

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING

Welcome to a journey that will not only help you finish strong in 2021 but, more importantly, change the trajectory of your life. Please know this, there are tangible rewards when we intentionally pursue God. Perhaps the greatest one of these is an ever-growing awareness of His presence.

"Come close to God, and God will come close to you."
James 4:8

In these next 21 days, we will draw close to Him by prayer and fasting. Please don't allow the word "fasting" to throw you off. Fasting is a decision to take your eyes off of the things of this world to focus more completely on God. Fasting is about wanting a deeper relationship with God. Check out our "Guide to Fasting" at www.christplace.church/pray.

Begin each day reading a devotional written by one of our pastors, followed by a time dedicated to prayer. Each day remind yourself of your purpose. Our longing is to know Him. We echo the Psalmist: *"As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God."*
Psalms 42:1

These next few weeks together are going to be life-giving. Let's do this!

Rick Lorimer



Lead Pastor

Day 1 – August 9, 2021

Scripture: Psalms 84: 1-12

Devotional written by Pastor Rick Lorimer

"Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage." Psalm 84:4-5

Some theologians believe this Psalm was written for pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. Others see this being written by those returning from exile. Either way, it contains great anticipation and hope for being in God's presence. It captures our heart's prayer to be in God's presence.

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God." Psalm 84:1-2

God's worst is better than the devil's best. Check out verse 10:

"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness." Psalm 84:10

"Even a glimpse at the love of God is better than ages spent in the pleasures of sense." (Charles Spurgeon) It's in God's presence that our perspective on life is realigned. It's in His presence that our joy is restored. It's in His presence that our soul is replenished. It's in His presence where we find safety and peace. It's in His presence that we are empowered to wade boldly against the current of culture and our past.

Please take a few minutes to read through the whole Psalm (verses 1-12) and go slow while choosing to personalize it for yourself and your pilgrimage.

PRAYER: Lord, as we begin our pilgrimage over these next 21 Days, deepen our affection for your presence and restore our longing for the things of God.

Day 2 - August 10, 2021

Scripture: Psalms 16:11

Devotional written by Pastor Ashley Yeackley

"You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Psalms 16:11

Confession: in my early years of faith, my natural thought process was to believe that God's best for me was to deny myself of every good and enjoyable thing and live in a hole until I finally made it to Heaven to see Him face to face. In my mind, this was for His glory.

Thankfully, as I have grown in my understanding of God's character, I have learned that it is not His desire for me to be miserable but joyful with abundance. God's desire is for us to have a relationship with Him and to receive the good things He has prepared for us. He is a God who kindly makes Himself known to us and leads us down a path that leads to life. Life with Him is a life of abundant joy.-I'm thankful for a Creator who wants to know us and for us to know Him. Daily, He wants to reveal Himself and lead us down a path that allows us to experience all that He has for us. Wherever you find yourself today, please know that God wants to walk with you and make your path known. Let's posture ourselves in a way that we are ready and expectant to let God make Himself and His plans known to us today. Ask yourself these questions: *Do I trust God's leading in my life? Am I seeking His presence in a way that leads to the fullness of His joy? Are my eyes fixed on eternity with delight and anticipation of what's to come?*

PRAYER: Lord, thank you that you are a present God who wants the best for me. Please help me to invite you into, and trust your leading in, all that I do. In your goodness, walk with me as you lead me on a path of abundant life. In your generosity, grant me the joy of your presence as you walk with me. In your grace, please give me holy anticipation at the thought of the eternal paradise you have prepared for me. Amen.

Day 3 - August 11, 2021

Scripture: Psalms 37:4

Devotional written by Pastor Bruce Riddle

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."
Psalms 37:4

The greatest delight that any Christ-follower can encounter is found in their relationship with Jesus. It is greater than the "things" we do for Him, greater than the "things" He does for us, greater than our accomplishments, and greater than our failures. It's even greater than our love for our kids and spouse. Just Him. Just Jesus! The Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End! His light and life and majesty, being in awe of who He is, not just what He does or has done.

In 2007, the Lord asked me a question that kind of leveled me. He spoke to me about His heart for Lincoln, its youth, and how we would be a part of it. It was exciting to have God begin revealing this to me, that this was on His heart. Ever since we have been praying for His will to be done, and after some time, He asked, *"Bruce, if I never did anything I've shown you, would I still be enough for you?"* Wow! That leveled me. What was He asking? He wanted to know if He was still and would still be my greatest delight. More than what He would be doing but just Him being who He is!

When we "delight" in Him and have that kind of centering, we will find our greatest pleasure in Him, and we will find our greatest passion for Him! As a result, He begins to change things in our lives. He changes our desires, goals, and values. And He brings those things into what I call "alignment," with His desires, goals, and values. We begin to love what He loves! We start to care about the cares of God. His heart becomes our heart.

The fruit of that alignment with Him is that God grants us the desires in our hearts because they're His desires that have grown in us.

