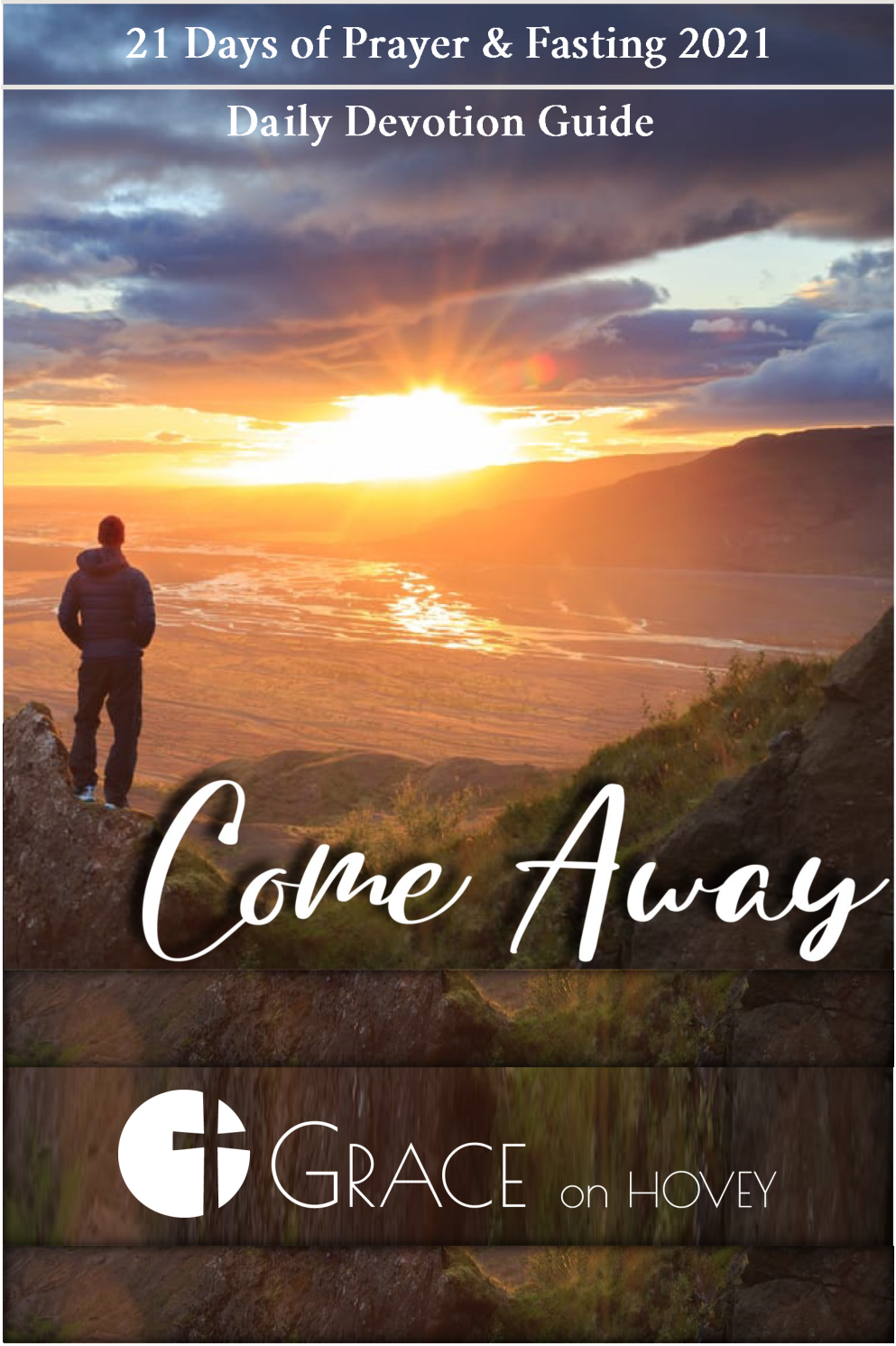
21 Days of Prayer & Fasting 2021

Daily Devotion Guide





GRACE CHURCH

Www.gracenormal.org 1311 West Hovey Ave. Normal, IL 61761

Come Away
Prayer & Fasting 2021

Contributors:

Senior Pastor
Niall Philyaw

Senior Associate Pastor
Len Thebarge

Associate Pastor of Student & Family Ministries
David Gross

Director of Children's Ministry
Kelly Graeber
Children's materials can be found
at the Connect@Home Front Porch

Contents

Section 1
Fasting

A Word from Pastor Niall 6
What is Biblical Fasting? 8
Physical Aspects of Fasting 8
A Corporate Invitation 9
My Commitment 10

Section 2
Daily Readings

Week One: Prepare - Reorient

Day 1: Come Away and Prepare for Your Day 11
Day 2: Jesus Teaches Us to Pray (part 1) 15
Day 3: Jesus Teaches Us to Pray (part 2) 19
Day 4: Making Prayer Filled Decisions 23
Day 5: Aligning Our Will with God's 27

Week Two: Refresh

Day 8: Rest in His Promises 31
Day 9: Rest in God's Purposes 35
Day 10: Rest in His Peace 39
Day 11: Rest in His Power *(God fight's for His people)* 43
Day 12: Rest in His Provision 47

Week Three: Resist

Day 15: Every Believer Has Three Enemies 51

Day 16: Jesus Modeled Prayer & Fasting During Spiritual Battles 55

Day 17: Prayer is a Part of Our Spiritual Armor 59

Day 18: We Fight Our Spiritual Battles with Other Believers 63

Day 19: Jesus Has Won the Victory Over the Powers of Darkness 67

Week Four: Relent

Day 22: Witness God's Authority to Live 71

Day 23: Be Forgiven 75

Day 24: Forgive Others 79

Day 25: Forgive Unconditionally 83

Day 26: Love Much 87

A Word from Pastor Niall

Dear Grace Family,

It's 2021! We are at the beginning of a new year, having just finished a particularly challenging one. We all know what it is like to be busy, exhausted, out of rhythm, and stretched thin. And it is in these moments, we can hear the calming voice of Jesus: "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while."

Just think about how busy Jesus was: the crowds pressing in, the never-ending list of needs, the opposition of religious leaders, and then caring for the souls of His closest friends, the disciples. Any one of those things would be enough to overwhelm us! There are not enough hours in the day for all of that!

But Jesus modeled a prayer life of retreating from the unrelenting busyness of life and ministry. He went to desolate places to pray to His Father. He also invited his disciples to join Him in doing the same. **Jesus has invited all of His followers to COME AWAY and be with Him through prayer.**

During 2021, we will be exploring the entire book of Mark, which is often overlooked as far as Jesus' prayer life is concerned. Mark does not include the very familiar Lord's Prayer, but he does offer a number of profound glimpses into Jesus' prayer life. It is on these glimpses that we will focus our attention in February. If the Son of God needed to COME AWAY, how much more do we need time with Him.

I am praying the devotions in these next pages will be a blessing to you and lead you closer to the heart of Jesus. And I am looking forward to how the Lord will use this time of prayer and fasting.

Blessings!

Pastor Niall

Come Away



What is Biblical Fasting?

Fasting is a **spiritual discipline** in which believers abstain from food for the spiritual purpose of intensifying our hunger for God and aligning our hearts with His!

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by demonstrating our HUMILITY before Him (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God through our REPENTENCE and CONFESSION of sin (1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by acknowledging our sole DEPENDENCE on Him (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Matthew 4:1-4).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by discerning His WILL and DIRECTION in our lives (Judges 20:26-28; Acts 13:1-3).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by increasing our appetite to PRAY (Mark 1:35).

Fasting aligns our hearts with God, increasing our appetite for Him and His WORD (Matthew 4:1-4; John 4:31-35).

Physical Aspects of Fasting

- If you have specific health issues related to diet, check with a doctor before beginning a fast.
- No matter what way you choose to fast, make sure and drink fluids including water and fruit juices.
- You may need to restrict some of your physical activity during a fast, especially rigorous exercise.
- Sudden movements, especially standing up quickly, may cause dizziness or light-headedness.
- Expect some physical, mental, and perhaps even some emotional discomfort during a fast. Headaches, sleeplessness, and irritability often accompany a fast, but don't allow the fast to become an excuse for improper actions or attitudes.



