will manifest things in our lives according to our faith. Faith is built up every day that we are here on this Earth. With every new day, God has blessed our minds, bodies, and health. He will supply everything we need if we trust in Him.

REFLECTION

God has not given us a spirit of fear; but of love, power and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). We can move mountains and accomplish what seems impossible if we have the faith of a mustard seed. How much faith do you have?

RECITE

I trust God with all my heart and know He supplies everything I need. He will make a way for me.

PRAYER FOCUS

Father, Your word declares my God shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. God, please bless me with a miracle to fit my personal needs today. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

Learning to Listen in Stillness

“Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed and be still.”
- Psalm 4:4 NKJV

READ

While we appreciate the convenience of technology, it does come with a cost: the huge temptation to feel a greater sense of urgency throughout the day. We have to check our email, reply to that message, listen to this voicemail, or return the phone call. Those of us who text, tweet, and post items to Facebook, Instagram, or other social media sites rarely disconnect. We are continually overwhelmed with demands for our attention. Periods of silence, where we can cultivate inner stillness and wait for the promptings of the Holy Spirit, are increasingly rare. Yet, as Habakkuk realized, it is in those moments of quiet reflection that we can hear God's voice.

“I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guard post. There I will wait to see what the Lord says...” (Habakkuk 2:1, NLT).

As you seek to gain a deeper fellowship with God during the fast and beyond, be sure to make a standing appointment with Him to pray, listen, and reflect on what He says to you. Find a quiet place where you can forget the busyness of life, silence your thoughts and emotions, and quiet your flesh. By focusing on the Father instead of the world, you will gain a better understanding of Him, revitalize your relationship with Him, and develop a renewed reliance on Him.

REFLECTION

Find a quiet place where you can disconnect from the world and fellowship with the Father. When you still your thoughts, what does He say to you?

RECITE

I will be still and know that you are God.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Lord, I'm going to dedicate myself to you daily and disconnect from the demands of my technological reality so that I can hear from you without distractions. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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Verse 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. Verse 17: But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, Verse 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 (NIV)

REFLECTION

In these verses we’re being warned about the importance of the spiritual practice of fasting. Fasting is a spiritual discipline and should be approached with the proper attitude and reverence so as to bring glory to God for our sacrifices. Matthew teaches us three things that result from fasting with a godly attitude. It postures our hearts toward God, it pleases God because our focus is on Him and not ourselves, and assures us of our reward.

APPLICATION

Ask yourself if others can tell that you are fasting based on your attitude or expression. What do you look like? How do you respond when offered something that would break your fast? Do you feel compelled to tell others you are fasting? If yes, why? Make the decision to wholly dedicate yourself to God during this fast and ask Him to remove the prideful desire to be approved by others.

PRAYER FOCUS

Heavenly Father, forgive me for any times I have fasted for the approval of others rather than spiritually submitting myself to You. Thank You for reminding me that fasting honors You and that my reward comes from Your approval. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Anger

“For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” - James 1:20

READ

Anger is an emotion that can be very dangerous and deter us from the path God has set for us. When we are angry, we tend to make poor decisions and harbor the emotion, which affects our future decisions, interactions, and treatment of others. If we are striving to be like Christ, we must learn to deal with anger and not allow anger to deal with us. Getting to the root of the issue and learning to forgive is a huge step in the right direction. Let us not allow an emotion to keep us from all that God has for us.

REFLECTION

Do you remember the last time you were angry? Recall your thought process during that moment of anger. How did you handle the situation? What will you do differently the next time anger attempts to rear its head?

RECITE

Anger is an emotion, not a determinant of how I respond to displeasing situations and circumstances.

PRAYER FOCUS

Father, thank you for the peace you provide. Please help me to deal with anger in accordance with your Word. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

That's Just the Way I Am

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I become a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.” - 1 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV)

READ

How often have you said, “That's just the way I am?” This phrase is a common disclaimer. It proclaims to you and to others, “don't expect me to ever be any different than I am right now: deal with it.”

“That's just the way I am,” is a convenient phrase that allows you to stay entrenched in the comfort zone of all your shortcomings. If you were nothing more than flesh and blood, the phrase would be true. You would be limited, and your options would be limited. Of course, you know that you are so much more than your flesh and blood limitations. You know that you have already gotten better at many things. Chances are, you are better at expressing yourself now than you were as a toddler.

Chances are that you are a better driver than you were when you first got a learner's permit. Chances are that there are many things that you used to do that are not a part of your behavior today. The proof is all around you. You can clearly see that you are not limited to who you used to be. You can be better tomorrow than you are today. You can change.

REFLECTION

Are you looking at yourself as the person you have always been or are you looking at yourself as the person you could be? Are you resisting changing your heart and mind because you are comfortable with your shortcomings? Does it seem that change would require too much effort?

RECITE

Since I know better, I must do better.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, help me to face and take responsibility for my shortcomings. Guide me to grow in spiritual maturity so that I may put away the childish things of my past. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

Eyes Wide Open

“And Elisha prayed and said, 'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.'” - 2 Kings 6:17

READ

2 Kings 6:17 reads: “And Elisha prayed and said, 'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

When Elisha prayed for this young man, his servant, it wasn't because he was physically blind, but because he was afraid; he had just seen an impending Syrian army that outnumbered Israel about to attack.

The young man saw the soldiers, weapons, chariots, and the spoils of past Syrian victories, and he was confused and frightened. However, when his spiritual eyes were opened as Elisha prayed, he saw differently and was no longer afraid. Now he could see God's army of angelic horses and chariots fulfilling God's word to Elisha: “for those who are with us are more than those who are with them, do not be afraid” (v. 16). Consequently, the Syrians were blinded and defeated.

How do you see the situations around you? How do you see the events and circumstances of your life? If you just look with your natural eyes, you will be like Elisha's servant: fearful, confused, and anticipating defeat. However, if you look with the spiritual eyes of faith and the vision that God's Word gives you, you, too, will see the hand of God in your situations.

God's promises, His presence, and His power are accessible to you. You just need to stand like Elisha, trusting God for the victory every single time during the fast and for the rest of your life.

REFLECTION

How are you viewing this 40-day fast? Do you doubt your ability to complete it? Are you setting yourself up for failure? What can you do to strengthen yourself to finish it successfully?

RECITE

My spiritual eyes are opening during this fast. Thank you, Lord!

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Heavenly Father, I humbly come before you in thanksgiving for all of my blessings. As I fast and pray today, I must remember the Word and cry out: “Lord, open my eyes that I may see things differently today according to the sight that faith, trust, and the Word of God brings into focus!” I ask for clarity in this season. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

Work Your Plan

“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.’ - Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

READ

How often do we doubt what God is going to do? How often do we block our own blessing? How many times have we talked ourselves out of things that God wants us to have? We are so bombarded by negative things in the newspapers, on TV, and in our communities that we have lost faith in what God has planned for us. We are so busy looking at what’s going on that we fail to see what God wants to do and has done.