PRAYER: Lord, may my delight be in You and You only! May Your desires and passions become mine so that *"in you, I live and move and have my being...."* Acts 17:28. Help me to see as You see. Help me to love as You love! Help me to care as You care. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 4 - August 12, 2021

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

Devotional written by Pastor Johnathan Reynolds

"We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments." 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

I believe one of the most significant traps the enemy of our soul sets for us is in the area of fighting battles. We are humans, and we see through our human lens. Yet, the "Warfare" or primary source of conflict we will face in this life will not be other people but against spiritual forces of evil.

With this in mind, our physical weapons, such as our strength, aptitude, charisma, or any other human strength we try to rely on, will fall short. The only way to this spiritual battle is through spiritual means. The first place to start the fight against the enemy of our soul is on our knees, communicating with the One that created it all. We will lose this spiritual war if we try to fight it with our means, but there is no losing when we take it to our heavenly Father.

When you pray in this spiritual battle;

- Pray for a commitment to seek the truth of God's Word.
- Pray for a commitment to live by this truth.
- Pray for a commitment to boldly proclaim this truth to help others fight these spiritual battles.

By no means is this an exhaustive list, but it will be a great start to fighting the battles we will face as a Christ-follower.

PRAYER: Father, draw us near to You and the truth from Your Word so we won't walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Lead us into a deeper walk with You and help us to realize that we will win any battle we face if we are grounded in you! In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 5 - August 13, 2021

Scripture: Nehemiah 1:3-4

Devotional written by Pastor Paul Welch

Sometimes things don't go as we expect (surprising, right?). It's incredible what strong emotions can accompany unmet expectations. We can handle most of those situations with emotional maturity, perspective, healthy processing, and good friends. There are, however, other instances that seem to "hit harder." Our marriage, kids, spiritual battles, deep hurts, and strong convictions are examples of situations that bring emotions out in full force. Nehemiah found himself in one of those situations in chapter 1 verses 3 and 4:

"The said to me, 'Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.' When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days, I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of Heaven."

At this point, both Israel and Judah were in captivity. Almost 40 years earlier, a small group of Jews could go back to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Then a second group went back to continue the progress. Here is where we find Nehemiah. Hope was strong, progress was being made, but it seemed to take longer than expected, and the Jewish people in Jerusalem had begun to experience discouragement and disappointment. You've been there. The spiritual growth God has done in you is taking longer and is more complicated than you may have expected. You think you should be further along than you are. Discouragement sets in, and you feel the report that Nehemiah heard, "*They are in great trouble and disgrace.*" Things look rough; the vigor you started with seems to have diminished, and much more needs to be done. Maybe you've even "*sat down and wept*" as Nehemiah did.

What do we do when this happens? Let's look back at Nehemiah's response, "*When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days, I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of Heaven.*"

The first thing he did was express his feelings. It's okay to feel those emotions, but our feelings were not meant to lead us. The second thing he did was fasted and prayed. He didn't stay with his feelings but moved to habits that drew him to the God of Heaven. If you find yourself in a situation like this, allow yourself to feel, then lead yourself with fasting and prayer to hear from the Father. God would later use Nehemiah to direct the third return to build the walls of Jerusalem. Sometimes things don't go as we expected, but that doesn't mean all is lost. Use this time of fasting and prayer to reposition yourself to hear from the God in Heaven.

Prayer: God, I release to you my expectations, disappointments, and discouragements. I know that you are always at work, even when I don't see it. Lord, help me to hear your voice. Amen.

Day 6 - August 14, 2021

Scripture: Matthew 4:2

Devotional written by Pastor Lance Riley

"After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry." Matthew 4:2

This month, my son, Sullivan, will officially be a first grader! It is a significant change from kindergarten and an even bigger change from pre-school. While he is excited for this new season of life, it is also a little scary. It's a new classroom, a new teacher, and perhaps some friends have moved away. There are going to be a lot of unknowns to navigate.

That's the thing about new seasons, they are often full of opportunity and excitement, but uncertainty also comes with changing seasons. This is why fasting is so necessary during seasons of change. As we look through scripture, we often see that new seasons of God's favor were preceded by fasting.

In Matthew 4, Jesus spent time fasting in the wilderness before His earthly ministry, which had an impact that is still felt today. It was out of a time of fasting that He began to preach, "*Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven has come near.*"

Perhaps you are stepping into a season of great expectation, or maybe it's a season of massive uncertainty. Either way, fasting is a spiritual discipline that the Lord uses to bring clarity, confidence, and a fresh anointing of power for the new seasons of life.

PRAYER: Lord, I ask that your voice would be the loudest in our ears during this time of fasting. Whatever lies ahead, we trust that you will equip, empower, and anoint us to lead through this time. I am grateful that just as the seasons of life are faithful to change, you are faithful to your Word. Amen.