Grace Church 21 Days of Corporate Fasting and Prayer

Grace Church's time of corporate fasting and prayer begins on ***Monday, February 1*** with 5 daily devotions to help prepare your heart and mind.

Commitment Sunday will be ***Sunday, February 7***. We hope you will spend time preparing and filling out your commitment card located on the following page.

During our ***Sunday, February 28*** worship service, we will praise God and celebrate all he has done.

You are encouraged to join us…
for weekly fasting on Wednesdays

February 10
February 17
February 24

During these 3 weeks, the elders are asking that we devote each Wednesday to fasting and prayer as a corporate effort to seek God.

Fasting on each of these Wednesdays will involve ***abstaining from food for breakfast and lunch***. ***During the time we would normally spend in preparation or eating the meal, it is important to use that time to pray and to read God's Word.*** For example, if you normally spend 20 minutes preparing and eating breakfast, use that 20 minutes to pray and read Scripture instead.

If you are unable to participate in the corporate fast on Wednesdays, you are welcome to choose another day of the week to align your heart with God through fasting and prayer.

My Commitment to Fast and Pray

As a way of bringing focus to your time of fasting and praying, answer the following questions.

My Goal: I am asking God to

_____
_____
_____
_____

My Fast: What I will withhold

_____
_____
_____
_____

My Prayer: When and where I will pray

_____
_____
_____
_____

My Vow: God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to this period of fasting so that God will answer my prayer and give the thing for which I trust Him. Not my will Oh God, but Yours be done.

Lord, I dedicate small things to express the greatness of Your supremacy in all of life.

Lord, I will be faithful in little expressions of my faith for great answers to prayer.

Lord, I vow to fulfill these small expressions of my love to You. Amen.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Come Away and prepare for your day.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.
Mark 1:35

You do not have to spend much time with Jesus in the Gospels to discover how important prayer was to Him. For Jesus, spending time with His Father was the lifeblood of His earthly life and ministry. As a 12-year-old Jesus spent three days in the Temple in Jerusalem because He 'had to be in my Father's house' (Lk. 2:49). Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness fasting and praying in preparation for His ministry (Matt. 4:1). He prayed all night before choosing the 12 Apostles (Lk. 6:12-16); at the Mount of Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28-29), and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36).

However, perhaps the most important observation we can make about the prayer life of Jesus Christ is His daily practice of prayer. For Jesus, coming away to spend time with His Father was the key thing He did to prepare Himself for the day. One great example of this daily practice happens early in Jesus' ministry and is recorded in Mark 1:35. Let's begin our 21 days together by looking at this passage.

First we need to look at the day before. Mark 1:21-34 describes one day in Jesus' life and ministry, and what a day it was!

- It begins in the synagogue in Capernaum, where Jesus teaches and then delivers a man from demon possession.
- Then they go to Peter's house, where Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law.
- After sunset, people come to Peter's house with those who were sick and in need of healing. This included four men who lower a friend though the roof! This went on late into the night.

Then, the next day:
And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed.

I see three things that I can apply to my daily time with God in what we often refer to as 'Daily Devotions'.

1. ***Jesus set this as a priority***
   If anyone had the excuse to 'sleep in' this particular morning it was Jesus! But for Him, spending time with His Father was a higher priority than anything else, so He rises long before the sun to pray.

2. ***Jesus set a time.***
   While not stated in the passage, I would suggest that Jesus was intentional about the time He got up to pray. He probably didn't leave getting up early to chance. Having set time with God as a high priority, Jesus also sets a time to do so.

3. ***Jesus set a place.***
   Privacy and quiet were important to Jesus. He had a specific place in mind, where He could be alone with the Father. And the pre-dawn hour finds Jesus alone in this designated place.

When it comes to my daily 'devotional time' with God, these three things are very important for me. I need to set this time as the highest priority for my day. This protects me from the many excuses I tend to use to skip it. I then set aside a specific time to meet with God, so I 'get it on my schedule'. It can be very helpful to have a set place where I meet with God. For me, it is a chair that looks out into our back yard.

It is our prayer that these next four weeks will be a time for you to draw close to God, grow your time with Him, and to see these moments as an opportunity to 'walk with God in the cool of the day' in close, intimate conversation with your loving Heavenly Father.

Questions

1. Would it help to set aside a specific time and dedicated place to meet with God each day?

   If you already do have a time and place, consider adding a few minutes to your daily prayer time. Write what you have decided.

Prayers

1. Take a moment to thank God for His desire to spend daily time with you.

   Ask God for the desire to set aside a time and place to meet with Him each day.

2. Ask the Lord for the grace to experience true closeness with Him as the two of you meet each day.

Come Away... and reorient.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples". And he said to them, "When you pray say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come."
Luke 11:1

Jesus Teaches Us to Pray (part 1)
Day 2

As you come to Luke 11, the Disciples have been with Jesus for more than two years. Those years had been filled with wonder, as they witnessed Jesus heal the sick, deliver the demon possessed, raise the dead to life, feed multitudes with a young boy's lunch, and teach with wisdom and authority. They witnessed all of this up close, and had to wonder where Jesus' power came from.

Then one morning, as they were just getting up, one of them looks over and sees Jesus returning from His daily time of prayer. In that moment the light bulb goes on – PRAYER! Prayer was central to who Jesus was and the power He had. So this unnamed member of the 12 asks Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray…" This was probably John or one of the others who had been disciples of John the Baptist before meeting Jesus. Apparently John the Baptist had taught his followers how to pray more personally to God. Now, the disciple wanted Jesus to do the same.

So Jesus gives them a guide to prayer we now know as 'The Lord's Prayer'. This is not the first time they have heard this. We see a slightly longer version in Matthew 6:9-13 as part of The Sermon on the Mount, which took place earlier in Jesus' ministry. We will be looking at the version in Luke 11.

When Jesus gave us this prayer guide or model it was not His intent that we simply recite it, though there is nothing wrong doing this. However, His desire was that we use this as a series of themes to reflect on and pray through. Think of it as a form of the well-known acronym ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication) that many use - except this is the guide given to us by Jesus Himself!

This guide given to us by Jesus has two basic sections:

- Our focus on God. This will be our focus today.
- Our focus on our needs. We will look at this section tomorrow.

Jesus begins with a slow, calm gaze at God our Father before we turn our attention to the needs and cares of our lives. By doing this, any anxiety, distress or worry we have will be replaced by His peace and assurance. Here are the themes given to us by Jesus as we focus our attention on God.

Relationship: "Father"
Prayer is an intimate conversation with our Father – the God Who possesses a father's heart, love, strength and concern. We have this relationship through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1); as our fear is replaced by the assurance of being loved (Rom. 8:15-17); knowing that the Father cares for us (Matt. 7:7-11); as He holds us in His hand (John 10:27-30).

Worship: "Hallowed be your name"
"Hallowed" means to be holy and honored. When we pray these words we are telling God, "May my life be holy as You are holy (1Peter 1:15-16). First, we take time to **worship God** for Who He is (Ex. 34:5-9). We then pray for Him to **transform us** to reflect His character and holiness (2Cor. 3:18). True worship of God will always lead to our full surrender to God.

Surrender: "Your kingdom come"
We surrender our will and desires to God's will and purposes. This leads to God ruling in our lives. And where God rules, His kingdom comes. We are asking God's kingdom to come:

- In our life, as we become more and more like Jesus (Room. 8:28-29). As we are salt and light as our good works draw others to praise God (Matt.5:13-16).
- Through His Church as we live out the Great Commandment and Great Commission (Col. 1:18); leading to people putting saving faith in Jesus (Matt. 28: 18-20)
- When Christ returns to establish His perfect Kingdom on this earth (Rev. 22:20).

We begin our prayer by focusing on God Who is our Father – Who is Holy – and is establishing His Kingdom in us and through us as we await the return of Jesus.

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each of these three themes, using the Scriptures given to guide you.

Relationship: “Father”
Worship: “Hallowed be your name”
Surrender: “Your kingdom come”

Then respond to God in prayer.

Come Away and reorient.