You may not have a big shiny new car, but you have a car. You might not live in a mansion, but you have a warm place to sleep every night. God has the ability to breathe peace and prosperity on all of our problems and situations. Remember God can take the ordinary and turn it into the extraordinary. With God, all things are possible, so stay focused on what God has done, can do, and will do instead of the things He has not done.

REFLECTION

What are some of the things God has done for you? Take time to thank Him for His blessings. As you go through the day, ask God to show you His plan for you and to give you the wisdom and strength to fulfill it.

RECITE

I thank God for the many ways in which He has blessed me, and I will work the plan He has for me.

PRAYER FOCUS

Heavenly Father, I come with an open heart and mind, asking you to guide me on this path of life. I ask that you help me recognize my purpose and plan. I ask that you to give me wisdom and strength to pursue them. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

I Had a Dream

“Then God remembered Rachel; He listened to her and opened her womb.” - Genesis 30:22

READ

Rachel was Jacob's dream wife. They were very much in love. Like most married couples, they desired to have a child so their love could walk upon the earth. God listened to Rachel's dream for a child, and He answered her prayer by giving them a son. Their dream became a reality named Joseph.

It is impossible to overestimate the power and role of dreams in human existence. Dreams have brought us lifesaving medical breakthroughs and soul stirring revival movements. Some of our greatest athletic achievements are the result of a personal dream.

Years ago, I dreamed of hundreds attending 34th Street Church of God, even though at that time, we had significantly fewer in the pews. The United States of America is the result of a dream of real democratic government by a group of patriots. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. changed the conversation on civil rights because he had a dream. Your world and “the” world can be changed because of the dream inside you.

These dreams are your daytime dreams - your vision, your hopes, your aspirations, and your desires. A God-given dream won't go away. Search your heart and mind to get in touch with the dream God has put inside you. Then pray about it and take action!

REFLECTION

Are you able to make a distinction between visions that come from God and those that come from the enemy of your soul? Have you deferred your dream due to a setback?

RECITE

Without action, a dream is just an idle thought. Strengthen me to continue the pursuit of life goals.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, I pray that our church's vision will become a reality in God's perfect timing. I pray that my dreams of saving friends and family through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will come about as we expand ministry. Please reveal or clarify my personal dream that is your will for my life and direct me in acting appropriately on it. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Verse 33: “They said to him, “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.”

Verse 34: Jesus answered, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? Verse 35: But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.”

Luke 5 (NIV)

REFLECTION

In John 9:4, Jesus said, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.”

He knew His purpose and He knew His Father’s will for Him while He was in the earth. Because He knew that His time was short and He was singularly-focused on accomplishing what He came to do, it upset the religious leaders when He didn’t do things their way. They were prideful and envious, and got caught up in vilifying Jesus rather than doing the will of God. Always looking for a way to trap Jesus, they questioned Him about fasting. But Jesus knew their hearts. Even though they

were trying to discredit Him, He used it to teach and model God before them while He was in their presence. He let them know that traditional fasts were not necessary, particularly if they were being done with the wrong motives, and it was okay to celebrate Him.

APPLICATION

We can achieve God’s purposes during this fast by:

1. Being open for opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others
2. Praying for the lost, the lonely, and the left out within our communities
3. Taking advantage of every opportunity to love others and be a blessing to those in need

PRAYER FOCUS

Heavenly Father thank You for saving me! You did it, and for that, I owe You my best worship. The sacrifice of prayer and fasting is a small price to pay in response to all You did for me. Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, that I might not sin against You. Rather than complaining about what I am giving up, give me a grateful heart so that I might rejoice for the opportunity to worship You in this way. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Confusion

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”
- 1 Corinthians 14:33

READ

There have been moments when we've made a decision and the direction we went in left our lives in a state of confusion. We began to wonder if we made the right decision, questioning why God would send us in this direction into total chaos or if He even told us to take that path. Well, chances are we made that decision on our own.

The Spirit of God is not one of confusion. He will provide us with clear instructions. Though we may not understand the purpose of the instructions, we will understand what He's asking or telling us to do. Many times, our lack of understanding stems from our opposition to the very thing God wants us to do.

We tend to think that we know what's best for us, forgetting that God knows everything and is everywhere. Therefore, He protects us from dangers seen and unseen. So, let's learn to trust God more than we trust ourselves, learn His voice, distinguishing between God's instructions and the devil's temptations.

REFLECTION

Can you recall the last time you felt confused about where you were and the direction of your life? How did you get to that point? Were you listening to God or walking your own path?

RECITE

I will trust God more and deny my flesh.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, thank you for watching over me and protecting me from decisions that would lead to chaos and confusion. Help me to trust you more because you know what's best for me. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Finding Your Inner David for Your Outer Goliath

“David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the lord saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands.'” - 1 Samuel 17:45-47

READ

As you live, you have things and situations happen in your life that may cause you to feel weary and defeated. But God is always with you during the ups and downs of life. Even when the downs seem as deep as valleys, know that you can have victory over the enemy as you live for Christ.

No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from me,' says the Lord.” - Isaiah 54:17 (NKJV)

It's not about how big or terrible the situation looks. Instead, it's about your knowing in your heart of hearts that God has the last and final say regardless of what anyone else says. And as the song lyrics to “Giants” by Donald Lawrence indicate, “Giants do die. The bigger they are, the harder they fall.” Be comforted in knowing you serve a God who has power over it all.

REFLECTION

Just as a boy named David, the youngest son of Jesse, conquered and killed Goliath, a giant who was more than nine feet tall and was feared by an entire army, you, too, can and will conquer those things you see as giants in your life. You are a child of the almighty God, and He gave you the power, so speak boldly to that giant and command it to obey. What “giants” do you fear? How do you plan to conquer them?

RECITE

As a child of God, He has given me the power to command those things that attempt to hold me back from my rightful inheritance to be still and leave this place. Victory is mine!

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, I thank you for your power, grace and mercy. I pray you continue to build up in me a courageous spirit as you did in David. I know you are always with me, even in the valleys of life, for you are God Almighty. Amen.

A Mind to Work

“So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.” - Nehemiah 4:6 (KJV)

READ

One challenge of a large church is having enough volunteers to serve in the various ministries. The scripture above references the will of the people rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Chapters 4-7 of Nehemiah detail how different forms of opposition were overcome because **the people had a mind to work**, a determination to rebuild the wall, and a resolve to finish the task. They were ridiculed, threatened, discouraged, extorted, and slandered, but they continued forward in the work for which they were commissioned.

