

Froward In Faith
Introduction to Prayer and Fasting
Pages 1-6
Because The Work of The Kingdom Matters

If you seek a closer walk with God, fasting may be for you. But at first glance you may not want to fast because it involves sacrifice, denial, and giving up the pleasure of food or something else that special to you. The discipline of fasting has fallen into widespread disuse that people do not know its power. I am not guaranteeing that every circumstance in your life will be fixed by a fast, but I do know that in every fast done with right motives, folk have gained specific direction from the Lord.

As you embark upon this 40 Day fast, my prayer is that you will remove the clutter from you life and the noise in your world enough to sense God's presence and hear from Him. I truly believe that you will, if you know specifically what to listen for. That is why I want to encourage you to find the courage and the time to ask God questions that you need answered.

In our daily journey with Christ we often need wisdom and direction for specific areas for our lives. If we will take time to ask God questions about these areas and then listen, He will speak!

Sometimes we come up against a brick wall or face a situation that seems insurmountable. In times like these we must ask God for wisdom to see us through. James 1:5 says that if we lack wisdom and ask God for it, He will give guidance to us in abundance.

Fasting is a time when we sort through our thoughts and consider the real questions in our lives for which we need answers. During these 40 days, peel back the protective coating around your heart and allow yourself to ask God to give you answers about the deepest questions you have. Carefully consider the motive and purpose of the questions. Ask them from your heart, and then expect God to answer.

Provided for you in this material are some questions you might consider to get started. Feel free to ask your own questions as well. Whatever it is that you are fasting...meals, activities, recreation, TV, etc., take that time you would spend doing those things and give it to God. Ask Him questions that will help you realize the condition of your soul so you can pray effectively for your needs and the needs of others. I would encourage you to consider writing down those questions. Ask them out loud to the Lord in prayer. Listen then with expectation for His answer. Write down the answers He gives you.

We'll be in this journey with you. We will come through this time strengthened and better equipped to serve in our local church, our denomination and for our university. It's going to be great to hear from God in a new way!

In Christ,
Don Seymour
Prayer Committee Chairman

P.S. The following devotional guide was adapted and used by permission from material shared with us by Rev. Kevin Seymour of Highpoint Church of the Nazarene, Delaware, Ohio.

A Closer Look At Prayer

Most believers, if they are honest, would have to admit that they do not know the delights of praying for an extended period of time. Our culture is so busy and demanding. Our attention span has been trained to be short and quick. Everything goes against spending extended time in solitary meditation and prayer. Yet, we all yearn to have that kind of relationship with our Lord. How can this be accomplished?

One of our goals should be to move from being a spectator to a participant. Our Lord gave us his example by being a participant in the experience of prayer. He prayed all the time.

1. At the beginning of His ministry (Mark 1:35).
2. At the middle of His ministry (Matthew 14:23).
3. At the end of His ministry (Matthew 26:39).

Matthew 6:9-14 contains the Lord's Prayer. The disciples had noticed that prayer was a learning experience and was a connection to the power ministry of Jesus. The Lord's purpose in teaching this prayer was not to recite a 13-second prayer, but to demonstrate an effective prayer time. These verses were meant to be demarcations or topics that should be covered in our own personal prayer time.

Praise: "Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name."

Yield control: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Provision: "Give us this day our daily bread."

Confession and pardon: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Praise: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen"

How should you use this prayer as a guide?

- I. This prayer begins and ends with Praise
"Our Father which art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name."
 - A. Thank God for your relationship with Him and that you can call Him Father through faith in Jesus.
 - B. Praise the name of God for the corresponding needs in your life.

Jehovah-Tsidkenu	The Lord my righteousness
Jehovah-Mekadesh	The Lord who makes me holy
Jehovah-Shalom	The Lord our peace
Jehovah-Shammah	The Lord who is there
Jehovah-Rophe	The Lord who heals
Jehovah-Jireh	The Lord shall provide
Jehovah-Nissi	The Lord our banner
Jehovah-Rohi	The Lord my shepherd
- II. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."
 - A. Yield yourself daily to righteous rule-His control
 - B. Your family (spouse, your children, your grand children)
 - C. Your church (pastor, leaders, ministry, the harvest to be reaped)
 - D. Your community
- III. "Give us this day our daily bread."
 - A. You can include all your specific physical needs

- 1. Food, health, housing
- B. Heart searching. Include all of your spiritual needs.
 - 1. Am I in fellowship with Jesus?
 - 2. Am I in fellowship with the church?
 - 3. Am I practicing biblical, balanced, diligent work habits?
 - 4. Am I obedient in the use of my time, money, and abilities?
- C. Don't stop praying for these needs until you get an answer
- IV. "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."
 - A. Confess all known sins to God and ask Him to forgive you
 - B. Forgive and release others
 - C. Set your will to forgive those who sin against you
- V. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."
 - A. Put on the whole armor of God (protection for inside) Ephesians 6:14-17
 - 1. The belt of truth
 - 2. The breastplate of righteousness
 - 3. The feet shod with preparation for the Gospel of Peace
 - 4. The shield of faith
 - 5. The helmet of salvation
 - 6. The sword of the spirit
 - B. Pray for a hedge of protection (protection from the outside)
- VI. "For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen."
 - A. I will be controlled by the will of God (His kingdom)
 - B. I will be confident in the power of God (By His power)
 - C. I will be concerned for the glory of God (His glory)

As your pastor, I ask you to join me in this 40-day adventure of drawing nearer to God in prayer. Together, let us seek the will of God as because the work of the kingdom matter.

Special Information About Fasting

In over fifty references to fasting in the Old and New Testaments, there is no specific command to fast, with the exception of the Day of Atonement for the Jews. In the New Testament it was assumed that fasting would be a part of the normal devotional life of the believer.

In these two New Testament references to fasting, Jesus gave us very specific guidance for this spiritual exercise:

Matthew 6:16 *When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full.*

Matthew 9:15 *Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."*

Jesus said not if you fast but when you do. He indicated in these verses that fasting should be a normal discipline in the church. Numerous other examples of fasting support the idea. What does it mean then to fast? What is the purpose of fasting? And how does one go about fasting?

1. Definition of “Fasting” – going without food and sometimes water voluntarily, generally for religious purposes. There are four types of fasts referred to in the Bible.
 - a. **Normal fast**, going without food for up to 40 days (Ex. 34:28, Ezra 8:21, 23; Dan. 6:18; Luke 2:37; Mark 2:18; Matt. 4:2; Acts 13:2-3, 14:23 and others).
 - b. **Partial fast**, abstaining from certain foods (Daniel 10:3).
 - c. **Absolute fast**, going without food or water no more than 3 days (Esther 4:16, this is very rare in the Bible).
 - d. **Voluntary group fast**, called for a specific reason for a specific group of people (1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Jonah 3:5 and others).

2. Purpose of Fasting
 - a. Worship – it must be God-centered, God-initiated, and God-ordained.
 - b. At times, fasting is an expression of distress, grief, or repentance.
 - c. Fasting is a preparation for God to give guidance and renewal (Daniel 9; Ex. 24).
 - d. Fasting reveals the things that control us and hinder our intimacy with God.
 - e. Fasting reminds us that we are sustained “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”
 - f. Fasting helps keep our balance in life (1 Corinthians 9:27; Psalm 35:13).

