

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 through 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.

Come Away

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.

...and prepare for your day

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.