Often times, we must approach tasks with the same mindset. We must be able to see beyond the opposition so that we persevere and finish the work. Stephen Covey tells us to begin with the end in mind. During Black History month, we are often reminded to keep our “eyes on the prize.” However, the Bible simply directs us to have a mind to work. It is only when we have a mind to work that we can complete a task and exclaim that it is finished.

REFLECTION

Do you have a set of goals for this year that you are determined to complete? Has a plan been put in place to complete those goals? Set aside some time to identify those goals, then put together a list of short-term tasks that pave the way to completing the overall goals. Set your mind to work and finish the task.

RECITE

Today, I will construct the plan to complete my long-term goals. I will remain focused on the task and not give energy to the opposition. I will track my progress and set my mind to work, making the work greater than the obstacle.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, I thank you for the strength to overcome any and all opposition as I serve in whatever capacity the Holy Spirit leads. I thank you for reminding me that the task will never be more than I can bear, and I thank you for blessing me with a mind to work. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

His Wonders Remembered

“He has caused His wonders to be remembered.” - Psalm 111:4

READ

Sometimes it's a challenge to be a spiritual person. Have you ever wondered to yourself, “Why am I doing this? Why am I trying to live like this? Why did I tell God I would obey? Why have I promised to love those who are unlovable? This is so hard!” Then, God blesses you with demonstrations of His matchless love, faithfulness, forgiveness, sovereignty, and greatness, and you are filled with great joy as you recognize the wonder of God and remember exactly why you have chosen to submit your life to Him.

“Many, O Lord my God, are your wonderful works which you have done; and your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to you in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” - Psalm 40:5 (NKJV)

REFLECTION

Let's propose that the next time being a Christian gets hard, we won't express frustration or ingratitude, or forget the blessing and privilege of being in a relationship with the God of the universe! What wonders has God shown you?

RECITE

I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, You are good, and your mercies endure forever. May I always remember and never forget the wonderful things you have done for me. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

How Much is Too Much?

“She broke the jar and poured the perfume on His head.” - Mark 14:3b

READ

The story of the Bethany anointing is one of the few stories of Jesus' life that is contained in all four of the gospels. So impressive was this event that it was indelibly written upon the disciples' hearts so that they never, ever forgot this act of devotion. Mark uses it as a prelude to the passion events. It contrasts the hatred and rejection that Jesus was receiving at the hands of the rulers and the people. This act of worship and devotion stood out as an act of love that the Lord deserved from all but was only given by a few. May this deed be received as a call to worship for us today.

May this deed make us ask ourselves the question, “How much is too much?” This woman's act set a standard of sacrifice, which none can better, but all can match. That alabaster bottle was very valuable. It was worth a year's wages. Plus, it was to be saved for the most important occasion of one's life. What is the most extravagant thing you have done for the Lord? What can we learn from this Scripture?

- Real love is always extravagant.
- Extravagant love is always criticized.
- Jesus always comes to the defense of those who are criticized for being extravagant in their devotion towards Him.

REFLECTION

Actions speak louder than words. Do your actions for His church show Him how much you love Him? Do you find yourself doing more for an employer than you do for your church? Have you made personal sacrifices to assist with His work?

RECITE

Because He has given me everything, nothing I give Him will ever be too much.

PRAYER FOCUS

Father, may all the people connected to the 34th Street Church love Jesus so much that they will be extravagant with the giving of their time, talent, and treasures. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Beautiful Feet

“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things!” - Romans 10:14-15 (KJV)

READ

The scriptures above come from a passage in Romans that expresses the desire for readers to be saved. This passage includes the familiar scripture, “...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

However, the last two scriptures from this passage ask very pointed questions to the believers. How shall unbelievers call on him in whom they have not believed? How shall unbelievers believe in him of whom they have not heard? How can unbelievers know, unless they be told?

The Information Age that we live in provides numerous vehicles by which to spread the glad tidings of good things. Many times, a smile, a kind word, or a simple “God bless you” could make the difference in person's day.

REFLECTION

Take this moment to consider the different ways you can share the gospel with others. Be mindful that while we are used to planting the seed, it is God that does the watering, pruning, and growing from the vine. With whom can you share the Gospel of Christ?

RECITE

I will add the term sower to my job title. I will make it a point to share the spirit of Christ with someone new and plant a seed for God to water, prune, and grow for service in His kingdom.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Lord, I thank You for blessing me with another day and providing me with yet another opportunity to serve You. On this day, I am promised a sure reward of beautiful feet without the extra cost of a pedicure. All I need to do is share the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things to someone. I thank You for good memories to share and life-changing scripture to plant into the lives of Your children. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Verse 21: “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.

Verse 22: For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.” Verse 23: So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.”

Ezra 8 (NKJV)

REFLECTION

Ezra models for us godly leadership by leading the people in fasting and prayer. Put simply, he was walking the talk and demonstrating his faith in God by going to Him with a pure heart to seek direction. He didn't want God's people, or the enemy, to believe they were being hypocritical because their actions didn't line up with their words.

APPLICATION

How is your faith lived out? When people witness your actions, do they reflect your trust in God? Someone is always watching us, which makes all of us leaders in some way. Are we leading from a place of faith? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you those areas in your life which do not line up with your profession of faith and trust in God. Write what He reveals to you in your journal, repent for your unbelief, and ask God to increase your faith.

PRAYER FOCUS

Father God, please forgive me for those words and actions which reflected fear rather than faith in You. Holy Spirit, reveal to me those areas where I need more faith, and increase my faith as I fast and humble myself before You. Show me how to be the leader you want and need me to be. As I journey along this path with my 34th Street Church family, help me to be an example of faith which can encourage others. I trust You and I thank You for answering my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Turn the Page

“Do not remember the former things; neither consider the things old. Behold I am doing a new thing! Now it springs forth; do not perceive and know it and will you not give heed to it?”

- Isaiah 43:18-19

READ

After the clock struck midnight on January 1, 2023, did you recognize the opportunity God gave you to let go of the past and start over? Or did you allow past mistakes and problems to enter into the New Year with you?

God chose to allow you to see another day and another year. Why? Because He has a plan for your life if you are willing to let go of the past and get in agreement with Him. Every day, you have a chance to be better than you were the day before. God did not bring you to this point in life to leave you stuck on this page or chapter in your life. In order for you to be in agreement with the plans of God, **you have to turn the page**. Keep moving forward, turning the page day after day until you get to where God wants you to be. After all you have been through, how do you turn the page? Take whatever it is to God and leave it there. There is no need for you to tote what God has already taken.

REFLECT

Each day, our goal should be to get in agreement with God's plan for our life. The question is not whether He will perform a new thing in us, but whether we are ready and willing to receive it. What do you need to let go of to move forward in your relationship with God?

RECITE

I will let go of the past and turn the page because God is calling me to move forward.