Give us each day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins for we
ourselves forgive everyone who is
indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.
Luke 11:3-4

Jesus Teaches Us to Pray
(part 2)
Day 3

Yesterday we joined the twelve Disciples as Jesus was teaching them how to pray. Undoubtedly, Jesus was sharing out of His own experience of spending time with His Father. This teaching was more than a prayer to recite word for word. These were themes to be reflected on and prayed through, enabling us to have balance in our prayers.

We saw Jesus begin with a calm gaze at God, resting in His presence. This gaze began by remembering our **Relationship** – He is our loving and strong Father, having chosen to adopt us as His child. Then we move to **Worship** – seeing the greatness of Who He is and then asking Him to make His name holy in us and through us. True worship of God moves us to surrender to God. Then comes **Surrender** – as we pray for God's Kingdom to come in us and through His Church as we await His glorious return. Where God rules His Kingdom comes.

Now Jesus moves from a focus on God to a focus on our needs. These can be put into three categories:

1. Our Physical Needs
2. Our need of Forgiveness
3. Our Spiritual Battle

Praying for our Physical Needs – "Give us each day our daily bread"
The word 'bread' is used as a symbol of all of the necessities of life. These include food, water, shelter, clothing, relationships, and health. This prayer shows that we are aware of our daily need of God for the daily needs of our life. In addition to asking, we also take time to give thanks, with gratitude and humility for what God has provided. This prevents us from taking this daily provision for granted, or worse take credit for that provision ourselves. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." James 1:17

Praying for our need of Forgiveness
Each of us need to receive forgiveness from God and to extend forgiveness to others.
"Forgive us our sins": Each of us are a 'work in progress' when it comes to becoming more like Jesus Christ! As we see the perfection of Who God is, we ask Him to show us where He wants to change us from Self to Him (Psalm 139:23-24). We then confess this as sin, receiving forgiveness that restores our fellowship with Him (1 John 1:9).

"For we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us": Having received forgiveness from God through the death of Jesus on the cross, we are commanded to now extend that forgiveness to those who have sinned against us (Eph.4:31-32)

Praying for our Spiritual Battle - "And lead us not into temptation"
The word 'temptation' used here refers to a trial, challenge, or crisis. In context, it also is used in reference to being tempted to sin. Here in Luke 11, both uses are in view.
First, we are asking God to give us His wisdom and insights to see life's situations from His viewpoint: to see how He wants to use those challenges and trials we all have to glorify Him and grow more like Him (Romans 5:1-5), to trust Him and not our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Second, we are asking God to give us the grace to resist the temptation to indulge in sin, to recognize the battle between our own sin nature and the Holy Spirit within us, and to yield to the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25)

Prayer

Let's combine today's themes with yesterdays and pray reflectively through the whole prayer as it was given to us by Jesus. Be sure to pause and listen to what God is saying to you as well!

- "Father"

- "Hallowed be your name"

- "Your kingdom come"

- "Give us each day our daily bread"

- "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us"

- "And lead us not into temptation"

Come Away and reorient.

In those days he went out to a mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.
Luke 6:12-13

Making Prayer Filled Decisions
Day 4

Decisions – we all have decisions we need to make every day. Most of these daily decisions have a limited impact on us long term. Then there are the decisions that require more care, because they will adjust the path and course we are on. Then there are those more rare decisions that require real consideration and time, because they will redirect or set the course we take in the days ahead.

When facing some of those more important decisions that will adjust or set direction in our lives, we can sometimes find ourselves doing something like this. We take a few moments to pray for God to give us wisdom, followed by an extended time of thought, analysis, and planning (and discussion if others are involved). We then conclude with a moment to pray for God to bless the decision we just made.

Jesus gives us a different way to make decisions – Prayer Filled Decisions. He shows us how to weave significant times of prayer with thinking, analyzing, and planning. A great example of this is when Christ chooses the twelve Apostles in Luke 6:12-16. This is a very significant moment in not only Jesus' ministry, but in history! So Jesus, following a familiar pattern in His life, finds a place to be alone for an extended time of prayer all night, in fact.

There are a number of men and women who have been following Jesus as disciples (learner or apprentice). These people have put faith in Jesus as Messiah and dedicated themselves to learning from and imitating Him. Now it is time to choose the men who will become Apostles (Chosen Messenger), the primary leaders of what will become The Church – all those who put Saving Faith in Jesus Christ. While Jesus is the cornerstone of The Church, these Apostles (minus Judas) will be the foundation. They will write a significant portion of the New Testament and take the Gospel as far east as India, west as Rome, and south as Egypt and possibly Ethiopia.

While we know how long Jesus prayed, we are not told how He prayed. Please allow me to suggest that based on Christ's teaching and example, we can look to The Lord's Prayer for some insights on how to make Prayer Filled Decisions.

- *"Our Father in Heaven"* – Start with this reminder that you are praying to your loving Father Who has a plan and purpose for your life. He promises to give you the wisdom you need to discern His will.
- *"Hallowed be Your Name"* – Desire to make the decision and take the actions that best glorify God.
- *"Your Kingdom come, Your will be done"* – Desire God's purposes and will for you and your life. Also, that your decision will extend God's kingdom (presence and rule) into the lives of others.
- *"Give us this day our daily bread"* – Trust God for the resources you will need for the action He desires you to take.
- *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"* – Is there any sin in your life that would hinder you from doing God's will? Any relationship you need to restore?
- *"Lead us not into temptation"* – Stated positively, we are asking God, through the indwelling Holy Spirit to direct our thinking and steps, so we are not depending on our own understanding.

Now, you and I are ready to start the process of thinking, analyzing and planning, as we continuously ask God to direct them. And in time, reach the decision that places us in the middle of God's will.

Questions

1. What are some decisions you are facing right now?

   How would following Jesus' example affect your decision making process?

2. How did the fact Jesus had a daily practice of balanced prayer (remember Day One) impact His ability to make Prayer Filled Decisions?

   How would having this same pattern impact you?

Prayers

1. Choose a decision you are currently considering and use the outline given above to pray through it. Note any insights God gives you.

2. Thank God for those insights, and ask Him to put His will and purpose in your heart, so they become yours.

Come Away and reorient.

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."
Matthew 26:36-38

Aligning Our Will with God's
Day 5

Our lives are a mixture of the 'positive' moments we find enjoyable and the challenges and trials we would rather avoid. Most of us find it far easier to 'accept God's will' when experiencing the enjoyable times than when we are experiencing the moments and situations we wished never happened. It may come as a surprise to you, but Jesus was no different when He was living on this earth.

Nowhere is this more evident than when we see Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion. We are all familiar with the scene. But Matthew lets us get a glimpse into Jesus' heart as they pass through the gate and into the garden. It would seem one word is not enough, so he uses two.

- **"Sorrowful"** (vs. 37) – Means to grieve; deep sadness; to have sorrow over loss.
- **"Troubled"** (vs. 37) – Means to feel faint from grief; be overwhelmed with sorrow; feel burdened or weighed down with sorrow.

Jesus is facing two extremely painful experiences on the cross. First, there is the extreme physical pain of the crucifixion itself. Crucifixion is the most agonizing form of execution ever devised by man. However, that is not the most painful thing Jesus is facing – He is going to take on the sin of every person who will ever live on earth and experience the wrath and judgement of His Father in our place.

Many of us have faced situations and moments that caused us to experience sorrowful and troubled emotions: A deep sense of loss and grief when a loved one has died, facing pressure or challenges that make us feel overwhelmed, losing a job and feeling surrounded by bills we cannot pay, or deep sadness when a child walks away from God. "Why" becomes a common question.

Jesus models how we can pray through these times, aligning our will with His.

1. **Do not try to handle it on your own – Go to God**
   Jesus experienced the same weaknesses we do – hunger, thirst, pain, and temptation. Now He was about to experience the ultimate human challenge – death. In this most challenging time of His life, He needs His Father! How much more do we when we face trials, temptations, and heartaches that threaten to overwhelm us?

2. **Do not try to stuff your emotions – express them to God**
   Jesus says "My soul is sorrowful, even to death". The word sorrowful means to be surrounded by sorrow on every side. Luke tells us Jesus sweat drops of blood. Psalm 56:8 tells us God holds our tears in a bottle – He deeply cares and carries our deepest emotions and struggles close to His heart. Share them with Him!