Day 7 - August 15, 2021

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:10

Devotional written by Pastor Danette Matty

"And the LORD came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel! And Samuel replied, "Speak, your servant is listening."

Before the age of electricity and modern refrigeration, people used icehouses to preserve their food. Icehouses were either partly underground or were thick-walled structures with no windows and a tightly fitted door. In winter, large ice blocks were cut from frozen streams and lakes, hauled to the icehouses, and covered with sawdust.

While working in an icehouse, one man lost a valuable watch. He and his fellow workers searched long and hard for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn't find it. A small boy heard about the watch and slipped into the icehouse over the noon hour and, within moments, came out with the watch in hand.

Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. The boy simply said, "I closed the door, lay down, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

Have you positioned yourself to hear God's voice? (Psalm 46:10)

Young Samuel lived with and assisted the priest, Eli. One night, after Eli went to bed, Samuel heard his name. He went to Eli to see what he needed, but Eli said what a parent or guardian might say if the child in their care had a dream and sleep-walked into the room: "I didn't call you...go back to bed." This happened three times, and finally, Eli realized the LORD was speaking to Samuel.

Eli didn't tell this youngster, "You're too young to hear from God," or "Tell God whatever He wants to say to you, He can tell me since I'm a leader." He instructed Samuel to be prepared for this God-encounter with a ready response: "Speak, your servant is listening."

Two other remarkable observations:

1. God wants to speak to us (Isaiah 30:21, John 16:13).
2. God does not show favoritism (Romans 12:6). The age of the listener doesn't limit the voice of God.

Decide today you will position yourself to hear God. Be prepared for your God-encounter with a ready response: "Speak, your servant is listening."

PRAYER: God, thank You that You listen and speak to anyone whose heart is open to You. Help me to be on a continual journey of openness to Your Holy Spirit. Help me position myself daily to hear Your voice and have a ready response to listening and obeying Your lead.

Day 8 - August 16, 2021

Scripture: Psalms 27:8

Devotional written by Pastor Jeremy Kuehn

"My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming."

Fear of missing out, or FOMO as it is called, is a real phenomenon. But the truth of the matter is that for all the times we felt as if we have missed out, whether it be by someone's intentional neglect of invitation or our self-assigned hopes and dreams, loneliness is a powerful feeling. During a season of intense loneliness, one of my mentors found out just how burdening it could be. They had begun their first semester at college only to find themselves spending more time alone in the dorm than out with friends. Their life expectations were not measuring up; the invitation to a vibrant college experience was not realized. However, they began to pray in those moments and received the truth that we can always choose to make our loneliness into aloneness with God. The fact is the invitation to be with God has been extended, but we often forget about it.

King David faces an adversary in this verse, and we don't know exactly what it is. I want to point out in times of adversity, we have many invitations from which to choose. The invitation of offense, revenge, rage, or the insidious call to ask everyone we know to pray about it with us. Not that prayer is the issue but the act of spreading the adversity beyond spiritual breakthrough to outright gossip. Of all the invitations in David's life at that moment, he chose the invitation to be in the presence of God.

In the text we, read God's request, *"Come and talk with me,"* made to David's heart, who responds, *"Lord, I am coming."* However, the verb "come" is not singular. It is a plural request for all of God's people. The response to the invitation is the responsibility of the individual. Simply put, it is each person's choice to accept or decline the call of God to "come and talk." During these 21 days, the plural invitation from God is open to the entire Christ Place family. But the response for every member will be an intensely personal pursuit.

When faced with any situation in life, remember God's call to His people, *"Come and talk with me,"* and in your heart and with your actions, choose to pursue the presence of God by living, *"Lord, I am coming."*

Prayer: God, help me to hear you speak to my heart as David heard you. Help me be sensitive to your leading and help me discern you above all the things of this world. Thank you, God, for accepting me and calling me to be with you as I go about my day. God, today my heart responds, *"Lord, I am coming."* In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 9 - August 17, 2021

Scripture: Genesis 25:21-22

Devotional written by Pastor Rich Justus

"Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So, she went to inquire of the LORD."

It is important to note that Isaac wasn't praying for something that his wife Rebekah didn't want. He wasn't praying for something that God didn't want. The scriptures tell us that God spoke to Isaac's Father Abraham in a vision telling him that he would have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. Isaac's mother was childless until she was in her 90's and then she had Isaac. That was a miracle, but it wasn't the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham for thousands of descendants.

I am sure Isaac and Rebekah had talked about God's promise to Abraham before they got married. There had to be excitement knowing that you are going to be used by God to fulfill His promise. But one problem - it wasn't happening. Have you ever wondered why things aren't happening in your preferred timeline? I bet Isaac and Rebekah were discouraged, maybe wondering what they might have done wrong, perhaps even felt like giving up. We have all been there at one point or another in our lives, haven't we? Knowing the promise, Isaac asked God to make good on His promise and give them a baby. The Lord answered, and Rebekah became pregnant, not with one but two babies. Everyone is happy now, so it's the end of the story, right? No, there is more to the story.