REQUEST

Lord, I thank You for the opportunity to move beyond my past. Clear my mind and open my heart as I move forward in faith. Lord, I thank You in advance that my future is so much greater than my past. Amen.

Faith Your Way Through

“We walk by faith, not by sight.” - 2 Corinthians 5:7

READ

We've all heard the phrase “I'll believe it when I see it.” In fact, some of us have used this phrase quite frequently. However, our use of this phrase during our everyday dealings with other human beings usually means that we live by it. But living by sight puts limits on our life. If we live each day believing that we can only have and accomplish things that we can see, we won't have or accomplish much.

Let's not set limits on our lives when **we have a limitless God**. He has the power to make the impossible possible. But to turn on His power in our lives, we must demonstrate our faith in Him. How do we demonstrate our faith? By walking in victory and believing it's already done simply because of who He is. So whatever you are fasting and praying for, have faith and believe that it's already done and live as such. Faith your way through!

REFLECTION

Each day, we have a choice to believe only what we can see and limit our own possibilities or to believe God for His word and live life accomplishing what many say is impossible. Consider things you've done that someone said you could not do. How did you do it? Did you faith your way through?

RECITE

With God, all things are possible. - Matthew 19:26

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, I thank you for the gift of faith You've given to me as I commit myself to you. Please help me to grow in faith. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

Restoring Peace to Your Spirit

“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” - Philippians 4:4-7 (NIV)

READ

When was the last time you yelled or snapped at someone? When was the last time that you said something harsh, rude, contrary, or highly critical to someone close to you? It's not uncommon for us to use others to outwardly vent the fears, worries, and anxieties we feel inside.

Our closest relationships often bear the brunt of any discontent or distress we feel inside. When your spirit is disquieted, it's easy to lash out or overreact to the small stuff that annoys you. You may find yourself rehashing old gripes or starting arguments with the very people you care about the most.

Next time you feel your level of irritation rising, press pause. Step away for 5-10 minutes to commune with God. Philippians 4:6 advises you that instead of being anxious and distressed, give your concerns to God in prayer and petition. It offers an assurance that if you do, the “peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

REFLECTION

When I pray and surrender my distress to God, He can and will exchange my distress for His protective, transcendent peace. Instead of being harsh, today I will let my gentleness evident to all.

RECITE

Lord, transform my distress into peace.

PRAYER FOCUS

I surrender all of my distress to the Holy Spirit for guidance. I open my mind to receive the peace of God. Help me to demonstrate a gentle manner in my interactions with others. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

Do You REALLY Trust God? REALLY?

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all ways acknowledge him, and He will make your paths straight.” - Proverbs 3:5-6

READ

To be perfectly honest, there are really only two ways people live their lives as they pass through this world - either remembering God or forgetting Him. They either acknowledge His presence, living their lives in dependence on Him. Conversely, the others pay little attention to His claims on them and live a life on the basis of their own understanding and abilities. This includes the “lip service,” one may give.

Often you can tell a person’s heart (and priorities) by simply looking at their checkbook, and their calendar. If your time and your treasure cannot be found guilty of being in support of His kingdom, you are not much different from nonbelievers. The question we must ask ourselves is, “Do we trust God?”

The very nature of this question produces two possible meanings: First: can you trust God? Is God trustworthy? Can God handle the decisions and the problems in our lives? Second: can YOU trust God? That is, do you have the ability and willingness to trust Him? The scripture is very telling about trusting God: the matter of trust is an all or nothing thing. Notice how many times the word “all” is used. The command to trust precedes the promise. Blessing comes after trust is expressed. The promise is conditional. Unlike many of the unconditional promises in the Bible, this promise of direction is given only to those who exercise trust in God.

REFLECT

Is your trust in God conditional? Is your faith in God followed by continual worry about the problem? What areas in your life are places where you need to yield to Him and look for His direction?

RECITE

Trust in God is an all or nothing endeavor. I will trust Him with everything.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, I pray that my faith and trust in You will grow. I ask You to help me lean on You and allow You to have total control so that Your will be done. I pray that the fruits of my deepened trust result in deeper guidance. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

God's Mighty Power

“My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”
- 2 Corinthians 12:9

READ

God tells the Apostle Paul something very powerful. The choice to live within the grace of God is deliberately determined to discipline. It is not others that keep us consecrated to the Lord; it is only God's grace that enables us to choose a lifestyle of consecration, and only by God's grace are we able to stay committed to a lifestyle of consecration to GOD.

In Corinthians 11:22-28, Paul describes some of the consequences of his choice to live a life consecrated to God when he says, “...imprisonments, beaten with countless stripes, and frequently at the point of death, once stoned, three times shipwrecked, many times on journeys, exposed to perils from rivers, perils from bandits, perils from my own countrymen, perils from the Gentiles, perils in the city, perils in the desert places, perils in the sea, perils from those posing as believers, in hunger and thirst, frequently driven to fasting by want, in cold and exposure and lack of clothing...and besides those things that are without, there is the daily inescapable pressure of my care and anxiety for all the churches.”

In all this, Paul concludes in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, “I take pleasure in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong.” God's grace is new every morning and so is God's grace to meet the need of each day for each one of us. If we continually call on the Lord in our times of weakness, we will feel God's presence and power working in and through us.

REFLECTION

Without a doubt, we are all inadequate to face life's difficulties on our own. Therefore, we need God's help and his resources. We may feel weak at times, and we may feel strong at times. We know the strength we feel comes from the Lord.

RECITE

God's grace is sufficient for me, for GOD's strength is made perfect in my weakness.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Heavenly Father, I humbly come before You in thanksgiving for Your grace and your strength during my times of weakness. I ask that You empty me so that I can be filled with the Holy Spirit and commit to Your will for my life. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

Do You Love Me?

“The most important one is this,” answered Jesus, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” - Mark 12:29-30 (NIV)

READ

We love God because He first loved us. We are not saved by the law; we are saved by the grace of God. God sent his son Jesus to earth to save us by shedding His blood on the cross. Now that's good news! It is also God news. There is no other entity that can accomplish the same thing. Our response then, is to demonstrate our love for Him by living a life that is pleasing to Him.

God's Word includes the prescription for how we are to live. The 10 Commandments are relevant to our lives and provides a foundation for all of God's instructions to us. Jesus fulfills the law; therefore, when we believe on Him, we are empowered to follow God's commands. Our love for God will lead us to desire to obey Him, and our relationship with God gives us the power to obey Him.

When we are tempted to sin, the Holy Spirit empowers us to obey His word. When we love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, our motivation is to please Him, our thoughts are toward Him, and our actions reflect Him. When we live a life of surrender to God and love for God, we are blessed. We are assured of God's guidance, peace, revelation, comfort, joy, and so much more.

REFLECTION

How do you demonstrate your love for God? What can you do to make sure your life is pleasing to Him?