3. Practice of Fasting
 - a. For an occasional fast, eat a light meal (fruit, vegetables, yogurt, etc.) prior to beginning. Drink a lot of water. Skip 2-3 meals and break the fast with fruit juices followed by a light meal. Avoid oils, dressings and starch for a couple of meals.
 - b. When starting a regular discipline of fasting, begin slowly with a partial 24-hour (2 meal) fast once a week for several weeks while drinking fruit juices.
 - c. Monitor your inner attitudes and maintain a worshipful attitude.
 - d. Break the fast with a light meal of fruits and vegetables.
 - e. After a few weeks, try a normal fast, drinking lots of water only.
 - f. Always be careful not to call attention to what you are doing.
 - g. After succeeding with this for several weeks, move to a 36-hour (3 meal) fast.
 - h. Seek the Lord regarding extended fasts. Get additional information on conducting extended fasts and clear the fast with your physician. (People with certain physical conditions should not fast.)
 - i. Remember that the major work of scriptural fasting is in the realm of the spirit.
 - j. If skipping meals is not possible, try fasting certain types of foods (like sweets or soft drinks), or you can fast activities (like TV or sports). It’s important to convert that time to devotional activities, not just abstain from them.
 - k. One Key Thing To Remember: Our stomachs are like spoiled children. When they don’t get what they want they cry and growl and make all kinds of noises. It may be time for many of us to quit allowing our stomachs to control our lives. The hunger pain you will feel isn’t all real. Don’t give in. Our stomachs are not to be our gods.

Daily Prayer Guide

Day One

Direction In Prayer

*"And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."
Matthew 6:13*

Jesus taught us much about prayer by example and in word. "The Lord's Prayer," or "The Disciple's Prayer" is a part of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. This is His model prayer that gives us an outline on the issues we should pray for.

At the close of the prayer, Jesus instructs us to pray for the Father's direction for our day. It includes a healthy understanding of our enemy and his ability to draw us away from the Father's will for our lives. Satan seeks to bring the child of God into a place of temptation and ultimately to surrender to that temptation, and to spiritual defeat.

We should pray every day for God to lead us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Pray that He will give us daily deliverance from the enemy's power and deceit. Yesterday's deliverance was great, but we must depend on the Father to lead us today. The enemy never ceases his relentless attacks. He constantly plans and schemes to control us. Therefore, prayer should be a vital part of our daily life. Our Lord gives us the opportunity for complete victory over all of the enemy's attacks. As believers, we know who is the King of the Kingdom. It is His kingdom to which we belong. Prayer helps focused on kingdom priorities. Through His power we are able to accomplish all of these things for His glory alone.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will give the people of our Church a spirit of prayer. Pray that He will clearly direct us and protect us from the evil one. Take time to focus on God's greatness and thank Him for the vision that He has given our church. Pray that during these forty days, He will reveal to each of us how to use our time, our talents, and treasures to further the work of His kingdom.

Today's Question for God: God, how do YOU want me to grow in my faith during this emphasis? Wait for the answer from Him.

Day Two

Don't Let The Fire Go Out!

*"Why is the house of God neglected? Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts."
Nehemiah 13:11b*

When the Olympics came to America several years ago, part of the experience was for people to see the Olympic flame. For every Olympics, a flame is lit from the Eternal Olympic flame in Greece. It is then carried to wherever the Olympic games are being held. The flame made its way to Atlanta for the opening ceremonies by being carried all around America first.

Volunteers and heroes from all over America carried torches holding the flame from place to place. While the flame was passing through Jackson, Mississippi, Harley Sheffield had the honor of carrying it on his bicycle. As he was crossing the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, the expansion grates on the bridge blew out a tire on his bike. The torch popped out of its holder, fell onto the bridge, and broke into pieces. The Olympic flame was extinguished.

Sheffield was horrified. They would have to go all the way back to Greece and start over! He would go down in history as the man who allowed the flame to go out! His panic was unnecessary because a "mother flame" and a replacement torch were in a van not far behind. The replacement torch was ignited from the "mother flame" and he carried the Olympic flame onward to his destination.

This story provides a great illustration of our walk with God. Too many times we stumble and allow our flame to go out. If you have faltered in your walk with the Lord, and your flame has grown dim or gone out, the "flame of the Holy Spirit" stands ready to bring correction and rekindle the flame in your torch today. He plans to keep it burning.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will light our spiritual torches with the fire the Holy Spirit. Pray that our local church will be on fire for the Lord. Ask God to make your spiritual flame burn brighter (increase your faith). Our Scripture today tells how God enabled Nehemiah to restore the priests to their duties. Ask Him how He can enable you to restore, rekindle, or resume something for Him that will give Him glory.

Today's Question for God: God, do YOU see my faith in the same way that I do?

Day Three

The Birth Of A Dream

*"Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb."
Genesis 30:22*

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 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. The United States of America is the result of a dream of real democratic government by a group of patriots. Martin Luther King changed the course of a nation because he had a dream. "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! The dream to impact our community and county, and to play a part in touching the world for Christ has its roots in Habakkuk 2:3, "For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false: Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay."

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church's vision will become a reality in God's perfect timing. Pray that our dreams of seeing friends and family saved and brought into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That dream will come about as we demonstrate that we believe that people do matter to God and to us. Ask God to reveal or clarify our personal dream that is His will for our life and that He will help us to act on it.

Today's Question for God: God, what does great faith look like?

Day Four

What A Great Dream Looks Like

*"He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had.'"
Genesis 37:6*

In 1989, a movie called "Field of Dreams" was released. Kevin Costner played Ray Kincella, a 37 year-old man who had never done a crazy thing in his life until he heard a voice one day that said, "Build it and he will come." You see, Ray had had a stormy relationship with his dad. As a rebellious child of the 60's, he scorned his dad who loved baseball, refusing even to play catch with him. His father died before he could make things right. When he plowed his cornfield over and made a baseball field, everyone said he was crazy for following his dream, but through the magic of the movie he could be reunited with his father as a young man. The theology is certainly not correct, and the plot is nowhere near reality, but that is what makes the movies, the movies.

One thing is for certain; people will come to a place where their dreams can be fulfilled. God's field of dreams is not in Iowa, but rather in the hearts of His people. How do we know what a dream looks like? The list below gives a good description of what a God-given dream looks like:

A God-given dream will stir your passion.

A God-given dream will be humanly impossible to accomplish.

A God-given dream will make an impression on you for a lifetime.

A God-given dream will cause you to exercise strong faith.

The enemy of our soul will attack a God-given dream.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will be a true "field of dreams" where people can find and fulfill their dreams. Pray that our dreams for the future will be bigger than our memories of the past. Pray that we can be one so that the world can be won. Pray for church leaders to have discernment for decisions that affect this dream. Ask God to protect our dream from the enemy.

Today's question for God: God, do YOU believe that my faith is great?

Day Five

When Your Dream Is Delayed

"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him...Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'"
Genesis 37:19-20

Joseph found out what every dreamer finds out – not everyone is happy about your dream. Joseph found out that people would envy your dream, conspire against it, speak against it, and even attack your God-given dream. Joseph's brothers put him in a pit and then sold him as a slave who was taken to Egypt. Don't you imagine that Joseph wondered; what in the world God was doing and if his dream would become a reality?

Remember that every God-given dream must die a human death. That is, every dream from God will come to a place where it is impossible to accomplish the dream in human ability alone. God is sovereign and his timing is perfect. Remember Habakkuk 2:3b, (our dream for His kingdom) "...will certainly come and will not delay." Therefore, when we run out of resources and get to a place where we realize that the dream cannot happen unless God steps in, then God alone will get the glory when the dream is accomplished. His ways are not our ways, and He does not delay a single day.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will continue to possess a God-sized dream of reaching our immediate community and the surrounding communities. Pray that God will give us the endurance and stamina needed to face any temporary setbacks. Pray that all who are involved will experience joy on this journey of faith. Ask God to strengthen us in the building of His church!

Today's question for God: God, is there anything in my life that keeps me from having great faith?

Day Six

Don't Stop Short Of Your Dreams

*"The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered."
Genesis 39:2a*

In 1930, two young brothers named Dick and Maurice McDonald moved from New Hampshire to California to pursue the American dream. After a few failed ventures, they struck gold when they opened a small drive-in restaurant. By the mid-1950's, their annual revenue was \$350,000, and the brothers split \$100,000 in profits.