The scriptures say the babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So, she went to inquire of the Lord. Rebekah got what she wanted and then complained about it!? Before we judge Rebekah, let's look at our own lives. Have you prayed and prayed for the Lord to bless you with a spouse, baby, job, internship, college class, puppy, or any number of things, and then wondered what you were thinking when things got tough? When it wasn't what you thought it would be. Rebekah did the right thing. She inquired of the Lord. It didn't say she complained to her husband. It didn't say that she yelled at the Lord and wanted to quit. She went to inquire (ask) the Lord. We can learn a lot from Rebekah. She didn't give in to the feeling of hopelessness she asked the Lord. She kept her faith strong and found a purpose that empowered her to keep moving forward. When things seem overwhelming and hopeless, we would be wise to follow Rebekah's lead and not let it harm our relationship with the Lord but let it build our relationship with the Lord and, in the process, our faith.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you that you are faithful. Would you please show me the promises you have made to me in Your Word and give me faith to expect them to be true? Allow me to recognize Your hand on my life today, so I may thank You for all You do. Amen.

Day 10 - August 18, 2021

Scripture: Revelation 3:7

Devotional written by Pastor Steven Pettit

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. This is the message from the One who is holy and true, the One who has the key of David. What He opens, no one can close; and what He closes, no one can open...."

Following God creates opposition. Jesus warned us that the world would hate us if we followed Him. Life in Christ isn't always going to lead to comfort and prosperity. This life we chose is a difficult road to travel. The church in Philadelphia was experiencing great hardship from those around them. Satan was strongly opposing the church, and it may have felt overwhelming, but God reassured them of His faithfulness. The enemy could not close the door to stop His purpose from coming to pass no more than they could open another door that would bring more destruction. God had laid out the pathway and was on His way to rescue His people, and nothing was going to stop Him from doing so. Those God was addressing here were living according to His purpose and not their own, which will always create significant opposition. Romans 8:28 says,

"And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."

That last phrase is crucial. It describes how things will work out according to His purpose, not ours, which means we must live out His purpose for our life rather than our own because if we desire our own purpose, we will likely end up frustrated, discouraged, and full of doubt when things don't go our way. But what is His purpose? The next verse tells us.

"For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." (Romans 8:29)

His purpose for our lives is to bring us into the image of His Son, which is the image of God, and wasn't that how humankind was originally created? Yes! God is bringing us to Himself, purifying and shaping us every day, so even in hard times where it feels like doors are closing and there's no way out, know that God is with you and is accomplishing a great work in you, and through you, and the enemy can't stop it!

God loves you, and if you feel like He's abandoned you, know that He hasn't. Even if you can't feel Him, He's there. The Scriptures declare that He will never leave nor forsake you. He's always working for your good, but it may not be the good you would describe, and it's time we humble ourselves under God and live according to His purpose. Get before God, seek His face, and let Him speak over your life today as you choose to live for Him and not yourself.

PRAYER: God, I'm thankful that You have not left me at any moment. Today, I exalt your truth over my circumstances, believing that You have a plan that is greater than anything I could ever imagine. Guide me today in Your purpose for my life, that I may be an even more accurate representation of Your Son, Jesus, so that all may see that when I go through the hard times, that I am different, and that You in me is what makes me different. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 11 - August 19, 2021

Scripture: Isaiah 43:19

Devotional written by Pastor Ryan Martinez

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

Many people have grown up seeing God move one particular way or speaking one specific way. Many were taught that God only moves a handful of ways, and anything outside of those ways "IS NOT GOD." Many Christ-followers believe God is predictable in His methods. I have learned that God is not predictable. He's highly unpredictable. Some would push back and say, "But the Bible says that He is 'the same, yesterday, today, and forever.'" We cannot conflate God's character with His methods of operation. I'm personally convicted of this when I think of Isaiah 43:19.

This verse is powerful, first of all, because God says, "*I'm doing a new thing!*" God tells us in His own words that He doesn't always operate the same way. We are the ones that put Him in a box. We are looking for the same old methods, looking for God to move the same old ways. But He doesn't want to move the same old ways. He wants to remain unpredictable because when we start thinking God is predictable, that's when our faith begins to stagnate. God loves to keep it fresh. God loves to keep His people on their toes!