3. **Even as you struggle with the desire to change the situation – make an intentional decision to submit to God's will.**
   Jesus prays, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And not just once, but three times. Despite all He is experiencing and feeling, Jesus prays for the Father's will to be done. But note He needs to ask repeatedly, each time using His will to accept the Father's will. Prayer opens our lives to the Grace we need to embrace God's will and purpose.

4. **Do not stop praying – Until you experience God's comfort, encouragement and strength**
   Luke tells us that the Father sent angels to comfort Jesus. We also see Jesus calmly rise from prayer to face all that was to come – arrest, trials, beatings, ridicule and finally, death on the cross. Sometimes it will take days and even weeks of prayer to move through a difficult challenge in our lives. But moment by moment, we will experience God's amazing grace for the journey!

Questions

1. What is the most difficult or challenging situation you are facing right now?

2. Why do you think even Jesus struggled with being sorrowful and troubled?

   How do these emotions drive us towards God?

Prayers

1. Take time to pray over that challenge you are facing.
   Be sure to express all of the emotions you feel, and make the decision to accept God's will.

2. What grace do you feel God giving you?
   (Encouragement, comfort, insight, strength)

3. What do you hear God saying to you regarding His love and direction?

Come Away and refresh.

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by ourselves to a desolate place and rest awhile." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.
Mark 6: 30-31

Rest in His Promises
Day 8

The twelve Apostles were in need of a break as we come to Mark 6:30. They had been out ministering in teams of two, and were excited to report their experience to Jesus. They also were mourning the loss of John the Baptist, who had been beheaded by Herod. Some of them had been disciples of John before being pointed towards Jesus by him. Now, they were busy ministering to the crowds of people who came with various needs. So Jesus tells them it is time to get away for a bit to be refreshed. Welcome words indeed!

As they approach their get-a-way spot their hearts must have fell, for there waiting for them was a crowd of people. Jesus had compassion on the crowd, so instead of a welcome break the twelve join in as He teaches and ministers to them. This day will end with the miraculous feeding of the 5000 (more like 15,000 counting the women and children). So much for getting a break!

It may not have worked out as planned in Mark 6, but there were numerous times when Jesus did take the twelve away from the crowds to be with Him to be encouraged and refreshed. In fact, He did just that the night before His crucifixion for what we know as 'The Last Supper'. One of the things Jesus does that night is encourage them with some reminders of the promises He has made to them (and us). In the midst of the sometimes busy and stressful lives we live it is important to hit the pause button for a moment and rest in the promises of Jesus. Let's look at a few of them, starting in the Upper Room. Then we will move to other passages in the Gospels.

1. Jesus promises to prepare a place for us, and to return for us to be with Him for eternity. (John 14:1-3)
2. Jesus loves us as the Father has loved Him. We abide in His love. (John 15:9)
3. Jesus promises to give us His peace, so our hearts are not troubled. (John 14:27)
4. Jesus promises to give us His joy, so our joy will be full. (John 15:11)
5. Jesus promises to be with us, even to the end of this age. (Matt. 28:20)
6. Jesus promises to give us resurrection life. (John 11:25-26)
7. Jesus promises to give us rest if we will come to Him. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Back in the Upper Room, Jesus warned the Disciples that life would be challenging at times! They would face rejection and persecution at times. In fact every one of them would experience martyrdom with the exception of John. And he would end his days in lonely exile. As we see how Jesus was rejected and crucified, we are not to be surprised when we as His followers are treated the same.

Jesus does not promise to change these circumstances, nor does He promise 'it will all end well for you'. What does Jesus promise us? The gift of Himself. He is our life, our peace, our joy, our rest, and our hope. As the Disciples discovered, Jesus Christ is more than enough!

So take a moment to reflect on the promises Jesus has given to us. Thank Him for them – and for the gift of Himself! He is your rest and amazing grace for the journey!

Questions

1. What are some other promises Jesus has made to us as His followers?

2. Which of the 7 promises mentioned above encourage you the most today?

   Why?

3. Why is it important to intentionally take time to reflect on and pray through the promises Jesus has made to us?

Prayers

1. Try a prayer like this, “Jesus, I thank you for the promise of

   _____. It encourages me because _____.”

2. Are you facing a situation that is a struggle right now?

   Which promises of Jesus apply to that situation?

3. Use this as an opportunity of pure worship and thanksgiving as you pray through each of the promises of Jesus that come to mind.

Come Away and refresh.

"I came that you may have life and have it abundantly"
John 10:10

Rest in God's Purposes
Day 9

All of us at some point wrestle with questions about our purpose . . . Why am I here on this earth? What is the purpose of my life? Does my life really matter? Where can I experience deep and true meaning? Without real answers to these important questions, we can go through life feeling worthless, unimportant, and aimless. God did not create us to feel such purposeless. Jesus said in John 10:10 that He came, "that (we) might have life and have it abundantly". Jesus wants our lives to be overflowing with passion and purpose. During Jesus' life and ministry, He gave us some very clear purposes we can live for.

READ: Mark 12:28-34

THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS – When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment in the Old Testament Law He responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6 which says we are to, **"LOVE GOD"**. Loving God means worshipping Him and offering to Him a life of surrender and obedience. Loving God is the number one purpose you and I have on this earth. We were created to know and experience the fullness of the love God has for us and to willingly offer the same love back to Him. Of all the things that God demands or expects that we do in life, at the very top of our purpose priority list is to love Him wholeheartedly.

The scribe asks for the single greatest commandment, but Jesus offers two. Second only to loving God, Jesus says, **"LOVE OTHERS"**. Loving others means caring for others and making an effort to meet their physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual needs. In Matthew 7:12 Jesus offers a tangible explanation of this type of love by saying, "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them." Part of the purpose we've all been given in life is to pay attention to the relationships that God has surrounded us with and treat them with the same level of kindness, patience, grace, mercy, and forgiveness that we would like given to us. Our purpose in life is to lovingly relate to others with a Christ-like attitude of selflessness, servanthood, and sacrifice.

READ: Mark 16:15-16 (Matthew 28:19-20)

THE GREAT COMMISSION – At the end of Jesus' life and ministry on earth, He gave His disciples one extremely important assignment, **"PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL"**. We are to go and tell others about the good news of Jesus Christ. What is the good news? In a sentence . . . the message that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth, died on the cross, was buried, and rose three days later in order to pay the penalty for sin and grant believers eternal salvation. Paul says in Romans 1:16 that we are not to be ashamed of the gospel, because contained within its message is the power of God for salvation. By proclaiming the good news about Jesus, we are not only giving others the opportunity to be saved, we are fulfilling a purpose that God gave to us in life.

Jesus offers to us all we need to experience the meaning and purpose we are looking for in life. If you're struggling with your purpose right now, go back to the basics. If you need to be refreshed in your purpose, go back to the fundamentals of the faith. Finding rest in God's purpose is as simple as loving God, loving others, and boldly proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ! That's it. When you do, you will find and experience the abundant, purposeful life that Jesus Christ came to give to you!
of Himself!

Questions

1. Are you struggling to know God's purpose for your life right now?

2. Are there any areas of your life that you are neglecting loving God or loving others?

3. Who are the people God has put in your life that He wants you to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to?

Prayers

1. Ask God to reveal ways you can demonstrate your love for Him.

2. Pray and ask God to reveal ways you can demonstrate love to others.

3. Pray and ask God to reveal who you can share the good news of Jesus Christ with.

Come Away and refresh.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:4-7

Rest in His Peace
Day 10

For many people, 2020 was a very difficult year. My heart goes out to those who have lost their job, or worse yet, a loved one. Then there are those who have suffered a great sense of loneliness and isolation. Parents of school age children faced the challenges of juggling online learning and jobs along with other demands. While Denise and I faced a few disruptions to our routine and plans, we were fortunate to not face what many endured this past year.