You might think, yes, the rest is history. But you may be surprised to know the rest of the story. In 1954, a man by the name of Ray Kroc came into the picture. Ray Kroc saw potential those brothers did not see. In 1961, Kroc bought the exclusive rights to McDonald's for the sum of \$2.7 million – now with 21,000+ restaurants worldwide, the rest of the story is history.

The lessons learned from this story are:

Don't pull up short of your God-given dream.

Don't allow someone to out-dream you.

Don't allow someone else to finish your dream.

Christians, look to Joseph as the role model for dreaming big. Genesis 39 holds important lessons for all dreamers. There are lessons in this chapter that can keep us from stopping short of our dreams:

Know that God is with us (verses 2, 21, & 23).

Know that God is aware of our actions (verse 9).

Know that God can make the bitter things in life sweet (verses 21-23).

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will pursue our God-given dream to its fullest potential. Pray that through the achievement of this dream will come more and better Christ followers for the kingdom of God. Ask God to show us ways in which we have stopped short of His best for us.

Today's question for God: God, what would YOU do through me if my faith was greater?

Day Seven

Can You Trust God?

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."
Proverbs 3:5-6*

There are two basic ways people live their lives as they pass through this world – either they remember God or forget Him. They either acknowledge His presence and live their lives in dependence on Him, or they pay no attention to His claims on them and live a life on the basis of their own understanding and abilities. The worst tragedy and cruelest deception is the man who says feebly with his lips, "I trust God," but an examination of his calendar and checkbook shows no difference between him and the man who does not even make that claim. The question we must ask ourselves today is, "Do we trust God?"

The very nature of this question produces two possible meanings: First – "Can you 'trust' God?" That is, is He trustworthy? Can He handle the problems in your life? Secondly – "Can 'you' trust God?" That is, do you have the ability to trust Him?

These verses reveal some important things 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.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our congregation's faith and trust in God will grow. Pray that we will allow God to be in control and that we will utterly depend on Him and desire that His will be done. Pray that the fruits of our deepened trust in Him will result in guidance from Him. Ask God to identify an area of your life where you need to yield to Him. Give it to Him and then look for His direction.

Today's question for God: God, what are some practical steps YOU want me to take to grow my faith?

Day Eight

A God You Can Trust

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."
Proverbs 3:5-6*

God expects His people to trust Him, and He is a trustworthy God! We were created to live our lives in dependence upon Him. Our knowledge is incomplete, our wisdom is inadequate, our power is ineffective; thus, we need our Creator. Sin in its very essence is failing to trust God. These verses in Proverbs tell us how we are to trust Him.

We are to trust Him entirely (verse 5). God wants us to trust Him "with all of our heart." That means everything from our salvation to physical, mental, and social needs. That includes trusting Him with our families, marriages, jobs, relationships, finances, abilities, weaknesses, health, accomplishments, and failures.

We are to trust him exclusively (verse 5). God commands us not to depend on our own understanding. Why? Because it is fundamentally flawed with an infection of sin. God is truly omniscient. He knows it all from beginning to end. He even knows the number of hairs on your head. So follow His leading from His Word, from prayer, and Godly counsel. He is on your side, so trust Him!

We are to trust Him uniformly (verse 6). In all we do, in every decision we make, we are to trust His wisdom, not just with big things, but also with the little things.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our congregation will be fully convinced of His trustworthiness. Take time to praise Him today for who He is and what He does. Take time to thank Him for His faithfulness and for leadership to us and in our church.

Today's question for God: God, what should I stop praying about and just start doing?

Day Nine

Learning To Trust Him

"Trust in the Lord...Fear the Lord...Honor the Lord"
Proverbs 3:5-9

In order to receive the blessing of God, we must trust Him. Trusting God is not some mere token confession you make from time to time. Trusting God must be complete, total, daily reliance upon the promises of God. Every day you will face the choice of relying upon your own understanding or trusting Him.

You and I must choose to trust God. When you come to those places in life where the line is drawn and the question is "Can I trust God?" your answer determines whether you grow spiritually or shrivel and die. The issue is, "Which am I going to choose?" When God told Noah to build the ark, it had never rained. Noah chose to trust God. Abraham left everything behind because he chose to trust God. Joshua was faced with a decision, and he said, "Choose today whom you will serve...but as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord." Do you have this kind of trust in the Lord?

You can prove your trust in Him. Trusting Him is real when you acknowledge Him, when you depart from evil, and when you honor the Lord with your time, talent, and treasures.

Prayer Focus: Claim the following Scripture today and personalize it for your local Church and for yourself: Hebrews 10:35-39, "Do not let this happy trust in the Lord die away, no matter what happens. Remember your reward! You need to keep on patiently doing God's will if you want Him to do for you all that He has promised. His coming will not be delayed much longer. And those whose faith has made them good in God's sight must live by faith, trusting Him in everything. Otherwise, if they shrink back, God will have no pleasure in them. But we have never turned our backs on God and sealed our fate. No, our faith in Him assures our soul's salvation."

Today's question for God: God, what should I put on my "To Don't" list?

Day Ten

A Prayer For Direction

*"Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me."
Psalm 119:133*

There are at least two essentials to the Spirit-filled life – prayer and the Word of God. As the old song says, "They go together, you can't have one without the other." Prayer finds its very foundation in the Scripture. You could not pray with purpose, conviction, or direction without the revelation of God that you find in the Bible. Therefore, you must study the Bible and be a person of prayer.

In Psalm 119, almost every verse refers to the Scriptures. Verse 133 is a prayer for direction. The Psalmist here pleads for guidance from the Word of God.

Have you ever considered that God desires to guide every step you take? He desires to guide not only the big steps in your life, but even the mundane steps you take every day in the kitchen or your workplace. He will also guide you to the friend who needs encouragement, the neighbor who needs Jesus, and the co-worker who needs a witness of God's love.

Prayer Focus: Thank God for guiding our people through His Word and prayer to reach outside the four walls of our church. Ask the Lord to continue to give the pastor and staff the wisdom and discernment needed to accomplish everything He has placed before us. Thank God for His guidance of your steps. Ask Him to continue to guide you by making the Scripture you read to come alive and personal to you.

Today's question for God: God, what do YOU want to do through me today?

Day Eleven

Discover Your Destiny...Like Abraham

*"Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."
Genesis 14:20b*

Chapter fourteen of Genesis records for us a significant event in the pilgrimage of Abraham. This godly man became a warrior as he joined in defeating four kings who had united against five kings of the valley. War would not have interested Abraham, except for the fact that Lot, his nephew, was captured and taken into captivity. Today's text picks up with Abraham returning as a conquering hero. His high esteem, already in the eyes of others, went higher. Then he was known throughout the land.

At this point in his prosperity, he was faced with a significant choice. In fact, his future destiny hangs in the balance of this choice. This choice is a spiritual battle, and it is a greater battle than the physical one he just fought. Will he become worldly with all these material possessions, or will he become rich in God's eyes because he is a giver?

Life is all about making the right choices. In this Bible passage, Melchizedek is a picture of Jesus Christ. With that in mind, you can see that Abraham made a wise choice by giving back to God a tenth of what God had given him. In your prosperity, which comes from God, do you give an amount back to Him? Spiritual growth will result from worshipping the Lord through giving.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will be a giving church in a new way. Pray that we will reach beyond our four walls and our members to touch the world with God's love through our talents, time, and treasures. Ask God to reveal ways that we can grow in our giving. Pray about your personal giving and how you can become more generous.

Today's question for God: God, is what I give to your work satisfactory to You?

Day Twelve

Discover Your Destiny...Like Rebekah

"Drink, my Lord,' she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. After she had given him a drink, she said, 'I'll draw water for your camels too...'"
Genesis 24:18-19

Chapter twenty-four of Genesis details the marvelous narrative of the servant of Abraham who seeks out a bride for Isaac. Most interpreters see a story behind the story in these verses. Abraham appears to be an example of Father God, Isaac is a picture of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the servant who goes on the journey to find the bride corresponds to the Holy Spirit.