Second of all, God says, "*I am making a way in the wilderness and... wasteland.*" The wilderness is a locale for intense experiences—of stark need for food and water, a place of insufferable isolation, and a setting of great danger. Nobody wants to be in the wilderness. Wastelands are pretty similar. A wasteland is an unusable area of land that has become barren or overgrown. Nobody wants to be anywhere near wastelands. But in this verse, God is saying, "THE PLACE THAT NOBODY WANTS TO GO... THE PLACE THAT NOBODY THINKS CAN BE USED, I'M GOING TO USE IT. I'M GOING TO DO MY THING RIGHT WHERE NOBODY EXPECTS IT." But we convince ourselves that it can't possibly be true! And we refuse to see God moving because it's not what we expect. If we are going to experience the moves of God, we have to be willing to look in places we would never expect.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You call me by name. I am Yours. You never promised a world without trouble, but you promised to be with me in my troubles. We can take courage because you have given us hope in every situation. When my life feels like a desert, and I thirst for something new, you sustain me. When I desire something more, you show me completeness in you. Thank you for your presence. Thank you for never leaving me or forsaking me. Thank you for doing a new thing for me.

Day 12 - August 20, 2021

Scripture: Psalms 27:1-8

Devotional written by Pastor Cle Mangram

"The Lord is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble? When evil people come to devour me, when my enemies and foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident. The one thing I ask of the Lord—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in His Temple. For He will conceal me there when troubles come; He will hide me in His sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock. Then I will hold my head high above my enemies who surround me. At His sanctuary, I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy, singing and praising the Lord with music. Hear me as I pray, O Lord. Be merciful and answer me! My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming."

I'm Good As Long As...

"As long as we're okay, then everything will be okay." She spoke these words to remind us that our relationship would be the key to guiding us through the unexpected challenges that we would inevitably encounter. It serves as an assurance of the strength of our connection to weather the unimaginable and a reminder to ensure we maintain a healthy connection. My wife and I have only been married for a few years. We have realized that what's going on between us has ramifications on how we handle what's going on around us. When we're off as husband and wife, our ability to meet the challenges of raising a family and navigating the complexities of leading in ministry is compromised. When we are good, then our ability to meet those same challenges is strengthened.

In Psalm 27, it's clear that David has experienced some significant, overwhelming, and life-threatening opposition from his enemies. Yet, as he acknowledges the abundant evidence that he should be terrified, he resolves to trust in God. His concern is not for safety; instead, he dwells in the presence of the Lord. God's presence brings all the confidence he needs.

What would your life look like if you could walk through every trying moment with confidence, knowing that everything will be okay because God is with you? When you are navigating the difficult, don't look for a way out. Go to God for a way through. He is the way, the truth, and the light. He longs for you to experience the safety of His presence.

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for the promise of your presence. Help me to be more aware of it as I navigate today's challenges.

Day 13 - August 21, 2021

Scripture: Daniel 10:1-14

Devotional written by Pastor Nathan Kroll

"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. At that time, I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, 'Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.' And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.'"

Have you ever prayed for something and wondered if God even heard your prayer? Or have you prayed for something over a long period, and it just never seems to change? I think of Zachariah and Elizabeth. They prayed for a child, and their prayers were heard but not answered till they were too old to have children. Well, during these 21 days, you might be praying for something specific and hoping that God hears you and answers.

Today's reading is out of Daniel 10: 1-14 and is a fascinating passage. Today, we don't often think of the spiritual world and all that is happening all around us until we encounter that spiritual world. Daniel did just that. He was fasting and praying for something he didn't fully understand but troubled him greatly. There was to be a war sometime in the future. He wanted to know what it was all about when, suddenly, a vision of a man appeared before him. He told Daniel that from the first time he prayed, God heard him and sent a messenger to deliver the message to him, but the prince of Persia delayed him for 21 days, and Michael had to come and fight to help get the news through. (That's so crazy!)

When you pray, do you think about what you spiritually put into motion? Did you know that there are opposing forces out there who want to stop what you pray for from happening? I wish, for just a moment, God would open my eyes to see what I don't think about when I pray. To know that there is a battle being waged against my prayers and that God is fighting to see them answered.

PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, open our eyes to see what you see and to know that our prayers are heard as soon as we pray them. Thank you that you are the same today as you were then, and we can trust that the battle is being won!

Day 14 - August 22, 2021

Scripture: Psalms 62:11

Devotional written by Pastor Ashley Yeackley

"One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: "Power belongs to you, God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love."

For my leadership minor in college, I took a class called "Power and Influence." It was such an interesting class as we learned about different types of power and how power (or even perceived power) influences others to respond to the desired behavior. Through David's posture in Psalms 62, we see how he has positioned God to have the authoritative power over his life.

David's response to God's power is a willingness to wait on God, an understanding that his victories come from God, and an assurance that God is his rock, salvation, and unshakeable fortress. David is surrounded by people who not only want to remove him from his position of power but remove him from this earth. Even their lies, threats, and misperceptions of his life are not enough to influence or alter David's commitment to God. They have no power over Him because David has positioned God as the ultimate power and influencer in his life, which is where He belongs.

As David so clearly points out, there are different people (and things) who will fight to have power in our lives. We have to choose who we are going to let influence our lives. Unfortunately, many of us have been hurt or negatively affected by people in positions of power. David assures us we can trust God at all times and with a whole heart (verse 8).