When looking back at 2020, there are many words people would use to describe their experience. However, not many would use the word 'peaceful'. As the Disciples were in the Upper Room with Jesus at The Last Supper, peace was not on their minds either! Their minds and emotions were in a swirl as Jesus layered one disruptive word on another. He was going to die soon - one of them would betray Him - Peter would deny Him; the rest would desert Him - He was going to leave them - Who in the world is this 'Spirit' Jesus promised - they would face persecution. In the middle of all of this Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27) How are we supposed to experience the peace of Jesus when life seems anything but peaceful?

Paul gives us the answer in Philippians 4:4-7. The peace of Christ flows into our lives through the channel of prayer. In fact, as we read His words, it appears that we have a choice to make. Deal with things on our own and be anxious or pray. Here are a few points he makes about this prayer.

1. **Rejoice in the Lord always (vs.4)** – To rejoice in the Lord is to offer Him our worship and praise. As we saw in day two's devotion, Jesus taught us to begin our prayer by focusing on God. He is our loving Father Who is also the Transcendent Creator Who is Perfect in His Holiness. It is important that we begin with God, not ourselves or situations.
2. **Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication** – Do not dwell on anything but pray about everything. When we try to manage or understand something on our own we are heading for being anxious. Instead, we are to go to our Loving Father – Transcendent Creator – Perfect, Holy God – in prayer.

3. **With Thanksgiving** – We are thankful that our loving Father loves and cares about us so much that He invites us to come to Him, knowing He will give us the grace and mercy we need. We are thankful that He will walk with us, care for us, and provide for us through the situation or need we are praying about. Finally, we are thankful we can trust Him and entrust ourselves to His will and purpose.
4. **The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus** – Jesus promised us this peace in John 14:27. Here Paul explains that this peace will guard our thoughts and emotions as we face the challenge we are praying about.

It has been my experience that this is not always a 'one and done' prayer. But rather a daily surrender to God as He gives me the grace I need for that day to know His peace. Paul had this experience with his thorn in the flesh in 2 Cor. 12. As Jeremiah said in Lamentations 3:22-24: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Questions

1. How does taking the time to rejoice in the Lord prepare us to experience His peace?

2. What have you been anxious about this past year?

   What has caused this anxiety?

Prayers

1. Think about the things you noted in question #2 above.
   If you can, write them down.

2. Now, using the outline given to us by Paul in Phil. 4:4-7, give these to the Lord.

Come Away and rest in His power.

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." Exodus 14:13-14

God Fights for His People
Day 11

“I can’t do this…no matter how hard I try.” Do you ever feel that way? You are facing an impossible situation and are lacking in resources. That bill is due. That person is angry. You really messed up. There is no fix. So what do you do?

This was the situation of the people of Israel at the Red Sea. The Egyptians were hot on their heels. They had seen so many signs of God’s miraculous power and provision through the plagues on Egypt. They were no longer slaves. But in that moment with the water in front of them, they despair. Wouldn’t it be better back in Egypt? (A common complaint, it seems.) Why had the Lord led them out here?

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10) Notice that silence is the appropriate response of people who are trusting the Lord in the face of the impossible. “You have only to be silent.” I often want to talk my way out of it. Work my way through it. Grit my teeth and push on. And yes, every believer does need to talk and work and persevere. No doubt! But there is a place where we should lay down our weapons and rest. Let God part the Red Sea. We are not as in control as we think.

“The Lord will fight for you.” Even while we are sleeping, God is at work. “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.” (Psalm 127:2) God works the night shift. Our bodies need sleep and crave rest. But God has unlimited power and resources.

So what do we need to do in light of this wonderful truth?

1) Fear not.

2) Stand firm.

3) See the salvation of the Lord.



Questions

1. What is your Red Sea…your impossible situation?

2. How do you deal with fear?

3. How do stories of God's power in the Bible give you confidence today?

Prayers

1. Pray that you will be able acknowledge your lack of control and God's great power at work on your behalf.

2. Pray about some insurmountable thing in your life, giving it to the Lord.

3. Ask the Lord to show you what you need to do (in His power) and what you need to leave in His hands.

Come Away and rest in His provision.

Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven, and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance
Psalm 78:23-25

God Provides for His People
Day 12

Just about every day, we are inundated with advertisements that remind us of things we do not have. From food to electronics to cars. And the message is: YOU NEED THIS…RIGHT NOW! I've always found it interesting that some ads remind you that you need exercising equipment, and others remind you to get some fast food. Fasting is such a powerful exercise because it reminds us that we don't need food as much as we thought. We actually need the Lord's provision every moment of every day.

Manna was bread from heaven that the Lord provided for His people the Israelites in the wilderness after they left Egypt. The word literally means "what is it?" Can you see the people sniffing the manna and wondering what it would taste like? And God gave some clear regulations for how to use this mysterious manna. You could collect an omer (about 2 liters) per person each morning. Save nothing overnight. On Friday, you would collect enough for two days since Saturday was the Sabbath day.

The people did a good job collecting the right amount in the morning. (Would we?) Each person gathered the designated amount, no more and no less. Unfortunately, some of the people tried to keep the manna overnight and found it infested in maggots the next day. Isn't that like us? It can be difficult to trust that the Lord will supply for our future needs.

Some Israelites went out on the Sabbath day to collect manna like the previous days. But it wasn't there just as God had said. Just think, the people were provided a day when they didn't need to work. They didn't need to collect manna. And yet, they went out looking for it.

This is wonderful remind to us that God will provide for our needs. We should relax and rest and enjoy a weekly Sabbath. Remember the Sabbath day. Chick-fil-A does. Hobby Lobby does. But these are businesses that of course employ humans. Humans that are finite and need rest. The Sabbath day was given to us to rest in the presence of God. To trust His provision for us both spiritually and physically.



Questions

1. What are you worried about when it comes to future provision?

2. How has the Lord demonstrated that He will take care of you?

3. How do you need to embrace the rest that God provides?

Prayers

1. Praise God for supplying your needs.

   Give thanks for some of these needs.

2. Pray for greater dependence on the Lord.

3. Pray that you might truly rest in His provision on your behalf.

Come Away and resist.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.
1 John 2:15-17, 3:7-8

Every Believer Has 3 Enemies!
Day 15

An old man who had led a sinful life was dying, and his wife sent for a near-by preacher to pray with him. The preacher spent some time praying and talking, and finally the old man said:
"What do you want me to do, Parson?"
"Renounce the Devil, renounce the Devil," replied the preacher.
"Well, but, Parson," protested the dying man, "I ain't in position to make any enemies."

The devil is not our friend! Every Christian has three powerful spiritual enemies: the flesh, the world, and the devil. The flesh is our old sinful nature. Because of the sin of Adam, the whole world was plunged into sin (Romans 5:12). It infects each one of us from birth! It is described by John as "the desires of our flesh, our eyes, and the pride of life." We must not become conceited about our spiritual progress, because we know that we too could sin in small and also spectacular ways. This calls for us to pray for the filling of the Spirit, to be controlled by the Lord instead of our flesh. For they are at war with each other.

The world refers to a system (like the biblical image of Babel/Babylon) that is opposed to God. We are told that Babylon is "she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." (Rev14:8) At each level of society, we can see a force at work that seeks to undermine righteousness and faith in the Lord. Christians are called to be salt and light in this dark world. So we pray for God's kingdom to come and will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We seek to spread the light of the glorious Gospel that will transform the culture around us.

Finally, our fiercest opponent is Satan himself along with his demons. These fallen angels are behind a great deal of opposition to the church. Indeed, Satan is a bloodthirsty, roaring lion seeking to devour the unsuspecting person. We are called to resist him (I Peter 5:9), which we can do through prayer. Later this week, we will see why prayer in Jesus' name is important for resisting spiritual forces of darkness.

Questions

1. How have you seen signs of the Son destroying the works of the devil.

2. Of these 3 enemies, on which do you tend to focus the most?

   Or the least?