This unnamed servant, when looking for a bride for the Father's son, had one characteristic in mind that she must possess. It was not natural beauty, even though Rebekah was naturally beautiful. It was not strength, even though she was strong. The servant was looking for a person who had the spirit of giving, for a giving person would bless the son, Isaac. When Rebekah gave him a drink and then offered to water his camels (which might have taken hours,) he knew that he had found the bride for Isaac.

The Holy Spirit as well waits in the background until He sees the spirit of giving in us. Then He pulls out the riches and gives us a revelation of the Father's plan. The Holy Spirit will graciously confront us with the opportunity to give to us. (Genesis 24:17)

Rebekah was willing to give. She was going to the well to take care of her needs. It was her water, but she gave it away. (Genesis 24:18)

Rebekah was willing to go beyond the ordinary. If you are willing to go beyond the ordinary for God, He will go beyond the ordinary for you. (Genesis 24:19)

Prayer Focus: Pray that our congregation will possess a spirit of giving above the ordinary. Ask God to bless you with a giving spirit. Pray for someone you know who struggles with the issue of giving tithe and offerings to support God's work.

Today's question for God: God, what do YOU want to do through me this month?

Day Thirteen

Discover Your Destiny...Like Jacob

"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it...and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.'"

Genesis 28:16,22

Jacob was the black sheep of the patriarchs. His resume was filled with many questionable incidents. Today's passage finds Jacob running from the consequences of his actions and falling asleep at a place called Bethel. While he was asleep, God revealed Himself to him in a personal way. It was then that the God of his fathers became his personal God too.

Before we see how this moment of destiny changed his perspective about giving. Let's look at the point where God showed up in Jacob's life.

God reveals Himself when we are at the end of ourselves. Jacob's scheming and trickery had brought him nothing but failure and rejection. When he stopped running and fell asleep at Bethel, he had nothing. When we are at the end of our rope, God reveals Himself to us in a personal way.

God reveals Himself when we are alone. God came to Moses when he was alone with his flocks in Midian. God came to Isaiah while he was alone in the temple praying. God uses the times we are alone to reveal Himself. When we are alone, that is when God has our undivided attention.

Jacob was forever changed at Bethel. When God became personal to him, he immediately vowed to give God a tenth of everything. This personal encounter with God changed Jacob from a taker in life to a giver. Personal encounters with God bring remarkable changes in lives.

Prayer Focus: Pray that everyone touched by the ministry of our church will experience a personal relationship with moment our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Ask the Father how the giving of your time, talent, and treasures can reveal your personal faith in Him. If you don't know God in a personal way, pray and ask Him to meet you at "your Bethel."

Today's question for God: God, what do YOU want to do through me this year?

Day Fourteen

Discover Your Destiny...Like Jacob

"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it...and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.'"

Genesis 28:16,22

Today we continue our look at Jacob's encounter with God. Because of this experience, Jacob went from being characterized as a taker, to being known as a giver. It was all due to meeting the living God personally. Look at the God he met:

God is a Dream-Maker (Genesis 28:12). God came to Jacob with a dream for a glorious future. God always puts dreams about the future in our hearts. Jacob awoke to a wonderful truth. Beforehand, he did not know that he was at the house of God and the gate of heaven. God delights in giving us dreams and then seeing them come to pass.

God is a Promise-Keeper (Genesis 28:13). God reveals Himself not with just a generic name for Himself, but the covenant name of Yahweh. God is a God who makes promises and keeps them. He does what He says He will do.

God is a Work-Giver (Genesis 28:13). He speaks. The verse says, "and He said." God reveals Himself clearly to His people through the Bible, which are His oral words in written form. Jacob had been just stumbling around, until he heard the voice of God.

God is a Living God (Genesis 28:13). God does not identify Himself as, "I was the God of your father Abraham." But rather He says, "I am the God of your father Abraham."

Prayer Focus: Take time in prayer to praise and worship God for who He is to you. Love Him back in a real and personal way today.

Today's question for God: God, what do YOU want me to continue praying about?

Day Fifteen

Discover Your Destiny...Like Jacob

*"...when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back the spirit of their father Jacob revived."
Genesis 45:27b*

Andrew Singleton. had an I.Q. of only 55. But his parents dreamed for him. They dreamed that he could somehow enjoy life as a teenager. Although he was enrolled in special need centers for most of his life, when he was 19, his parents put him in regular high school. He attended special classes there and endured a tremendous amount of pressure while adjusting to his new environment. His parents desired that Andy would be accepted and have friends there. Eventually, Andy did so well that he was able to participate in some mainstream classes.

On graduation day when Andrew's name was called, his parents watched in amazement as the unbelievable happened. All 192 of his classmates rose to their feet and soon the entire crowd of spectators joined them. His classmates began to cheer for him and to call out his name. It was a dream come true.

When we get to heaven we will also celebrate a dream come true. Until then, God will keep us revived. Jacob was living with a spirit of poverty until he saw the wagons. When he saw the riches from Egypt from a son he had thought dead, he was revived.

Prayer Focus: Pray that each and every one of us at our church will develop ownership of our God-given dream to impact our community. Ask God to revive the church leaders of this dream as they continue to work toward it fulfilling it. Ask the Lord to anoint our pastor. Ask God to revive you in an area of your life that He sees the need.

Today's question for God: God, what does the next step of full commitment to YOU look like in my life?

Day Sixteen

How Much Is Too Much?

*"She broke the jar and poured the perfume on His head."
Mark 14:3b*

A woman Mary anointed Jesus at Bethany with expensive perfume. This is one of the few stories in the life of Jesus that is contained in all four of the gospels. This event that was so impressive that it was indelibly written upon the disciples' hearts and minds. They never, ever forgot this act of devotion. Mark uses it as a prelude to the passion events. It stands in contrast to the hatred and rejection Jesus received 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. Sadly, it only came from 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 improve, but all of us can match. That alabaster bottle was very valuable. It was worth a year's wages. 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.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the people connected to our church will love Jesus so much that they will be extravagant in giving of their time, talents, and treasures.

Today's question for God: God, am I fully surrendered to YOU?

Day Seventeen

Power!

"I pray that you will begin to understand His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the Heavenly realms..."

Ephesians 1:19-20

One of the greatest needs in the church today is power; not political power, not manipulative power, not fleshly power, but heaven-sent power. The source of all power is God Himself. The Bible tell us in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." The Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 1:18, "...the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

If God is the source of all power, then why aren't more lives changed? How is it possible to read God's Word, the Bible and be unaffected by it? The root of the issue is how you define truth. Do you believe that everything in the Bible is true and that it is from God? For the Christian, power and truth are inseparably linked together. Paul says in Ephesians 6:17, "Take the Helmet of Salvation and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." God gives us the power through Scripture. Consider today's devotional a challenge to memorize a new Scripture verse. Then you can claim the promise of its power.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the people of our local church will be a powerhouse for God because we daily put on His armor. This armor includes the belt of truth, the body armor of God's righteousness, the shoes of peace that come from the Good News, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, and that we will be a people who pray at all times (see Ephesians 6:10-18). Pray that we will have a genuine love for God's truth and will claim its power.

Today's question for God: God, how am I more like YOU now than I was this time last year?

Day Eighteen

Power For The Future

"Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today...The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.'"

Exodus 14:13-14

God's power does not operate until we move beyond the realm of our possibilities. As long as we can do it in our own strength, there is no need for God to display His power. We must move beyond our abilities if a watching world will ever see the power of God. The story behind our lesson for today is that the recently freed Hebrew slaves found themselves surrounded by impossibilities. Before them was a sea that could not be crossed. Beside them was a barren wasteland. Behind them was an enemy that desired to capture them and take them back to where they had been. In this difficult situation they had three options:

They could go back.

They could stand still.

They could go forward.

For the children of God, there is only one real option - go forward! As we move forward under God's direction and by His power, we must be careful. Around us are many roads that can only lead to defeat and death. Doctrinal deviation, isolation, cowardly compromise, and division must be avoided.