Today, we can choose to give God authoritative power over our lives. I am grateful for a God that chooses us and lets us choose Him because ultimately, God has power whether we give it to Him or not. In our verse of the day, David declares, "*power belongs to you, O God.*" Power, in deceitful hands, can lead to oppression and manipulation. The power of a God who IS unfailing love (verse 12) leads to reverence and awe of a holy God who chooses to love unworthy, unholy people. His power in our lives leads us to lifted hands of surrender, not because of any force or manipulation, but because He alone is worthy of our praise.

PRAAYER: Lord, today I stand in awe of Your majesty and might. Combining every perceived power on this earth is like a small puff of wind compared to who You are. Let Your power and influence be greater in my life. Today, I declare Your power over my health, finances, work, and relationships. As I choose to give You the ultimate authority over my life, help me live out the authority You have given me and influence this world with Your unfailing love. Amen.

Day 15 - August 23, 2021

Scripture: Ezra 8:21-23

Devotional written by Pastor Ryan Martinez

"There by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed that He would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. For I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to accompany us and protect us from enemies along the way. After all, we had told the king, "Our God's hand of protection is on all who worship Him, but His fierce anger rages against those who abandon Him." So, we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and He heard our prayer."

Israel was in exile, but they were given a mission: Rebuild the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem and end the disgrace of Israel. So, a group of Israelite volunteers left exile in Babylon to return to a Jerusalem left in ruins. Many people did not want the Israelites in the land, let alone rebuilding the Temple of the Lord. But this specific group of Israelite volunteers was bound and determined to obey the command they had been given. Ezra, a scribe that was well versed in scripture, was leading the charge, but he knew they couldn't accomplish this mission on their own. So, what did he do? He didn't run, hide, or deceive. He ordered everyone with him to pray. But not just pray. Fast and pray. Why would he declare a corporate fast? What good does fasting do? What is the purpose of fasting? These are all valid questions and questions you may be asking right about now.

Although the Bible never gives a direct command to fast, examples of fasting appear in both the Old and New Testaments. One of the most telling passages in which fasting is mentioned is Matthew 6:16, where Jesus is teaching His disciples the basic principles of godly living. When speaking on fasting, He begins with, "When you fast," not "If you fast." Jesus' words imply that fasting should be a regular practice in the lives of His followers. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian life. Such customs have only one purpose — to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done." Ezra and his band of Israelite volunteers needed to be ready to accomplish the mission given to them. So, they turned to the only One who could help them, and they pleaded for His protection and deliverance. Where do you turn when you need help? Do you turn to the One who can help you? Or do you try to make things happen in your power? Are you ready and cheerful to accomplish the things which God would have you do?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, today, we recognize that apart from You, we can accomplish very little. I know that I can accomplish the mission you've given me, but I know it will go so much better with you lifting me and guiding me through it. I know I can do all things through You, so I come to You to ask for strength and guidance.

Day 16 - August 24, 2021

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

Devotional written by Pastor Danette Matty

"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

In Romans 14, the apostle Paul gives us guidelines for living as transformed people in our culture. Because God is good and His plans for us are good, we can confidently sacrifice all we have to Him. It's not about good behavior as much as being transformed into the image and character of our good God.

I once mentioned to family members that I'd been taking a break from social media. My niece quipped, using the language of addiction recovery, "Oh yeah, I've been three years clean!" I laughed at her comeback, but it got me thinking about the addictive nature of media. I'm not anti-media. But I have to admit, over the years, whenever I've had the opportunity, such as this *21 Days of Prayer and Fasting*, to "fast" social media, I've never regretted it or even missed it. It allowed me to clear some headspace and put time and energy into activities and friendships in real life!

Having ingested pornography as a teen and young adult, I knew my eyes, mind, and spirit needed a "short leash" with my media choices. I needed to be extra careful with what I allowed my eyes to watch. One thing that helped me was reading parent reviews before watching a recommended movie. It was surprising how I could tell from the review what would feed the dark, undisciplined, and unhealthy side of my nature. A little too much caffeine in my mental coffee! That's not an excuse to judge friends but rather a practical way to take responsibility for personal purity.

In many ways, followers of Jesus in the entertainment industry have tried to redeem media, and I think that's awesome. We don't have to be afraid of media/social media, but because of its interactive nature and influence, guardrails can be our friends!

What about you and me? How can we allow the Holy Spirit to redeem our media engagement during this fast? Is there one form of media you can fast for a time? How will giving it up temporarily impact your thought life and relationship with Jesus? How does giving our body and mind to God translate into worshipping Him?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for showing us what a "living sacrifice" is. You gave Your body to God for the sake of sinners like me. Help me to follow your example in how I give up the world's ways and customs to let You transform me into a new person by changing the way I think. If that means giving up certain forms of media for a while, give me the grit and grace to do so. And in doing so, I want to learn to know Your good and pleasing and perfect will for me. Amen.