RECITE

I love the Lord with all my heart, soul, and mind. My love for God will lead me to desire to obey him.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, I thank You for the sacrifice of Your son Jesus on the cross. Thank You for providing a way for me to have a relationship with You. Help me to please You by obeying You and doing what You have commanded me to do in Your Word. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Verse 12: “That is why the Lord says, “Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

Versed 13: Don’t tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.” Return to the Lord your God, for He is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish.

Joel 2 (NLT)

REFLECTION

The Lord God, Jehovah, the Almighty loves us! It is His desire not only to be in relationship with us, but to be continually connected to us. It grieves the Lord when we are separated from Him by sin and sinfulness, and He is always ready to accept us back into fellowship with Him. He stands ready to pull us back into His arms, all He needs is our repentant hearts and the desire to be with Him. Fasting is God’s way for us to cleanse our hearts and minds and come before Him in sincerity. There is no need for an outward display of your repentance; rather, let it be an inward change of your heart.

APPLICATION

Since God stands ready and is waiting for you, this time of fasting and prayer is a good time to seek a closer connection with Him. Be intentional about reading your Bible every day, pray, and wait to hear what God is saying to you through His Word. Thank Him that He loves you enough to patiently wait for you to return to Him with a clean heart.

PRAYER FOCUS

Father God, forgive me for those times that I thought I was too busy to spend time with You. Please speak Lord, for Your servant is listening. I’m listening for Your voice as You speak to me through Your Word, through others, through my circumstances, and through my life situations. I want to be intimately connected to You. Forgive me for any time I have forgotten that I need You in every way. Thank You for loving me to wait for me to return to You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

For Real, For Real?

“This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment: in this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” – 1 John 4:17-21 (NIV)

READ

Many years ago, recording artist Chubby Checker recorded a song entitled, “Do You Love Me?” He was attempting to gain the attention of a young lady by performing the latest dances for her. In the kingdom of God, our love is foundational, established, and unconditional. It is not performance based or so much a feeling, but a commitment.

After we develop a love relationship with God, we are also commanded to walk in love with other people. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). The Bible also encourages us to “owe no man anything, but to love one another, for he that loves another hath fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8).

There will be people that we will connect with more than others, but it is not about us-it is about God. How does this agape (unconditional love) manifest itself? We must all constrain ourselves from our natural inclinations and work to prefer others above ourselves, preserve each other's integrity, and be quick to forgive, repent, and reconcile. This is not easy, but it is possible when we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, who gives us the power to do those things that are ordained of God.

REFLECTION

The love of God is unconditional, not based upon performance. God loves us; therefore, “we ought also to love one another”(1 John 4:11). Let us not destroy others with judgment, gossip, and criticism. Instead, we must love others and lift them up. Think of people who might need your love, support, and encouragement. What can you do to lift them up?

RECITE

I love my brothers and sisters, as I love God-unconditionally.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, I pray that my faith and trust in You will grow. I ask You to help me lean on You and allow You to have total control so that Your will be done. I pray that the fruits of my deepened trust result in deeper guidance. Amen.

Get Well Soon

She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment. – Matthew 9:21–22

READ

This is a great story about Jesus’ healing power. But there is something that sticks out about this woman’s determination to be well. She positioned herself to be healed. This woman sought help from doctors and continue to persevere until she could get help.

Though her status worsened, she didn’t give up in her pursuit of wellness. She continued to press forward and bring her entire self to Jesus. As you begin your fast, here are some helpful ways that you can follow in the footsteps of this woman and position yourself to be well.

REFLECTION

1. Be willing to interrupt and reach out to family, friends and our healthcare providers.
 - Make sure you understand your diagnoses and ask for clarification, as well as your medication list.
2. Preventative measures
 - Yearly mammograms, yearly breast exams, regular follow up appointments
3. Exercise
 - You can decrease your risk of heart attack by 15% by exercising 5 days per week for only 30 minutes a day.
4. Eliminate risk by not smoking and not drinking excessive alcohol
5. Stay well hydrated a. Fluids, notably water and not caffeinated drinks allow the brain and body to function.
6. Avoid processed meals and snacks
7. Get adequate sleep a. This is essential for brain health, an effective immune system and decreases mental health problems.
8. Pray and do what’s required to be healthy

RECITE

I am healed in every way by the power of God.

PRAYER FOCUS

Gracious God, I thank you for your healing mercy, extended over my entire life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Feast on the Fruit

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” – Galatians 5:22–26

READ

More often than not, our desires steer us down dark paths and out of the will of God for our lives. Our desires are just that, ours. They have a tendency to be self-centering and self-serving when God should be the center of our joy, our will, and our world.

We see something or someone (let’s be real) on the Gram, Twitter, or Facebook and want it and/or them. We are visual people. We feed the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life trying to keep up with the Jones and the Carters. In trying to keep up with them, we may be sending ourselves down slippery slopes into sin. However, the text says we need to Walk in the Holy Spirit.

We know that the Holy Spirit guides us into all truths (John 16:13), teaches us and brings to our remembrance all the teachings of Christ (John 14:26). If we know these things to be so, why is it so hard to ignore our flesh and walk as the Spirit leads? The answer: We want what we want! It is a battle between flesh and Spirit and that battle is daily, hourly, minute by minute, and even second by second.

During this fast, as we hunger in our flesh, we need to feast on what fruit the Holy Spirit bears; love, joy, peace, patience (longsuffering), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Since we are followers of Christ and are guided by the Holy Spirit, we must exhibit and put into practice the same attributes as we strive to mirror God.

REFLECTION

“For Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when God is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies themselves, just as God is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3)

RECITE

I want what God wants for my life.

PRAYER FOCUS

God, let your will be done, not mine. You know what’s best for me. Alleluia! Amen.

Money Management

“Be diligent to know the state of your flocks and attend to your herds.” – Proverbs 27:23

READ

Managing money can be tough but learning how to establish and live within a budget is a necessity. Determine your goals. Create a budget. Track your spending. Do a monthly review. It's easier than ever since so many of us have smart devices. Try these free apps like: Mint and Daily Budget.

For some, fitting in with others is a priority and in today's world of social media more people are falling into the trap of comparing their lives to others. So what if you are comparing yourself to “fakes.” There is a good chance that you may be! Either way, trying to maintain a lifestyle to those on social media around you or can be harmful to your mental health and your wallet.

REFLECTION

Always remember, your identity comes from who you are in Christ and not wearing the latest sneakers or carrying a designer purse. Romans 12:2 says, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Of course, everyone wants nice things. If you are considering spending outside of your budget, find ways to cut back in other areas like cancelling your Apple Music account or cutting back on going to Chipotle. Also, look for ways to make money like selling back textbooks or finding a flexible job like babysitting or dog walking.

RECITE

What God has for me—it is for me.