Before us there is a future. There is a land that flows with milk and honey, as in Canaan. This future is as bright as the promises of God that we find in His Word.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our local church will not be afraid to move forward with God. Ask God to give you a promise out of His word to claim for our church. Tell God about an area of your life that that you know needs to move forward.

Today's question for God: God, will YOU reveal to me any lack of commitment to YOU? Help me to be fully surrendered to You!

Day Nineteen

Powerful Jesus

"At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'"
Mark 5:30

In chapter five of Mark, we see three important incidents in the life of Jesus. It is within the context of these events that He revealed Himself as the powerful Son of God. In the first event, we see Him as more powerful than **demons**. He went with His disciples to visit the most demon-possessed man in all the country. When Jesus showed up, the demons immediately began to beg for mercy. With one word from Jesus, the demons left this man never to return. In this passage, we also see Jesus more powerful than **death**. When Jairus' daughter fell ill, he went looking for Jesus to come and heal her. But before they found Him, the child died. When the father found Jesus, he took Him home with him. Jesus, restored her to life by the power of His word. In the middle of these two great revelations, there is another incident where Jesus showed Himself more powerful than **disease**. It falls almost as a parentheses to the greater event of the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead. There are some important truths about the touch of faith in the healing of the woman with the issue of blood.

This healing event shows us that we should not only have new life in Christ, but we must also have spiritual health, individually and in our church body as a whole. Many have received salvation and have spiritual life, but are not spiritually healthy. Jesus says in John 10:10, "... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The way to experience spiritual health is the same way we experienced new life in Jesus – that is to reach out and touch Him by faith. His plan is to save us from our sins, to sanctify every believer and to make us effective witnesses for Him.

Prayer Focus: Ask God to give spiritual health to our church body and to us as individuals.

Today's question for God: God, is there anything in my life that I may not even be aware of that YOU want me to surrender to You? Show me so I can be spiritually whole.

Day Twenty

Power To Transform

*"For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves."
Colossians 1:13*

One of our problems today is that we trivialize sin, Satan, salvation, and the Savior. We have reduced sin to what we call minor complexes and simple problems. Satan is a myth, a joke, a cartoon character. In reality, he is the very real god of this world, the chief of an innumerable company of demons, the father of all unbelievers, the ruling monarch of darkness. Salvation has been reduced to a mere intellectual decision rather than a transformation of life. Our Savior has been trivialized to simply another religious leader. In the New Testament, Jesus never ask for compliments or tribute from those who rejected His claims as Messiah. He stands alone as the "only begotten of the Father." He made the claims that "He and the Father are one." He claimed to be the only way to heaven. We may trivialize these things, but in light of eternity, it is not a trivial pursuit. The very word salvation stands for all that God the Father has done to rescue us from our fallen condition. The New Testament presents salvation, not as a mere decision, but as a miraculous, supernatural deliverance from the life of sin! The book of Colossians sets forth the powerful truths about our salvation. Never trivialize what it took to save you.

Prayer Focus: Today is the halfway point in our 40 days of prayer and fasting. Pray that our prayer warriors will be encouraged in some way today. Pray that God's people at our local Church will continue to strive to deepen their relationship with Him on a daily basis and that holy living and generous giving will flow from our increased faith. Ask God to help you never to trivialize His love.

Today's question for God: God, who or what do I love more than YOU?

Day Twenty-One

Power Of Love

*"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."
I Peter 4:8*

A woman named Beth was driving her husband Jim's pride and joy, a little green MG. He had labored over this car for hours every Saturday for four years. He had wanted a car like this for almost all of his life. As Beth was driving, she saw a boy on a bicycle and swerved to avoid him. She heard the little car being crunched, scraped, and the glass breaking. Another driver stopped to help her out of the car. She was dazed but not hurt when the police officer approached her and asked for her insurance papers.

She did not so much fear the wrath of her husband, for he was gentle and nice, but she feared the great disappointment he would have. She dreaded the hurt and anguish she would see on his face.

As she went to the glove compartment to get the insurance papers, she found them in a plastic package. To her surprise on top of all the documents was a white envelope with her name on it. She opened it and began to read: *"Dear Beth, if you are reading this, you have probably been in an accident. Don't worry. I pray that you are all right, and just remember it is you that I love. Jim"*

The best of us have wrecked our lives. We have made a mess of things. We have loved darkness rather than light. But the cross of Christ is God's statement to us that no matter how much we have wrecked our lives and disappointed Him, He says, "Remember it is you I love."

Prayer Focus: Spend time in prayer adoring God for His love. Pray that as we move forward as a church, we will always cultivate a loving relationship with God and each other. Ask the Lord who in our church family member you can reach out to today, expressing His love.

Today's question for God: God, how do YOU want me to encourage someone today?

Day Twenty-Two

Changed By The Power Of God

*"As the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."
James 2:26*

How do you know that your life has been changed by the power of God? Well, how do you know that a high voltage electrical line has touched you? When a person comes into a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus, it is very obvious to the one who received this new life and to the people close to Him. When God comes into your soul, you will know it! However, the question can be asked: "Does the Bible teach about the evidence of a changed life?" This Scripture in James is the heart of this epistle, and it gives a clear understanding of a biblical working faith that is evident of a union with Jesus Christ.

Paul also speaks of this in Romans, using Abraham as an illustration. Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of the Jewish nation. What were his experiences concerning this question of being saved by faith? Was it because of his good deeds that God accepted him? If so, he would have had something to boast about. But from God's point of view, Abraham had no basis at all for pride. For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. In the spiritual realm, "...the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." Romans 4:1-5

There is no contradiction between these verses in James and Romans. Paul stresses the root of faith, while James stresses the fruit of faith. Paul looks at our salvation from the Divine perspective, and James looks at it from the human perspective. Paul sees the fire, and James sees the smoke coming out of the chimney. The two go hand in hand.

Is your faith evident to those around you? Does your faith penetrate your character and actions? Can others tell that you love the Lord?

Prayer Focus: Lord, increase the faith of every member of our church so that it is obviously visible to the outside world. Pray Matthew 5:16, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."

Today's question for God: God, am I truly living by faith, or am I counting on my good deeds to get acceptance from You?

Day Twenty-Three

All Power

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"

Matthew 28:18

The Roman Empire grew to be huge and wielded significant influence in the world. The borders of the empire were larger than ever before. Their elaborate governing system was in full operation. Tax money was coming in at a higher rate than ever. Truly the Roman Empire was operating in one of its finest hours. It was the most modern civilization the world had ever known.

If it were possible for Tiberius Caesar to have looked from his palace in Rome all the way to a distant mountain in Galilee where eleven men were gathered around their leader, and if he were able to hear what this leader was saying to them, there is little doubt that he would have laughed out loud. That leader Jesus said to His disciples, "I have been given complete authority..."

However, if Caesar could have seen about 350 years into the future, he would have been aghast to see his successor naming Christianity as the official state religion. It took less than 400 years for Christianity to conquer the great Roman Empire. History would later show that this act of being made an official religion of the empire would be a blight rather than a blessing to Christianity. However, it is still significant to see how a church of only eleven impacted the entire known world in such a short time.

How were they able to achieve this feat? It was through power - Holy Spirit, God-given power. We can impact our world because we have the same Holy Spirit living within us, giving us the same power to be in communion with God, to live victoriously over sin, to pray for the lost and witness effectively to them.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the leaders of our church will be mightily filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and impact our community and the the world for Christ. For yourself, pray or sing the words of this song:

"Breathe on me, breath of God, love and life that make me free. Breathe on me, breath of God, fan the flame within me. Teach my heart, heal my soul, and speak the mind that in Christ we know. Take me to your sanctuary. Breathe on me. Speak to me, voice of God. Comfort, heal, restore with love. Breathe on me."

Today's question for God: God, why am I afraid to trust YOU more than I do right now?