Day 17 - August 25, 2021

Scripture: Thessalonians 5:16-18

Devotional written by Pastor Paul Welch

"Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."

When I was younger, I played football. Youth football was a little intimidating when I first started because of the playbook. We were supposed to memorize the plays, including the numbering scheme of each player, the passing tree, and the order to call the play. Needless to say, I didn't get every play right in practice at my running back position. When that happened, it wasn't uncommon for the coach to come over, grab my face mask, look me in the eyes and simplify the play for me by saying, "get the handoff and run around the right side." That was so helpful - I wonder why we didn't just call the plays that way.

I still benefit from this kind of simplification in my life today. I can get easily distracted, and I don't always remember my responsibilities for each "play." This is why I appreciate the writings by the apostle Paul. I find his straightforward approach to communicating quite helpful and refreshing.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, I see Paul in a coaching role. He's simplifying the play in a direct, easy-to-remember way, and he uses pretty strong words to do it. "*Always be joyful*" is not the same as *always feel happy*. Why choose discouragement, disappointment, jealousy, or fear when we can choose joy? Joy is still a choice in the toughest of circumstances. If we are 'in Christ,' abundant joy is a constant, and John 16:22 says, "*then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy.*" Decide to "*always be joyful*" no matter what today brings.

Paul goes on to say, "*Never stop praying.*" We can't spend all our time with words of prayer on our lips, but it is possible to spend all our days in a spirit of prayer. We realize the presence of His Holy Spirit is with us always, and we understand our constant need to submit ourselves to Him throughout the day. If we live with this mindset, prayer becomes more natural in our daily living.

Verse 18 reminds us to "*Be thankful in all circumstances.*" Even our most difficult moments are opportunities to learn and put our trust in God. Many life lessons come during hard times, so instead of being frustrated at why bad things happen, why not exercise our faith and choose to be thankful for the valuable lessons learned and the presence of our omnipotent God.

After all, Paul coaches us, "*this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*" Thanks, coach, I get it. Now I can run the play.

PRAYER: "Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, help me to hear Your voice clearly to stay focused on what You have me to. I commit to keeping myself positioned to hear from You in prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Day 18 - August 26, 2021

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-17

Devotional written by Pastor Bruce Riddle

We start with a warning to "*be very careful, then how you live.*" Which is always wise, right?! But back up just a few verses, and we'll see why this is said. In verses 8-12, Paul reminds the church at Ephesus that they "*were once darkness, but now are children of the light*" to live as children of light. He says in verse 10, "*And find out what pleases the Lord.*" Wow! How simple and yet how profound. You just need to find what pleases the Lord and then do it!

It's from this admonition then that he makes the statement in verse 15, "*Be very careful, then how you live.*" So, he reminds those in Ephesus where they came from and where they are now. And the implication is, stay where you are now- in the light. Live wisely, not unwisely. In reality, we need this challenge, too, right?

It's so easy at times to revert to unwise living. We are making decisions apart from the acknowledgment and wisdom of God. We follow cultural trends and expressions when we, as followers of Jesus, are called (commissioned) to be careful for the days we live in are evil.

If we're living wisely, we'll capture and make the most of every opportunity to reflect the light and life of Jesus whenever and wherever. Unwise living squanders the little time we have on this planet that can be used for the Kingdom of God!

In verse 17, "*So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*" A fool knows what to do; they just don't do it. And the implication is, don't just understand it, but live wisely so that you can do the Lord's will.

PRAYER: Lord, we live in evil days. Help us, we pray, to live wisely, redeeming the time we have to honor You. Would you please help us to let Your light shine through us into this dark world? We ask for Your grace and strength to make the most of the opportunities you give us. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 19 - August 27, 2021

Scripture: Matthew 17:20

Devotional written by Pastor Rich Justus

"He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

The He in this verse is Jesus Himself. Jesus answered the Disciples when they asked why their attempts to free a boy from a demon that had taken over him had failed, but the demon submitted to Jesus and left the boy when He commanded. We can all relate to the disciples, can't we? Have you ever looked at someone successful at something that you had a hard time with and said, "How did you do that? It didn't work when I tried that"? Have you ever done the same thing someone else did but got a different outcome? I'm sure the Disciples were hoping for Jesus to answer with something easier to digest. Something like "the timing was different," or "you loosened that demon's grip on the boy for me." But Jesus answered with truth in love. People grow when you answer them with truth in love, and Jesus was preparing the Disciples to carry on the ministry after He was gone.

When the Disciples heard, *"Because you have so little faith,"* they had to be thinking, "Are you kidding me? We gave up everything we had to follow you in faith, Jesus!" Or maybe they didn't let pride well up in them at all to stifle the truth Jesus was sharing, and they heard Jesus tell them that if they had faith, they could do anything. It is easy to discount the truth in love that we receive from someone when we are embarrassed, and our egos are hurt. They knew Jesus loved them and wanted to equip and empower them. We can trust Jesus too!