PRAYER FOCUS

God, give me the gift of contentment as I consider all that you have provided. Manage me, so I can manage my finances. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Finding the Voice of God

“ Esther sent back this word: Go, gather all the Jews... and tell them to give up eating to help me be brave...then, even though it’s against the law, I will go to the king: and if I perish, I perish”

– Esther 4:15b-16, (CEB)

READ

In the story of Esther, the Queen’s request for her people to fast is not unusual at all. Esther had a formidable task before her, and she needed all the help she could get. She needed to focus on God’s voice and not her own, nor that of those surrounding her. Fasting is a means to activate, heighten, and attune our spiritual awareness.

The irony of this story is that it can lead us to think fasting is reserved for a crisis, or life and death situations. In reality, fasting is an acknowledgement that our battle is not against “flesh and blood.”

When we fast, we acknowledge that we are both spirit and flesh, but for most of us the flesh is the squeaky wheel that gets the oil. The ancient practice of fasting is a way of getting centered and reorienting our bodies

REFLECTION

Fasting is the means by which we attune ourselves to our spirit—the part of us that is uniquely equipped to hear from God. When we fast, we are reminded that we cannot make it without God, that our souls are hungry, and we are a thirsty people. The physical discomfort we experience is how our souls feel without adequate nourishment.

RECITE

My awareness of everything that matters in life is being heightened by the grace of God.

PRAYER FOCUS

Make me sensitive to your voice, O God. Help me to discern your nudges. Give me the strength to respond. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Verse 34: Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: Verse 35: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; Verse 36: I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Verse 37: "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? Verse 38: When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Verse 39: Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' Verse 40: And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Matthew 25 (NKJV)

REFLECTION

There is power in connection. That's one of the blessings of being in the Kingdom of God. To be connected means being brought together or into contact so that a real link is established. That was Jesus' prayer for His disciples, and it is His prayer for us. He knew the importance of being connected to each other and ultimately, to God and His Church. As we settle our hearts and minds on fasting during this Lenten season, let's keep our minds focused on the power of being connected.

Being connected is not for you only; it should also benefit those to whom you are connected. Moral support. Emotional support. Prayer support. Material support. All of these come through our connections to Christ, His Church, and our Community. Our fasting journey is an outward expression of our need to be more closely connected to God.

APPLICATION

One way of drawing closer to God is by being His hands and feet, demonstrating His love to the world through our love for others. Use this time of self-sacrificing as an opportunity to give to those who are less fortunate by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, or providing for strangers during their time of need.

PRAYER FOCUS

Father, thank You for connecting us to Your Kingdom through our connection to Your Son Jesus Christ and through the power of Your Holy Spirit. Because You have connected us to Your Church, we are also connected to Your community. Give us the wisdom we need to tap into the power of connection and serve as a conduit to others of Your love, joy, peace, and the many blessings You have given us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Be Still

“The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” – Exodus 14:14

READ

I enjoy listening to music. I enjoy all genres of music: R&B, classical and even a few country songs. I especially love listening to gospel music. To me, gospel music often tells my story. Many of the lyrics are my testimony. But as much as I love listening to music, there are times when I need to stop the music, be still and listen.

While driving in the car recently, I watched kids in another car with earbuds or headphones listening to music. I wondered what songs they were listening to--what lyrics were being played. And then I thought, “What would happen if the batteries died and they were forced to sit still in silence?

What would they think about? What thoughts would cross their minds?” It is in that moment that I realized that sometimes we can’t wait for that battery to die. We have to shut the music off, no matter how much we love it, to hear from the One who loves us most.

REFLECT

Sometimes God wants us to be still and listen. He wants us to hear a word from Him. Often times, we don’t think we have time to be still. We do. Take the time to remove yourself from social media, television and, yes, even music. Take the time to be still and listen to God speak to you.

RECITE

I will be still and let the Lord fight my battles.

REQUEST

Lord, let me always find the time to quiet my heart, be still, and listen for a word from You. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Managing the Physical

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” – Romans 12:1

READ

Physical fasting involves denying yourself of personal pleasures. When we fast, we take the focus away from the things that bring us pleasure and posture our faith and spirituality toward God. Although food is not the only means of fasting, it is often the most common for many of us. The physical act of denying food is an act of your faith.

REFLECTION

Fasting is an act of discipline and self-control. It is how you practice your ability to manage the desires of your flesh. When we fast, we begin to grow our spiritual strength and self-control. The physical aspect of fasting is sometimes necessary to clear the way for finding or restoring your spiritual clarity.

As you continue to journey through your fast, continue to remain encouraged. During some difficult life situations, fasting has reminded me that my faith is strong enough to withstand and overcome the test and trials that come. After fasting, I’ve frequently felt a greater sense of purpose and clarity. During this period of fasting, you are not focusing on feeding your body but allowing your energy to focus on prayer and meditation.

RECITE

I present myself as a living sacrifice to God.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, O God. Give me strength to live in a way that pleases you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Friending God

“For we are God’s handiwork...” – Ephesians 2:10

READ

I’m old enough to remember a time long before the age of the internet. Before e-mail. Before social media. It had snares and social traps, but in my opinion, it was a much simpler time.

If I called the home of a classmate with the hopes of getting to know them, I had to wait for a return call if they weren’t at home. Nothing was instant about the interaction. But what happens when we fast forward decades later?

Our world now provides instant connections to everyone. As a result, we’ve lost patience and we’ve developed a knack for fabricating value judgments based on those instant connections.

REFLECTION

We’ve even become reliant on social media as a gauge of our self-worth. How many followers do I have? How many people commented on my post? How many likes did my picture get? If the numbers are high, we feel good about ourselves. But if the numbers are low... Could it be that this way of connecting with others sells us short?

Could it be that we’re missing what God has for us, when we are preoccupied with what others have for us? Since we are God’s handiwork, our value is found in connecting with Him. Why stress going viral, when we can be blessed by going with God?

RECITE

All I need, I find in God.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank you, God, for creating me, for filling me with your Holy Spirit, and keeping me connected to a source greater than what’s in the world. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Young Lions

“Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry, but those who trust in the Lord will lack no good thing.” – Psalm 34:10

READ

Hanging around the right crowd can create serious 10th Commandment challenges for us to not covet. Looking around at the prosperous even in our church community we can feel the urge to up our game in wardrobe, choice of automobile or vacation plans.

In isolation we can think our family is doing OK, but when we look around, it’s easy to begin to think we need to get a promotion, a second job or a career change because we’re missing out! Don’t we deserve those nice shoes we see?

REFLECTION

The scripture says that sometimes even the young lions go hungry—that those who are on the fast track with the fabulous resume, connections and charisma also fall on hard times. But those who place their trust in the Lord will not lack any good thing. Look carefully at that promise: that doesn’t mean we get whatever we want. It doesn’t say that we all get the same blessings. It means we will not lack any GOOD thing.