Day Twenty-Four

The Anointing Brings Harmony

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like the precious oil poured on Aaron's head, that ran down on his beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore." *Psalm 133*

Remember the television show M*A*S*H? It was based on an American emergency medical unit in the Korean War. This group of people was composed of some very different personalities. There was Hawkeye Pierce, B.J., and Father Mulcahy. There was Colonel Potter, Radar, and Hotlips Houlihan. They were always playing jokes on one another and arguing over different political views and the war. But there was always one thing that brought these characters together. It did not matter what particular argument was going on or what practical joke was being pulled, when they heard the sound of the choppers bringing in wounded, they always were united in the O.R.

In our day of hurting and wounded people, we cannot afford to be one more church that spends all of its time arguing over things that will not matter in the light of eternity. We must bring our differences together and allow the Lord to merge them in the unity of the Spirit.

Just as Aaron, the high priest, was anointed on his head and the oil ran down his body, so the Holy Spirit descends from our great High Priest, Jesus Christ to us. Anointing always brings harmony.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our local church will realize its God given dream and that the He will help us experience genuine harmony among us because the Holy Spirit is allowed to have His way among us. Ask God to show you specific ways that you can contribute toward the unit of believers here in our local church.

Today's question for God: God, what do YOU want me to do or be that seems risky to me?

Day Twenty-Five

The Corporate Anointing

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head of Aaron that ran down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore." *Psalm 133*

This Psalm was written on the occasion of David's coronation as King over all of Israel. And what a struggle it was between the times he was anointed king by Samuel until the day of his coronation when he ruled over a united twelve tribes. He had worked so hard to unite these warring tribes. David understood that harmony could only be achieved when they practiced the unity of their faith. These days of unity for Israel under David, and later his son Solomon, were without question the most glorious days of their history. Never has Israel possessed all of the land that God gave her except in these days. Even in our current time, Israel is but a shadow of what she was, despite her being in a united state. In fact, Israel will know no greater glory until Jesus rules in regal splendor from His throne in Jerusalem.

There is a message in these verses for the church today. For as the people of God united under one king in the Old Testament, so the people of God must unite today under the King of Kings. As they experienced great glory in the unification in the Old, so we will experience a greater glory in the New. As they experienced a tremendous victory over their enemies because of unification, so we will enjoy freedom from the enemy's control in the New.

Unity is not uniformity. You can tie two cats' tails together and have unity but not peace! Seek ways to be harmonious.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the believers of our congregation will experience and demonstrate true unity of purpose. Pray that we will be one so that the world will be won. Ask God how you can help our church be unified.

Today's question for God: God, what does fear keep me from doing?

Day Twenty-Six

From Defeat to Victory

*"I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses."
Joshua 1:3*

Abraham Lincoln is widely recognized as one of the greatest presidents in the history of our country. He stood tall and strong in a very critical time in our history. We certainly regard him as a successful man. He also experienced many failures in his life.

When Abraham Lincoln went off to the Black Hawk War he was a captain. Through no fault of his own, he returned a private. That brought an end to his military career. His little country village shop "winked out" as he used to say. So he failed as a businessman.

As a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, he was too impractical, too unpolished, and too temperamental to be successful.

Turning to politics, he was defeated in his campaign for the legislature.

He was defeated in his first attempt to be nominated for Congress and in his application to be Commissioner of the General Land Office.

He was defeated in the Senatorial election of 1854 and in his aspirations for the Vice Presidency in 1856.

Finally, he was elected President of the United States and fulfilled his destiny and the destiny of a nation. Although maybe not as dramatic, Lincoln's experience is the experience of many of God's people. The enemy of our soul comes to us after repeated defeats and whispers in our ears, "You're a failure!" He tells us we will never win, we're trapped forever where we are and will never fulfill our God-given destiny.

The first chapter of Joshua tells the story of God's people who escaped the cycle of defeat and moved into a new day of victory.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the people of our church will possess all the land and build all the facilities that God intends for us. Pray Galatians 6:9, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Ask the Lord to encourage you in your walk with Him. In your prayer time, claim victory over evil for our church and for yourself. Pray that God will use us to implement His will concerning this church and that we will have the financial resources to move forward for His glory.

Today's question for God: God, will you remind me of some risks I've taken for YOU and YOUR kingdom?

Day Twenty-Seven

Are You Dangerous?

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9

When we are called by God our Savior out of sin's bondage, we begin a journey of faith with Him. We follow Him as our Captain and Leader into the promised purpose of the future, to fulfill our destiny. Along the way, God will stretch us. He will enlarge the horizons of our vision.

Jim Elliot, the great missionary who gave his life trying to reach the Auca Indians said, "Am I Dangerous?"

If we are honest with ourselves, we may find that we are utterly ordinary and commonplace. We profess to know a power the world cannot reckon with. We are all sideliners, coaching and criticizing the real wrestlers, while content to sit by and leave the enemies of God unchallenged. We are often spiritual pacifists, conscientious objectors in this battle to the death with principalities and powers in the heavenly places. The world cannot hate us; we are too much like its own. Oh, that God would make us dangerous!

How do we get there? According to Joshua there are several principles:

Choose to be strong.

Choose to be courageous.

Choose to be obedient.

Read Joshua 1 and write down everything God commanded him to do. Then reflect on how these commands compare with what the Lord is calling us to do.

Prayer Focus: Pray 2 Chronicles 15:7 for our church, "But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded." Ask the Lord to embolden us with strength, courage, and submission to Him to follow the path He has placed before us. Pray that these traits will be known through our church and in me as well.

Today's question for God: God, am I pleasing YOU?

Day Twenty-Eight

We Have Never Done It This Way Before!

"He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'"

Mark 2:12

Ancient sailors recorded many times that in the midst of a coming storm the top of their ship's mast would be circled with a mysterious circle of light. Many times their hair would begin to stand straight out from their heads as this light appeared. They called it St. Elmo's Fire. Any experienced sailor knew it was then time to take cover because the air was so electrically charged that a lightning strike was imminent.

The air must have been so charged in Capernaum when Jesus healed the paralyzed man, as found in Mark 2:12. There was a crowd around him, and this crowd was curious about the ministry of Jesus. Scribes surely were scowling as they watched this new Rabbi closely, hoping that they could catch Him in some error. The room was charged with excitement. Everyone knew that something dramatic was about to take place. It was not St. Elmo's Fire; it was the fire from King of King's. For when He is present, something miraculous is going to happen.

Sure enough, excitement mounted as four men began to tear up the roof in order to let a friend down in the presence of Jesus so that he could be healed. The Bible says they literally "took off the roof." When our group of believers gather, it ought to be a "roof-raising experience." And we too should be able to say, "We've never seen anything like this before!"

According to this passage, three things are needed to have a "roof-raising" experience with Jesus:

We must have a Savior who can save.

We must have a preacher who can preach.

We must have a flock who has faith.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will be filled with people of faith like those four roof removers, for they did everything possible to bring their friend to Jesus. Ask the Lord to make you like one of these four.

Today's question for God: God, what do I need to ask for and believe that YOU will do to make me a more effective servant?

Day Twenty-Nine

Can Jesus Do A Mighty Work Here?

*"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them."
Mark 6:5*

This is a sad picture. Jesus came to church but could do no mighty work there because of their lack of faith. It was not a good first year of ministry for Jesus as far as His reputation among the hometown people of Nazareth was concerned. He experienced a tremendous amount of rejection. Nazareth was where the Scriptures say, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:52) It started out well enough when He took the pulpit on a Sabbath and read from the prophet Isaiah chapter 61. This event (recorded in Luke 4:16-30), tells how they "were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips." (verse 22) But when He told them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (verse 21), they became enraged. In fact, they ran Him completely out of town to a cliff where they wanted to kill Him by casting Him off the edge. "But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way." (verse 30) Talk about rejection! Most preachers would have dusted their feet off and pronounced judgment, never to return. Jesus, however, is not like most preachers. He still had a burning desire to do a mighty work among them.