3. What things are you tempted to love more that the Lord?

Prayers

1. Praise Jesus that he has come to destroy the works of the devil!

2. Pray that you would love the Lord with an undivided heart.

3. Pray that you would recognize the attacks of these enemies.

Come Away and resist.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. Matthew 4:1-11

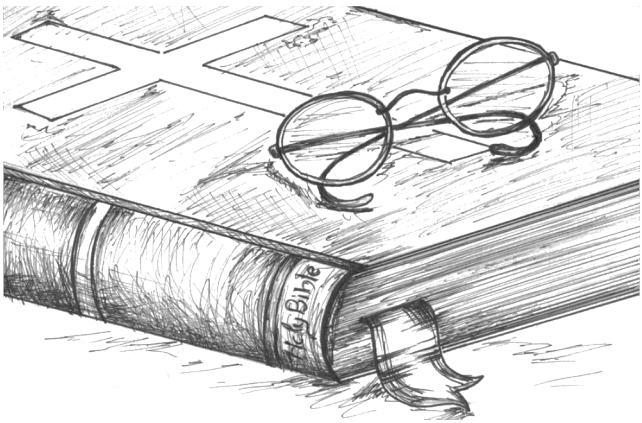
Jesus Modeled Prayer & Fasting During Spiritual Battles
Day 16

It was a showdown in the desert. Guns drawn, so to speak. Or maybe swords in this case, as Jesus demonstrates a reliance and proper understanding of the Word of God. The geography of this temptation was a far cry from the beauty of Eden during the time of the first temptation. This is a world ravaged by sin. On the one side is the Son of God who has taken on flesh. He was (physically) weakened and hungry from a long fast. On the other side was the devil who came to entice him.

Each temptation sought to bypass the Father's purposes for Jesus' life. Turn stones to bread and break your fast. Throw yourself down from a great height and prove your Sonship through an angelic rescue. Receive all the kingdoms of the world without the suffering of the cross. We are faced with temptations each day. But these temptations are not omnipotent. They are common to man. And believers throughout history have both succumbed to and also resisted them.

In the days of the Civil War it was illegal to trade in cotton; but many unscrupulous speculators tried to buy cotton in the South, run it through the Union lines, and sell it at great profit in the North. One of these speculators approached a Mississippi steamboat captain and offered him $100 if he would run his cotton up the river for him. The captain declined, reminding him that it was illegal.
"I will give you $500," said the man.
"No," answered the captain.
"I will give you $1000."
"No," the captain said again.
"I will give you $3000."
At that the captain drew his pistol, and pointing it at the man said, "Get off this boat. You are coming too near my price."

We must fight! One key element of Jesus' resistance was fasting. He had given up food for a time for the sake of his devotion to the Lord. In those moments of intense hunger, temptation came. But with the sword of the Spirit (the Bible), Jesus resisted each time. So can you! Combine fasting with prayer and Scripture reading to pursue greater devotion to the Lord. And remember that these battles are the norm for the Christian life. Our devotion to God doesn't exempt us from these battles. In fact, we may find that, like Jesus, the battles become more intense. Praise God for His gracious strength to stand firm!


Holy Bible

Questions

1. What is your price?
   In other words, what makes a temptation so…tempting?

2. What purposes does God have for you that might get derailed by sin?

3. What are some strategies to resist temptation?

Prayers

1. Pray for great resistance to temptation.

2. Pray that you might be filled with the Word at all times.

3. Pray that you might be spiritually nourished during this fast.

Come Away and resist.

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak
Ephesians 6:14-20

Prayer Is a Part of Our Spiritual Armor
Day 17

I remember ice fishing for the first time. It was an incredibly windy day! Cold too! And as I was walking out on the ice, I wondered why people enjoy this. It got so windy that I felt like I was being pushed backwards! Here, the Apostle Paul is writing about how to stand firm in midst of spiritual battles. These are battles with forces of darkness, not flesh and blood. And while prayer is not a designated piece of armor, we should consider it of utmost importance, for it is our direct line with God. In more modern terms, it is our wartime walkie-talkie that we use to call in reinforcements. So let's take a look at what Paul tells us:

Repetition is important. Repetition is important! (I couldn't resist) In verse 18, the word ALL is repeated 4 times. Let's take a look at each use of the word all.

AT ALL TIMES IN THE SPIRIT
Every time we pray, we should pray under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let the Spirit direct your words to God. Who does He bring to your mind? What concerns is He directing you to pray about? How is He inspiring your praise and thanksgiving? The Holy Spirit is going to guide you to pray according to the Bible. By contrast, we should not pray under the influence of the flesh. We shouldn't pray selfishly or in a way that would promote self as James reminds us (James 4:3).

WITH ALL PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION
There are all kinds of prayers that we can offer. Some folks like the ACTS model: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. Others use the PRAY model: Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield. And of course, we have the Lord's Prayer. Reciting the prayers of other believers is another way to pray different kinds of prayers. When it comes to prayer, variety is good, just like the conversations you have with your friends.

WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE
Don't give up! There are some requests that require persistence. Think of someone you know who needs Jesus. Think of the persecuted church. Consider your own spiritual life. These requests may feel repetitive, but don't grow weary! Consider that Zechariah likely prayed for a child for years before the Lord answered his request.

FOR ALL THE SAINTS

Consider the people in our church that need prayer. They need you to be engaged in prayer! Make a list of these folks and keep it updated. Get on the church email prayer chain. Care for folks in the church by praying for them. We don't do group prayer so that we twist God's arm, as if He were stingy. We pray together with the saints so that we might share in the rejoicing as the Lord answers our prayers.



Questions

1. Why do you suppose prayer didn't get assigned a specific piece of armor?

2. When is it hard for you to pray?

   Why is that?

3. Who is it that needs prayer today?

Prayers

1. Praise God for the ability to stand firm through His strength.

2. Pray using the ACTS or PRAY method described above.
   Or pray through the Lord's Prayer.

3. Pray for the ministry of the Gospel in Grace Church.

Come Away and resist.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.
James 5:13-16

We Fight Our Spiritual Battles With Other Believers
Day 18

"We are all in this together." How many times did you hear that last year? It is a nice sentiment, but I wonder how true it is. When someone feels all alone or is struggling through an illness, who is actually present with them? Who calls them or sends a card? We need loving family and friends because we all face times of crisis and need.

I remember a time when I felt spiritually attacked every Saturday evening, which made sense, since I was preaching the next day. I did not keep this struggle to myself. Instead, I asked some of my friends to pray for me that the Lord would grant a release from the heaviness I felt. And the Lord answered our prayers!

Praise God that we can say the church really IS in this together! James highlights what the individual believer should do when he or she is suffering. "Let him pray." You can do that in the privacy of your home or car or prayer closet. But he also instructs believers to call on their leaders (the elders) to come pray over them. Have you ever called on the Elders? Every time that I have been called on, I consider it a sacred responsibility to gather with the afflicted person to anoint them with oil (a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence) and pray. And I anticipate that the Lord will answer our prayers according to the riches of His wisdom.

James also broadens his instructions to confess sins to one another and pray for one another in order to be healed. We are not supposed to carry our sin and guilt in secret. That is what the devil wants, to keep us isolated and in shame. But there is freedom when we bring our sin into the light and have another believer pray for us. Let us be clear: they are not granting us forgiveness, for only Christ can do that. But they are interceding for us and ministering to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What a privilege we have to share our requests with each other. So let us fight our battles…together!


prayer

Questions

1. Why are we tempted to isolate ourselves during challenging times?

2. Who do you call upon when the going gets rough?

3. When did you experience an answer to prayer that someone in the church prayed?

Prayers

1. Think of someone who is in need of the Lord's touch right now. Pray for them.

2. Perhaps ask God for some faithful friends that will walk with you through challenging times. Or praise God for the friends He has already provided.

3. Pray about what you can do to encourage someone this week.

Come Away and resist.

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.
Colossians 2:13-15

Jesus Has Won the Victory Over the Powers of Darkness
Day 19

If you played sports growing up, you probably played an opponent that you expected to beat. You had more talent or experience on your team. It tempted you to boast and expect victory. But maybe your coach told you not to get cocky. Maybe you were reminded that your opponent was still going to play hard. Do not get overconfident. Do not let up on the energy. Do not sleepwalk through this game.

I remember reading a quote in a book that said, "Christians do not fight for victory; we fight from victory." What an amazing reminder of the truth of our standing with Christ. It is true that we have fierce opposition in this life. We dare not underestimate that! But through the victory of Jesus on the cross, we fight from a position of victory!