Our customized God-ordained blessing is usually quite different from our wants. Our challenge is to stop yearning for God to fulfill our wants and instead to start imploring Him to change us, so we recognize the good things He has already dropped on us. And then celebrate.

Are you really lacking any good thing in your life? How can your desires align with God’s will? What can you cut out that is keeping you from trusting the Lord for all your needs?

RECITE

I live daily in a state of abundance

PRAYER FOCUS

Today, I simply give you praise. Glory Alleluia! Amen.

Navigating the Wilderness

“When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities.” – Matthew 14:13

READ

I have always defined or designated the wilderness as a place of despair and isolation. I saw no reason to voluntarily visit such a space because there was no benefit in my eyes. Why would I reside in this backdrop when I am already troubled and lonely?

However, I have since learned that following Jesus can lead you into deserted venues, for the purpose of our own benefits. I would suggest that Jesus recognizes our need to rest and recreate ourselves.

REFLECTION

Our day-to-day routine can tax our spirits profoundly and Jesus is so aware of what is beneficial for us and invites us to take a break. Furthermore, Jesus desires a more intimate relationship with us, which invites us from taking a break from the noise of our very existences.

Pausing and taking a break affords us an opportunity to hear Christ speak into our lives, even when it feels like a wilderness experience, journey, or season. Fasting is that practice which isolates us from our normal routine. We can push the reset button regarding our circumstances and create a space for Jesus to step into our scenario.

During the season of Fasting, epiphanies are birthed and the lens in which we view life becomes clearer. I would suggest this leads to a transformation of mind and heart.

RECITE

I am being transformed right now.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank you for the opportunity to navigate the wilderness with you, to learn what I could not otherwise. I am never afraid because you are with me everywhere, at all times. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Overcoming Temptation

“The tempter came to Jesus and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” – Matthew 4:3–4

READ

The first of three temptations, Jesus was at a point of vulnerability after fasting for forty days and forty nights. He was not only exhausted but hungry. His need for bread was very evident, and Satan’s temptation was based on this physical need without taking into consideration the Messianic purpose of Jesus.

It never fails. Once you make up your mind to let go of something to move in a positive direction, the glamour and glitter of the old reappear with a level of enticement that makes it difficult to resist. Most spiritual victories are often met with an invitation to act contrary to what we believe to be the right thing. You just started a diet, and you get invited to an all you can eat buffet, or you get a “hey” text from the one you just ended a relationship.

REFLECTION

Temptation is a fact of life. It comes when you least expect and at a time when you are ill-prepared. It challenges our convictions and tests our faith. You are not immune just because you are in a relationship with Jesus. Here is the good news, Jesus provides a way out.

“Man cannot live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

With this, Jesus is letting you know that no matter the degree of temptation, you can rely on the word of God for deliverance.

RECITE

I am victorious because of Jesus Christ.

PRAYER FOCUS

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin. Every victory helps me, some other to win. Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue, I look ever to Jesus—he will carry me through. Amen.

Trust God for Today and Tomorrow

“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” – Matthew 6:31–33

READ

Since I can remember I’ve always set lofty goals for myself. I would easily consider myself an ambitious person. I feel as if I’ve attempted to map out my entire life since I was in grade school.

If you are anything like me then you’ve always known which college you wanted to go to, which profession you were going to enter, how many children you want, and the list can go on forever. Yet, as life continues to unfold before your eyes and some of the events on your timeline go unchecked, you begin to doubt if they may ever happen.

REFLECTION

The inclination is for us to play God and try to place people, places, and things into our life in order to fulfill our own goals or overcompensate for an area of our life that God is calling us to wait and trust Him in.

If I could be honest, I realized that I became so future oriented that I was presently absent. Everything that I was planning, preparing and doing was all to realize this one futuristic goal. However, in my pursuit of what I desired in the future, I realized that I wasn’t enjoying my current victories. We often forget that God is more concerned with what happens during the journey than where you end up in the destination.

Your journey is equally if not more important than the destination. Today’s devotion, reminds us that God provides us enough to get through today’s demands. Trust that everyday God will provide enough.

RECITE

God is my provider. I have all that I need.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, please help me to always walk in a spirit of humility that I may serve You well in all my days. Every day of my life, you’ve been good to me, O God. I give you praise. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Scripture

Verse 20: He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.
Proverbs 13 (NIV)

REFLECTION

In my generation (Baby Boomers), our parents would often tell us to be careful with the company that we keep, because they were concerned for our well-being. They would say something like “association brings about assimilation,” meaning, we become identified by the character of the company we keep. Jim Rohn states the people that you surround yourself with will have a huge impact on your life. They can influence your thoughts and behavior either positively or negatively.

APPLICATION

To become whom God has called you to be, you need to surround yourself with people of God that will provide wisdom and knowledge that will challenge and develop you to seek after the heart of God. Take a careful review of those with whom you spend your time. Seek the Lord for guidance on their influence in your life and your relationship with Him.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank You, Lord God, for putting the right people in our paths that we may grow and develop in You. Your word states “As iron sharpens iron, so people can improve (enrich) each other.” (Proverbs 27:17 NCV) Continue to develop us that we may become the men and women that You have called us to be and to live out our purpose in You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Consider Yourself Warned

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.” – Luke 16:19–21

READ

In the first thirteen verses of Luke 16 we find Jesus teaching his disciples about being wise stewards and that man cannot serve both God and mammon. In verses 19-31, Jesus tells a story about a rich man and beggar to illustrate his statements about loving money and the permanent nature of the law.

The story is about a very rich man who enjoys his wealth while on earth and a very poor man who has been reduced to begging. When they both die the poor man is taken up by angels to Abraham’s bosom while the rich man is transported to the torments of hades.

The rich man was not condemned to hades because of his riches, but rather for his missed chances. He had every opportunity to show compassion to the poor man at his gate but does not appear to have done so. He had become blind and deaf to the needs and agonizing cries of the poor around him.

REFLECTION

In this story, God’s eternal judgment has everything to do with how we use wealth in this life and whether we attend to those less fortunate in our midst. Consider yourself warned.

RECITE

I want my walk to match my talk.

PRAYER FOCUS

Make of my heart an open fountain of love. Make of my hands tools to do your work. Make of my mind a center of creative compassion. For your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Disconnect to Reconnect

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” – Hebrews 11:6

READ

With so many things competing for our attention and so many things available for us to purposely and habitually engage in like social media to avoid doing what we should, know or want to do; fasting is an amazing way to help us reset, recharge and reconnect with God. For some, reconnecting with God will mean disconnecting from social media.