Jesus is pointing out that the size of our faith isn't the limiting factor; instead, the faith put in is what matters. A little faith in God can do more than any amount of faith we have in ourselves. Have you ever taken credit for things when they were going well, thinking that you had everything to do with its success? Your hard work and character probably did impact those things, but did it all happen because of you, or can you step back to recognize God's hand in it?

We are so blessed to have a God that wants us to succeed. A God that knows intimately. A God that empowers us to do things that are usually beyond our reach. Take courage and have faith in God, and then nothing will be impossible for you.

PRAYER: Lord, let me live in the life of faith that You offer us today. Reveal the things that I limit by my lack of faith in You, and let me see the fullness of Your grace in all I do today. Amen.

Day 20 - August 28, 2021

Scripture: Psalms 18:39

Devotional written by Pastor Steven Pettit

"For You equipped me with strength for the battle; You made those who rise against me sink under me."

The Scriptures make it very clear that God is for us. David wrote this Psalm to recount the faithfulness of God. There's no doubt that God was with David throughout his life. Even before David fought Goliath, God was with him, helping him protect the sheep from predators. But here, David is writing this from his palace while his kingdom is the most powerful one. Imagine being David, starting as a shepherd, then slaying a champion of battle, causing the entire army of Israel to rise and defeat the Philistines. Then, all David ever did was love people and acted faithfully towards Saul, the king at that time. And to what did that lead? Saul trying to have him killed, resulting in David being on the run for years. Those years of being on the run would be a great test and development of character for David, as they were challenging times.

In difficult times it can be hard to see what God is doing in our lives. Some question themselves saying, "Maybe I screwed up. Maybe I didn't hear from God, and I'm way off-track from where God wants me." Regardless of what comes, we must learn to silence those thoughts and allow the truth to be the guide. It's in the hard times that we find out what is truly inside of us. Is the Word of God genuinely hidden in our hearts, or have we made it a book of principles we've memorized but never put into practice?

Do you believe God is for you, and that He has prepared you for battle, and that the battle belongs to Him? Do you believe He's given victory to you already, even if you can't see it? In the first battle David was in, he spoke with faith. Look at what David says to Goliath:

"This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head." (1 Samuel 17:46)

These words came out of a boy who hadn't even reached the age of 18 yet! Not only that, but if you know the story, David didn't have a sword to cut off Goliath's head. The only sword on the field was Goliath's, and that's the sword he ends up using to do so. David had every reason, according to man's reasoning at least, to doubt victory. He had no training, no armor, no weaponry, and was told that he wouldn't stand a chance out there against him, yet David went anyways. David knew God, and for him, that was enough. Let's believe as David did!

PRAYER: Father, I thank you that you've prepared me for battle, and even if I can't see it, I will declare victory over it, for I know that You are for me, You are with me, and You are leading me to that place where victory is found. Today, I choose to follow truth over feeling, Your work in my life over my circumstances, and to walk in faith and not fear. In the mighty name of Your Son, Jesus, I pray this. Amen.

Day 21 - August 29, 2021

Scripture: James 1:17-18

Devotional written by Pastor Cle Mangram

"Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the Heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us His true Word. And we, out of all creation, became His prized possession."

Gift-giving is stressful sometimes. When a birthday, holiday, anniversary, or rite of passage ceremony is coming up, the pressure is to get that special someone special something. You want it to be something they'll love. You want to see them tear up with sentiment over how thoughtful your gift is. "How did you know?!"

As the receiver of that gift, you can appreciate it when that someone has found the perfect gift for you. It's thoughtful, sentimental, practical, or just simply helpful to you. And sometimes, there are those gifts that when they come from that certain someone, you just know it's going to be a good one.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, rose to prominent leadership in the first Christian community ever. In a time of significant hardship due to famine that led to poverty, he writes this letter to those Messianic Jews in a manner reminiscent of the wisdom literature found in proverbs. It includes many short and challenging wisdom statements. In Chapter 1, he acknowledges the trying times. Trying times can make or break us. When things get tough, it can be tempting to take shortcuts, to compromise on our values, to stop thinking about others and how our decisions affect them. James points out the tendency to assume that God presents the temptation to you as a test. You're having a hard time in your marriage, so you think that God is testing you by tempting you to have an emotional or physical affair with someone else. You're experiencing tremendous stress and pressure in your job, so you think God is testing you by tempting you with alcohol. However, James points out that God does not bring temptation to do wrong.

On the contrary, every good and perfect gift comes from Him. Even during a trial, strength, fortitude, discipline, self-control, love, patience, and kindness can come from Him. And when you're in a trial, when you're in a hard place, and you receive peace instead of anxiety, you know from whom that came. You know that as the receiver, the gift giver has given you the perfect gift. A gift that tells you He knows and sees you.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for every good and perfect gift. Please help me see them and seek them even when it's a trying time, for I know that they are from You. In Jesus' name, Amen.