Because we walk by faith, we also fight by faith. Do you believe that Jesus has already won the decisive victory over the powers of darkness? Do you believe that you are truly dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus? Even death, a frightening foe to say the least, has been defeated. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (I Corinthians 15:55) These truths should make us confident.

But we still must take our enemy seriously. Stay humble. Pray hard. In biblical terms, we are to stay alert. Keep watch. We have a hungry enemy (1 Peter 5:8). But we know the Lion of Judah has defeated this furious opponent. So let us continue to pray that we may be able to stand. Let us pray that we are delivered from evil (Matthew 6:13).

We live in the reality of the "already/not yet." We are already seated with Christ (Ephesians 2:6). We already have victory over death. But we still have a fight in front of us. We will all have to walk through the doorway of death, unless Christ returns first. But in all these things, we are more than conquerors! (Romans 8:37)



Questions

1. Do you really believe that Christ has won the victory over sin and darkness?

2. When have you become “sleepy” in the face of spiritual danger?

3. How can you be more aware of the spiritual battles around you?

Prayers

1. Pray that you would not fall into temptation or become weary.

2. Pray that you might know the grace and power of God even in your weaknesses.

3. Praise Jesus for his perseverance to the end and for his great victory!

Come Away and relent.

"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
Mark 2:7

Witness God's Authority to Forgive
Day 22

All of us are capable of saying some pretty ridiculous things or making some pretty unbelievable claims. For example, did you know that I (P David) can fly!?! Or, were you aware that I can bench press the sun!?! For a handful who know me well, maybe this wouldn't surprise you and think, "yeah, I can see that". But for a majority, I'm guessing you'd more rightly be thinking that I was a lunatic who'd lost every single one of my marbles. No matter what ridiculous claims I might make about myself, no matter what fairy tale I might conjure up, unless I was able to confirm it or authenticate it in some tangible way, no one would believe me.

Jesus made one very important and unbelievable claim about Himself, a claim that if any other human being would say it would sound crazy. And yet, Jesus backed up His miraculous claim with His actions . . .

READ: Mark 2:1-12

In verse 5, after seeing the faith of a paralytic man and his four friends, Jesus said, **"son, your sins are forgiven"**. What? Sins forgiven? Why did Jesus say that? The four men had brought their paralytic friend to Jesus in order to experience healing, to be able to rise to his feet and walk again. Instead, Jesus speaks words of forgiveness that the scribes who were listening considered blasphemous. Why would Jesus say this? How could Jesus say this? Who can forgive sins but GOD ALONE?

Jesus knew EXACTLY what He was doing. It's one thing for Jesus to SAY He can forgive sin, it's a completely different thing for Him to back it up. Which is exactly what He did. While Jesus had a captive audience, and immediately after he makes the blasphemous claim to be able to forgive sin, Jesus says in verse 11, "rise, pick up your bed, and go home". Here again, Jesus says something ridiculously unbelievable, and yet we're told that immediately the paralytic man picked up his bed and went out before them all! No one said a word in response, not even the scribes, they were ALL amazed and glorified God.

By commanding the paralytic man to get up and walk, Jesus authenticated His authority to forgive sin! Jesus proved by healing the paralytic that He doesn't just have the authority to remedy the ***effects of sin***, He has the authority to remedy the ***source of our sin***. For Jesus, the healing of the body and the forgiveness of sins are two sides of His mission, with the forgiveness of sins being the most important.

Jesus has the authority to forgive our sin because it is against Him ultimately we have sinned. King David, in confessing his sin against Bathsheba prayed to God in Psalm 51:4, "***against you, you only, have I sinned*** and done what is evil in your sight." David asks God for forgiveness because it was from Him who he ultimately needed to be forgiven.

Like David, we have all sinned against God and are in need of forgiveness. It is through the authority of Jesus Christ that we can be confident that He is not only able to forgive us, He is willing to forgive us as well!!!



Questions

1. Are you skeptical or suspicious of Jesus' ability to miraculously heal?

2. Do you believe that Jesus Christ has the authority to forgive your sins?

3. What is the connection between Jesus' ability to heal and his ability to forgive?

4. READ: Matthew 9:1-8.
   Do you learn anything new/different about Jesus' authority to forgive from this parallel passage in the book of Matthew?

5. How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus has the authority to forgive sin?

Prayers

1. Ask God for any physical healing you are in need of today.

2. Ask God to help you believe in His authority to forgive.

3. Express your amazement of God and glorify in His ability and willingness to forgive you of your sin.

Come Away and relent.

"Forgive us our sins"
Luke 11:4

Be Forgiven
Day 23

Have you ever felt like it was just not possible for God to forgive you? Maybe you're an unbeliever and you think your sin is just too great to be forgiven. Or maybe as a believer, you keep repeating the same sin over and over and wonder if God will continue to be willing to forgive you. We are all aware of the depth of our own sin, how desperately we need forgiveness of our sin, and the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that sin creates in our lives.

READ: Luke 11:1-4

For three years, Jesus' disciples followed Him and observed His life. One regular habit that the disciples observed in Jesus' life was prayer. Luke 5:16 says that, "(Jesus) would withdraw to desolate places and pray". The prayer life of Jesus that the disciples observed was impactful enough that they asked Him specifically how to pray. The example of prayer that Jesus offers to His disciples is popularly referred as the Lord's Prayer. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches many things we should be praying to God about regularly, but one thing He makes abundantly clear is that when we pray we are to ask God to "forgive us our sins".

How does God respond to our request to be forgiven of sin? Jesus reveals the heart of God to forgive in the parable of the unforgiving servant . . .

READ: Matthew 18:23-27

In this parable, Jesus reveals that we all owe God a debt of sin that we cannot repay. The ten thousand talents that the servant owed the master was equivalent to twenty years wages!!! In todays' terms, that would be a $1,000,000 debt for someone who makes $50,000 per year. The point is, there is NO WAY that the servant was ever going to be able to repay the debt that he owed. No matter how much sin we have committed in our lives, there is NO WAY we can repay God to make up for our offense. The consequences we deserve for our sin is the punishment of separation from God for eternity in hell. There is no amount of good works that we could ever do that can cancel the debt we owe God and save us from the consequences we deserve for our sin.

Knowing that the debt he owed was far beyond his ability to repay, the servant falls on his knees and begs for mercy saying, "Have patience with me". As an act of pity and compassion toward the servant, the master

releases him and forgives him of all the debt owed. Colossians 2:13-14 says, "and you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, **HAVING FORGIVEN US ALL OUR TRESPASSES, by cancelling the record of debt** that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross". When we ask, God graciously makes forgiveness available to us through Jesus Christ who paid the debt we owe God by His death on the cross.

No matter what we have done. No matter how awful our sin might be. Jesus not only has the authority to forgive us of our sin, He willingly paid the debt we owe for our sin by dying on the cross. There is nothing we can or need to do to receive God's forgiveness other than to

. . . HUMBLY ASK



Questions

1. Have you ever felt like the debt of sin you owe God was too great to be forgiven?

2. Do you understand that there is nothing you can do to earn or deserve God's forgiveness?

3. Have you ever asked God to forgive you of the sin you have committed against Him?

   What sin do you need to confess and ask God to forgive today?

Prayers

1. Pray, confess, and ask God to forgive any sin in your life.

2. Pray and thank God for His compassion and willingness to forgive your sin.

3. Pray and thank God for cancelling your debt of sin through Jesus' death on the cross.

Come Away...and relent.

"For we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us"
Luke 11:4

Forgive Others
Day 24

Has anyone ever said something or done something to offend you? Do you hold anger, bitterness, or resentment toward someone who has hurt you or caused pain in your life? When someone sins against us, it is normal to feel like they owe us a debt. When someone mistreats or abuses us in some way, it creates within us the desire to repay them or be repaid for what they have done. Forgiving others is hard, but it is possible!

READ: Luke 11:1-4

Yesterday we learned from Jesus' teaching of the Lord's Prayer that we are to ask God to forgive us our sins. Immediately following Jesus' teaching to ask God for forgiveness He says, "for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us". Jesus says something similar in Matthew 6:14-15, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses". Again, in Mark 11:25 Jesus says, "and whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." It sounds like Jesus is saying that being forgiven by God is dependent on our willingness to forgive others. In a sense, this is true, being forgiven and forgiving others are very closely tied together. But how? To answer that question, let's look at the second half of the parable that we read yesterday.
.