Yes, you read right, you will have to disconnect to reconnect. Look at it this way, if you lose your internet connection, often the help desk fix is to have you disconnect to reconnect the service. Like a good helpdesk, this fast aids us by creating a specified time for us to troubleshoot our spiritual connection while being intentional towards restoring that which is lost between us and God.

REFLECTION

Hebrews 11:6 teaches us that having faith, believing that God IS and that He is the anchor of that faith positions us to please God and to receive the consequence of a worthy reward from Him if we carefully seek Him. So I encourage you to take this worth-while journey with God, socialize with Him and disconnect from the noise of the norm. By disconnecting to reconnect, you will certainly gain much more than you will ever give up!

RECITE

I am connected to Almighty God.

PRAYER FOCUS

Don't ever permit me to disconnect from you O God. Keep me steadfast. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Learning to Let Go

“When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich.” – Luke 18:22–23

READ

Christianity is a counter cultural religion. When we truly attempt to live out our faith, we carry a set of values that are in direct opposition to the values the world teaches us. A prime example is the way we deal with material possessions and money.

We are trained to attain as many material possessions as possible and to make as much money as we can. The notion is that things will bring happiness, stability, comfort, and even respect. So, we spend our lives trying to grab this, gain that, or make more. But then all of a sudden, we encounter the counter-cultural religion of Jesus. In the midst of our grabbing on, Jesus teaches us to let go.

REFLECTION

In Luke 18 he tells a man who is seeking eternal life that following the commandments is good, but you will not find true happiness until you sell all that you own, give the money to the poor, and follow me. We are called to release all of the things life has taught us to hold on to.

Yet in the practice of that release, we find a fulfillment that money and things will never be able to give. Today your task is to earnestly believe that whatever you are giving up now pales in comparison to the treasure you will gain in heaven. Cut against the culture of the grab and master the art of the release.

RECITE

I live with an eternal set of priorities. I know what's important.

PRAYER FOCUS

I will make room for you. You are my highest priority. You are my first love. I'm chasing after you. I'm holding onto you, Almighty God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Giving to the Lord?

“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people.” – Psalm 116: 12–14 NKJV

READ

As one looks carefully at Psalm 116:12–14, it becomes evident that the response to God’s goodness is gratitude expressed through the profession of devotion to Him. With a focus on finances, one is made to ask, how much of what I use my monetary resources actually profess my devotion to Him. Ultimately, one might ask, “Am I a good steward of the financial resources that have been entrusted to me?”

REFLECTION

Living in a capitalistic society often makes truthfully answering the questions aforementioned an anxiety producing exercise. However, as those who want to please the Lord, the tension between want/need; lifestyle/Christ’s-style; spending/saving; giving/getting must be embraced. In essence one is called to a life of thanksgiving.

Opposite to the world belief that God helps those who help themselves, God helps those who cannot help themselves. The universal experience of being inadequate in some form or another brings one to the reality of an all-sufficient God.

Once the realization of God’s gracious character and righteous purpose reach the depths of our soul, the only thing left to do is live a humble life before Him in continuous thanksgiving. “What shall you render unto Him?”

RECITE

I am and always will be a generous person. I believe in sowing and reaping.

PRAYER FOCUS

You have put irrefutable laws in the universe. You have inscribed universal principles in creation. I align myself with your laws and principles now. I give and I receive. I sow and I reap. I am generous because you have been generous to me. I bless your name O God. Amen.

Living My Best Life

“My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can’t save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, “Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!”? What good is it if you don’t actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn’t result in faithful activity.” – James 2:13–17

READ

I follow 376 people on Instagram. My timeline is full of ideas, clips, clothes, relationship goals, and money moves, and I wonder is this real? We all know that if you catch the right angles, say the right things, snap the perfect moment, you can fool anyone. But James warns us that you can’t fool God.

What good is it if you “say” you are a Christian but don’t show it by how you live? Walking it is way harder than talking it. Putting a cross in your bio or prayer hands in captions might say you’re a Christian but what would your actions say?

REFLECTION

James teaches that living your best Christian life means watching what you say, respecting all kinds of people, doing the right thing, giving, listening and most of all loving God and people.

Real talk, James means if you’re going to talk about it then be about it. So, as you do your thing today, don’t just say it but live your best life.

RECITE

Every day I am living my best life.

PRAYER FOCUS

With each new 24 deposit, you make an investment in me and I am grateful. I will not waste your gifts. I want to live every moment to your honor and glory, and with your help I can. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

This is the last official day of the Corporate Fast.

Finding the Perfect Caption

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have a gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

1 Corinthians 13:1–2

READ

Before pictures are posted on social media, many people have an extensive editing process of adjusting lighting and colors, trying different filters and, if necessary, cropping. After all of this, they will not post the picture until they have chosen the perfect caption that captured the “heart” of the picture.

REFLECTION

If we took the snapshots of the “picture-perfect” moments of our lives, we would capture the moments that best reflect our gifts, talents and blessings from God. After some editing, we may be ready to post the times when we spoke eloquently, shared great wisdom and had faith that moved mountains in our lives. But if God wrote the caption, what would it say? God cares about the “heart” of the moment.

The content may be beautiful, impressive, or even powerful but was it done in the context of loving others, self and God? If God wrote the caption of your life, would God say this picture is worth a thousand loving words or one empty one— “nothing.” As Paul says in this passage, if we have all the beautiful, lofty things of heaven and earth but have not love, we have nothing. In this season of fasting, let us pray for the most filling and perfect attribute of all—love.

RECITE

I am an illustration of God’s mercy

PRAYER FOCUS

Paint your mercy on my heart, that I might present to the world an accurate picture of you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sunday, April 5, 2026

Verse 20: “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

Matthew 28 (NKJV)

REFLECTION

In this passage of scripture, God has risen Jesus from the dead and given Him all power and authority. The first thing Jesus does with His authority is instruct and encourage His disciples. His instruction to them is to make more disciples by teaching people everything He taught them. In their time together, the disciples learned from Jesus how to pray, how to live according to God’s standards, and how to interact in godly ways and have truthful and fruitful conversations with anyone they came in contact with. The instruction for those of us who are followers of Christ is the same even today. We are to teach people how to obey God’s commands, how to live a life that’s pleasing to God, and how to be in relationship with others. And the wonderful encouragement that Jesus gave His disciples then is the same for us now, that He will always be with us. There will never be a moment that Jesus won’t be present with us as we fulfill these endeavors.

APPLICATION

We are all called to make disciples and a major way to make disciples is by connecting with and teaching others. But, before we can teach His commandments, we must first learn them. Develop a plan to study God’s Word consistently and frequently. Write the plan and make it a priority.

PRAYER FOCUS

Father, thank You for sending your Son, Jesus, as the perfect example. Walk with me as I make disciples by teaching others what I’ve learned from Your Word, and by pouring into others who need to feel Your presence. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.



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