Jesus still has a burning desire to do a mighty work through His church and people today. Are you willing to live by faith and have an effective prayer life? He is ready, willing, and able to perform powerful works through us today. Our faith will either turn the switch on or off. Jesus will either do a mighty work here, or He will go elsewhere to do His mighty work.

Prayer Focus: Pray that He will do a mighty work through our local church because we are of strong faith. Ask God to show you if there is a roadblock of unbelief in your life.

Today's question for God: God, is my obedience complete or partial?

Day Thirty

An End Time Church

"The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.
1 Peter 4:7

Have you heard the story about the man who woke up early in the morning, looked at the clock, and the time was 3:33? He looked over at the calendar and noticed that it was also the third day of the third month. As he arose from bed, he remembered that he lived on Third Street and that his house was the third house. When he read the morning paper he became even more excited because at the horse races that day there was a horse named Trio in the third race. So he rushed to the bank, withdrew all of his life's savings, and then rushed to the racetrack. He went to the third gate and sat on the third row. He bet it all on Trio to win the third race. Guess what happened. Trio placed third. Sometimes things do not work out the exact way we think that they will or want them to.

The recipients of Peter's letter were in the same situation. They had bet it all on Jesus and believed they had a winner. But they were being severely persecuted for placing their faith in Him. They must have wondered if being taunted and persecuted by unbelievers every day was worth it. Since they knew the difference that Jesus had made in their lives, they answered yes, it was worth it. This affirmative answer still begs another question, however: "How can we endure until the end?"

God is preparing His people for the Lord to return. The church will return to its position of power much like she experienced in her infancy. We are beginning to witness a Pentecostal power on the church again. The lapping of the tides are hitting the shores, but a tidal wave is coming! God will deal with the church as a bride as He did when she was a babe. Not everyone wants to be a part of an end-time church. Many are content to be in a safe ministry that provides comfort for the comfortable and disturbs no one. Many would love, in these last days, to sit at the feet of those preachers who will tickle their ears with "sweet Jesus" sermons that tell them all is well with their sin-filled lives. End-time churches must pray relentlessly, give tremendously, witness powerfully, and worship constantly looking for the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Prayer Focus: Pray for our church to be an end-time church. Ask the Lord to help us to do our utmost for Him as a church body and individually.

Today's question for God: God, what do I need to finish?

Day Thirty-One

God's Great Relocation Project

"Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'"
Numbers 13:30

God is in the moving business. He is always in the process of moving His people. Although we are often content where we are, God loves us enough not to leave us there. Sometimes we can get a little stubborn about changes that He has in mind for us to make.

A good illustration is found in the children of Israel as they were moving from Egypt to the Promised Land. God sent miracle after miracle to get them out. But then, they did not want to go on in and possess what He intended for them. In fact, they said in Numbers 14:3, "...Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" God was able to take His people out of Egypt, but His people didn't want Him to take Egypt out of them.

The old song says, "I have decided to follow Jesus – No turning back, no turning back." Paul said in Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God has begun a spiritual project in His church right here. May we take heed of the lesson we learn from the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land. May we be wise enough to realize that God began this great project, and He will carry this work to completion.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will continue to lead the way and that our faith will remain strong as we continue to follow the vision He has given our church. Thank the Lord for loving you enough not to leave you where you are. Thank Him for the privilege of being a part of this church body of believers during this exciting time in our history.

Today's question for God: God, what is holding me back from doing what I know You want me to do?

Day Thirty-Two

You Make the Call

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
II Timothy 3:16-17

Baseball umpire Durwood Merrill tells of his rookie year of umpiring in the major leagues. It was the first time he had called balls and strikes with the famous pitcher, Nolan Ryan. The second pitch of the game was so fast, Merrill never saw it. He froze, unable to make the call. Finally he yelled somewhat tentatively, "Strike!" The batter backed out of the box and said, "Ump, don't feel so bad, I didn't see it either!"

This story is a good illustration of what is happening in the world today. Change is occurring so fast that none of us can see it clearly. Yet we have to make vital calls and daily decisions about very important things. Some times we wonder if we are making the right choices.

There has never been a time when we've needed a standard more in our lives than we do today. We need a fixed point, a true north, an unchanging standard on which we can base our decisions and not have to worry about changing them. God has given us such a standard. It is the Word of God, the Holy Bible. It contains the rock-solid, never-changing, always relevant truth.

Unbelievers might say the Bible is irrelevant and outdated. Believers know that "...the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) You make the call.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our fellowship of believers will read and study the Bible daily. Ask God to let its wisdom sink down deep into our hearts and minds. May it be reflected in our character and actions.

Today's question for God: God, do YOU trust me?

Day Thirty-Three

Watch Out For the Dream-Stealers

"...so I sent messengers to them with this reply: 'I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?'"

Nehemiah 6:3

Dr. Haller Nutt of Natchez, Mississippi, had a dream. He wanted to build one of the greatest plantation houses in all of the South. Being a doctor and cotton farmer gave him the wealth needed to accomplish this dream home. He made his sketches and searched the nation for the best architect to make his dream a reality. He found Samuel Sloan in Philadelphia to design it. It was going to be an octagon-shaped mansion with eight rooms on each of the six floors. All of that was going to be grouped around a middle piece, a six story rotunda that would be capped with a 16-sided Byzantine onion-shaped dome. It was going to be beautiful with nothing else like it in all the South. Dr. Nutt went all over the world to purchase the very best furnishings for this masterpiece.

As soon as construction had begun, tragedy struck. The Civil War erupted. All the workers left to fight. Dr. Haller Nutt lost everything during the course of the war.

During that time, he moved his family into the basement of this grand mansion so that they might be safe and have shelter. Dr. Nutt died in 1865 before the war was over. The family continued to live in the basement. In fact, they lived there for over a century, 111 years! Finally, some relatives donated it to the local historical society. To this day, it stands as a monument to an unfinished dream.

In chapter 6 of Nehemiah, enemies tried to stop him from completing the dream that God had laid on his heart – that of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. But Nehemiah stayed focused. He completed his God-given dream in record time to the praise of His glory. He is a role model for us today.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will enable us to complete the dream that He has given us in such a way as to bring Him glory and expand His kingdom. Pray that He will thwart every enemy who tries to steal our dream and prevent it from happening. Ask the Lord how you can take ownership of this vision using the time, talents, and treasures that He has given you.

Today's question for God: God, is my obedience to You joyful or reluctant?

Day Thirty-Four

The Absurdity of Going Back

"Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"
Galatians 3:3

On Thursday, August 1, 1985, a room full of America's top intelligence officials were gathered outside the office of the director of the CIA for a farewell reception of a retiring colleague. However, the topic was not about the retiree. Whispers were flying around the room that the highest ranking KGB agent, Vitally Sergeyeovich Yurchenko, had defected. He was most important because he was in charge of all KGB operations in the United States and Canada. Now, he would be able to provide extremely important information about Soviet spies in America.

After presenting himself to the American Embassy in Rome, he was quickly flown to the United States in a military plane. Once in the U.S., he was taken to a "safe house" in northern Virginia where he was interrogated for hours and provided very sensitive information.

The most startling and amazing part of this story took place three months later on November 2nd. Yurchenko had been spurned by a girlfriend in Canada and was growing increasingly impatient with his situation. During the evening he persuaded the CIA agent assigned to him to take him to Georgetown for dinner and a movie. During dinner Yurchenko asked the agent, "What would you do if I got up and walked off? Would you shoot me?" The CIA agent replied, "We don't shoot defectors." Yurchenko countered, "I will be back in 15 to 20 minutes, if I am not, it is not your fault." With that he walked out of the restaurant and presented himself to the Russian Embassy where he un-defected.