READ: Matthew 18:28-35

In this parable that we read yesterday, Jesus reveals God's willingness to mercifully forgive our sin when we ask. As we read further into the parable, we see the servant who was forgiven of ALL of his debt and had no way of repaying the master demand that one of his fellow servants repay him one hundred denarii (an amount equivalent to one hundred days' wages). In todays' terms, that would be a $10,000 debt for someone who makes $50,000 per year, an amount that was within reason to pay back. As a result of the servant's unwillingness to forgive his fellow servant such a small debt, the master removed His offer to cancel the debt, put him in jail, and demanded everything He was owed be repaid.

If God is willing to forgive us of our unpayable sin, we should be willing to forgive others of their sin. The sin that others commit against us is insignificant compared to the sin we have committed against God. Our unwillingness to forgive others of their sin is evidence of the possibility that

we have not experienced the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God in our own lives. Therefore, **if we have genuinely experienced the forgiveness of God in our own lives, we MUST be ready and willing to forgive others of their sin against us!**

Paul said in Colossians 3:13, **"forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive"**. In those moments when we struggle to forgive those who have sinned against us, we need to look no further than to the extent that God was willing to forgive us. Forgiving others is not easy, not unlike the suffering and sacrifice that was required of Jesus to forgive us of our sins. As believers who have experienced the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God, we have the joy and privilege of offering to others what God has undeservedly offered to us!



Questions

1. Have you ever felt like the debt of sin someone owed you was too big to forgive?

2. How does unforgiveness effect the attitude you have toward someone who has sinned against you?

3. Is there someone in your life that has sinned against you that you need to forgive?

Prayers

1. Ask God to help you see that the debt of sin owed to you by others is small compared to the debt of sin you owed to Him.

2. Pray and ask God to help you forgive others as He has forgiven you.

3. Pray and thank God for giving you the miraculous ability to forgive others as a result of being forgiven by Him.

Come Away and relent.

"I do not say to you seven times,
but seventy-seven times"
Matthew 18:22

Forgive Unconditionally
Day 25

Nobody likes a repeat offender. A repeat offender is someone who makes the same mistake over and over and over and over and over again. A repeat offender is someone who, for whatever reason, does not feel any guilt, shame, or remorse for their actions. Repeat offenders are hard to deal with, but they are especially hard to deal with when they have repeatedly sinned against us. It's one thing for someone to say or do something that hurts us or causes us pain a time or two, it's another thing when they don't learn from their mistakes and continue treating us in an offensive way. It would make the most sense to avoid, ignore, or simply cut repeat offenders out of our lives. Is that what God would have us do?

READ: Matthew 18:15-22

In Matthew 18:15-22 Jesus offers instructions on how to handle repeat offenders in our lives. Jesus offers three important steps and one final fail proof attitude that can make all the difference in our relationship with someone who has sinned against us.

GO AND TELL HIM HIS FAULT – If someone has sinned against us, the first step is to go to them privately, make them aware, and discuss the offense with them. Our approach in communicating with someone who has sinned against us is not to judge or to condemn them, but rather to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) in hopes of reconciling the relationship.

TAKE ONE OR TWO OTHERS ALONG WITH YOU – If step one does not bring about reconciliation, we are to take another godly person or two with us in order to serve as an intermediary who can facilitate better communication, encourage listening, and provide accountability.

TELL IT TO THE CHURCH – Finally, if steps one and two do not bring about reconciliation, we are to take our grievance to a pastor or the appropriate church authority who can make a final determination for us concerning what should happen with our offender.

At the conclusion of Jesus' instructions about how to handle a brother who has sinned against us, Peter asks an "elephant in the room" question, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Peter thought he was being generous by offering to forgive up to seven times. Jesus responds by saying, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times." By saying seventy-seven times, Jesus was

saying that we are to offer unconditional forgiveness to those who have sinned against us.

No matter whether our efforts end in reconciliation or not, **it is our responsibility as the offended party to unconditionally forgive**. Unforgiveness in our hearts is not just destructive to our own sense of joy and happiness, it also causes us to become bitter, resentful, and worst of all, angry to the point of acting out toward others with vengeance. Paul provides some practical examples of how we can express unconditional forgiveness toward those who sin against us in Romans 12:14-21, "Repay no one evil for evil . . . as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all . . . never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God . . . do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good". Unconditional forgiveness is a Christ-honoring act of sacrificial love toward another who doesn't deserve it. By offering unconditional forgiveness we are offering a repeat offender the opportunity to experience the same unconditional forgiveness God has offered to us!



Questions

1. Have you ever been a repeat offender?

2. What is your attitude and how do you want to respond toward those who repeatedly sin against you?

3. Why is it so difficult to offer unconditional forgiveness to others?

Prayers

1. Thank God for offering you unconditional forgiveness even though you are a repeat offender.

2. Pray and ask God to help you offer unconditional forgiveness toward anyone who has repeatedly sinned against you.

Come Away and relent.

"her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much"
Luke 7:47

Love Much
Day 26

Who we identify with and how we identify ourselves with them impacts how we express our love for them. If we identify with a specific athletic team we will talk about their wins and losses, wear their team colors, and schedule our lives around their games so we can watch. If we identify with a specific musical artist or band we will talk about them, listen to their music, and schedule our lives around going to their concerts. These are all simple expressions of love that come out of our identity. The less we identify with them, the less we will express our love for them. The more we identify with them, the more we will express our love for them.

What is the appropriate way to identify ourselves toward God?

READ: Luke 7:36-40

In Luke 7:36-40 we are introduced to a woman who is only identified as a "sinner". No name. No flattering description or positive characteristics. We are told that she is a "woman of the city" implying that she is more than likely a prostitute. The Pharisee, at whose house Jesus was visiting and eating a meal, thought that if Jesus truly was a holy man (like himself), He would have known "what sort of woman this is who is touching him" and distanced himself from her. Instead, Jesus accepts the woman's extravagant and personal act of using her hair to wipe her tears and ointment on his feet. What type of person offers such an extravagant and humiliating act of love to another?

READ: Luke 7:41-50

In Luke 7:41-50 Jesus tells a three sentence parable about a money lender who cancels the debt of two debtors who were both unable to repay what they owed. After telling this parable Jesus asks Simon the Pharisee, "which of them will love (the moneylender) more?" Simon rightly answers the one whom he cancelled the larger debt.

With eyes of compassion turned toward the sinful woman, Jesus speaks to the self-righteous Pharisee and condemns him for not even offering the littlest expression of love. Whereas, Jesus praises the sinful woman of the city and offers forgiveness of her sins because of her extravagant expression of love.

Two individuals who each identified themselves differently in the presence of Jesus. The Pharisee identified himself as righteous and in no need of Jesus' forgiveness. Whereas the woman identified herself as a sinner and in desperate need of Jesus' forgiveness. Jesus said the sinful woman loved much because she was forgiven much and the self-righteous Pharisee loved little because he thought he needed to be forgiven of little.

How do you identify with Jesus? Do you exhibit extravagant acts of love for God because you identify as a sinner in need Jesus? Or do you exhibit meager acts of love for God because you identify as a righteous person in no need of Jesus? Jesus said in Luke 5:17, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." How much we love God speaks volumes of how we identify ourselves toward him. If you're struggling right now to express your love for God, a great place to start would be to confess in your heart to Him . . . **I AM A SINNER** . . . and as you experience the forgiveness of God, extravagant expressions of love will flow naturally out of your heart and out of your life!



Questions

1. How do you identify yourself toward God? Righteous or sinful?

2. What are some ways you express extravagant love to God?

3. READ: 1 John 2:3-5, 3:19-24, 5:3.
   What are some ways that John says we are to express our love to God?

Prayers

1. Admit to God that you are a sinner.

2. Express your love and gratefulness to God for forgiving you of your sin.

3. Ask God how you can demonstrate you love for Him in more extravagant ways with your life.

Notes