The world watched in amazement a few days later as this man boarded a Russian Aeroflot jet, stopping briefly on the boarding steps to wave good-bye to freedom. He then returned to the confines of communism. Why would anybody who had enjoyed freedom return to communism? Yet that which amazes us in the political arena is met with welcome acceptance in the spiritual arena. Why would anyone who has tasted the freedom through God's grace return to the confines of sin, bondage, regret and separation from God? What kind of relationship do you have with the God of grace?

Prayer Focus: Pray what we will continue to walk in the Spirit and not by our own human effort. Ask the God of grace to help us deepen your relationship with Him in worship, obedience, and witnessing for Jesus, demonstrating His love and compassion?

Today's question for God: God, do I trust YOU?

Day Thirty-Five

A Contribution or A Sacrifice?

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."
Romans 12:1-2

Did you hear the story of the chicken and the pig who were walking together down the road? They came upon a beggar who was nearly starved to death. He had not eaten in days. The chicken and the pig decided to help him. The chicken said, "I have an idea. Let's fix him some breakfast - some ham and eggs!" The pig thought about that a moment and then said, "I don't like that idea very much because it only requires you to make a contribution, but for me it is a complete sacrifice!"

As Paul wrote the believers at Rome, he came to a real turning point at chapter 12. Here, he made application to the truths he had laid out in previous chapters. He stating how we should respond to the knowledge that God has procured our salvation and saved us from the wages of sin through Jesus Christ. He tells us to lay our all on the altar; surrendering completely to God. Don't simply make a contribution like the chicken, but sacrifice all like the pig.

Prayer Focus: Pray that this body of believers will be totally surrendered to God.

Today's question for God: God, what should I lay to rest that I insist on keeping alive?

Day Thirty-Six

Don't Drop Out Of the Battle

"In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain.""
Psalm 11:1

In the 1984 Olympic Games hosted by Los Angeles, there was a memorable event in the women's 3000 meter race. Two premier long distance runners were entered: Zola Budd, a South African running for Great Britain, and Mary Decker from the U.S.A. During the race, the two bumped. Budd landed awkwardly and was cut deeply by Decker's spikes, but was able to continue. She finished a disappointing seventh. Mary Decker suffered a pulled left hip stabilizer muscle. Her injury put her out of the race.

In a spiritual sense, there are many Mary Deckers today. Wounded, they have quit running the race. Among the many images of life found in Scripture, there is the image of the runner and the image of battle. As believers in Jesus Christ we begin with a birth, but we discover quickly that this journey we are on is more like a battle. It is very difficult to persevere in a battle. In 1 Kings, chapter 22, the Bible records the time when King Ahab of Israel joined with Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to battle against Syria. In the midst of the chaos, Ahab is struck by an arrow. He groans to the driver of his chariot, "Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded." (verse 34)

There are many like Ahab who have been wounded in the battle for souls and have forsaken their place. The Scriptures are full of these warnings and admonitions. Galatians 5:7 says, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" A disturbing part of our culture today is an aversion to any kind of commitment. Our society is short on longevity and long on short-term, quick, instant "what have you done for me lately" attitudes. God teaches us differently through His Word to persevere.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will persevere with what the Lord has entrusted to us. Ask the Lord whom you can encourage to persevere today. Proverbs 11:25 says, "...he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." Claim this promise as you act upon it.

Today's question for God: God, how can I live my life to demonstrate my faith in YOU?

Day Thirty-Seven

Conversion = A Changed Life

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service." *1 Timothy 1:12*

After Watergate, there was an abundance of books that were published by the various personalities involved. One of the most famous was Chuck Colson who wrote the very famous "Born Again." This book detailed his conversion to Christ. All of these years later, we think of Chuck Colson as a great man who has had such an impact on the world through his prison ministries. We forget that before his conversion he was known as "the hatchet man." It was a common saying in Washington that Colson would walk over his own mother for Nixon! Another player in the Watergate scandal was the very boisterous G. Gordon Liddy. One of the great quotes from his book tells of a time when a certain court date came around. Everyone had been discussing Colson's conversion to Christianity. As Colson walked into the courtroom, Liddy was overheard to say, "Oh, no, if Colson would walk over his own mother for Nixon, just think what he will do for Jesus!"

Time has proven Colson's conversion genuine. He certainly is one more example of how God can change a life. In 1 Timothy, the Apostle Paul is encouraging Timothy in the faith to cherish, protect, and preach the Gospel. The reason is that the Gospel's message changes lives. Indeed, the Gospel is preached here at our church so that our goal of making more and better followers of Christ can be met.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will always be a place that impacts the world for Jesus. Pray that each one of us will join together to help expand God's kingdom.

Today's question for God: God, what promise in YOUR word do YOU want me to memorize?

Day Thirty-Eight

Truth and Freedom

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:32

In a day before politicians decided truth according to polls and partisanship, Abraham Lincoln made decisions based on principle. His most notable act was the Emancipation Proclamation. It was New Year's Day, 1863, when this decree was first publicly stated. It would be almost two years later, after his death, that his convictions were made official in the Constitution. Lincoln took a stand without compromise that would nearly rip our nation apart and cause much bloodshed. He knew there were some things that were worth standing for, even if it meant a fight. Personal freedom for everyone is such a thing.

An unusual thing happened after the war. Even after an amendment to the Constitution, slaves continued to live as slaves. Shelby Foote records for us what one Alabama slave said in 1864, "I don't know nothing 'bout Abraham Lincoln 'cep they say he set us free. And I don't know nothing 'bout that neither." How tragic. Strange as it may seem, man preferred the security of slavery to the uncertainty of freedom.

It is tragic when someone does not exercise his personal freedom. Even more so are God's people who have been set free spiritually but who are content to remain in their slavery. Jesus Christ is the Great Emancipator who has paid the ultimate price for His people to be free from the bondage of sin.

Consider these verses:

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." Romans 6:6-7

"Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:2

Prayer Focus: Pray that the believers of our congregation will be a discerning people who will claim our Christ-earned freedom and live in it to the glory of His name.

Today's question for God: God, what financial sacrifice do YOU want me to make for the work of the kingdom in our church or for Ohio Christian University?

Day Thirty-Nine

Why Pray?

"...The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

James 5:16

Can prayer really make a difference? Can my prayers actually change things? Is it possible for the will of God to be thwarted because I don't pray? These are legitimate questions. The answers you give them reflect the very foundation of your relationship with the Lord. On one hand, if God is Sovereign, He's going to do everything the way He wants, so why pray? On the other hand, if He is waiting on my prayers to execute His will, then I had better get serious about praying very quickly. How do His Sovereignty and my prayers go together?

God uses prayer to make the impossible, possible and the ordinary, extraordinary. Prayers make our efforts effective and help us to define God's will more clearly. C.H. Spurgeon said, "Whenever God determines to do a great work, He first sets His people to pray." Faithful praying releases the Holy Spirit to act and allows us to see God in His full glory.

Someone once said, "God does things when we pray that He does not do when we do not pray." May today's devotional be an inspiration for you to seek the Lord in prayer. Look up prayer in your Bible's concordance. Then read and study those verses it gives you. It will help you become endeared to prayer and to realize just how vital prayer is.

Prayer Focus: Thank God for hearing all the prayers that have been lifted up on our church's behalf. Thank Him for answering them. Pray that God's people here will pray more than ever before and that everything we do as a church will be bathed in prayer.

Today's question for God: God, what have I put off doing, that I must do?

Day Forty

He Is Faithful

"Your mercies are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:23

God has given our church a vision for the future. As we have explored forty days of prayer and fasting in pursuit of this dream, we have found Him to be a faithful promise keeper. Today's devotional is dedicated to praising the Lord for this aspect of His character.

Prayer Focus: Praise Him using this wonderful old hymn:

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

(Text by Thomas O. Chisholm. Music by William M. Runyan)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Chorus

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and spring-time and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Repeat Chorus

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Repeat Chorus

Today's question: Jesus, when YOU died for me, what did YOU know that I could become for YOU?
Help me experience all that You have planned for me!

Rev. Don Seymour