

**21** PRAYER  
AND  
**FASTING**

DAYS

CLEARPOINT CHURCH



JANUARY 2-22, 2022

Dear Partners,

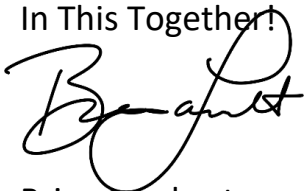
In January 2010, Clearpoint Church embarked on a *21-Day Prayer and Fasting Journey* that profoundly changed our lives. We have continued to make corporate prayer and fasting a regular practice at the beginning of each year. We invite you to come along with us in January 2022, as we seek the Lord together through prayer, fasting and personal devotion to Him.

Participating in the *21-Day Prayer and Fasting Journey* is a great way to reset your spiritual compass and experience a fresh and new commitment to God in every area of your life. To prepare and inform you for the fast, this guide will answer many questions about fasting and provides a 21-Day Calendar to follow for each day. The 21 Days begins Sunday, January 2<sup>nd</sup>. We break the fast, Sunday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>.

I believe a 21-Day commitment to Fasting and Prayer will provide a whole new experience for you in your walk with Christ and His Body.

May God continue to bless you and us as you seek Him!

In This Together!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Lambert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "L".

Brian Lambert  
Lead Pastor

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### MY FASTING NOTES

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## ALL ABOUT FASTING

As we begin this *21-Day Prayer and Fasting Journey* together, there are a few questions we must answer in order to understand fasting and why it is essential to our walk with God. These answers will also encourage us all to continue faithfully to the finish line....Day 21!

**QUESTION #1: WHAT IS FASTING? (WE DO THE DANIEL FAST.** *We recommend the following websites for more information: [Daniel-fast.com](http://Daniel-fast.com); [ultimatedanielfast.com](http://ultimatedanielfast.com))*

Fasting is setting aside a specific amount of time to go without food in order to pray. The purpose is not to starve yourself and the goal is not to lose weight. It is an intentional time of pursuing God to fill a spiritual hunger rather than eating food to fill a physical hunger. It is denying your physical desire for food in order to pray and connect with God to meet a spiritual need. It might not make a lot of sense, but it is a powerful! Jesus never commanded it, but it was certainly expected that His followers would fast and pray.

*Matthew 6:16-18 says, "when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (ESV)"*

### QUESTION #2: WHAT DOES FASTING DO?

#### 1. Fasting expresses our hunger for God

- We express to God "food is good, but you are better."
- It helps restore our focus from ourselves and the good things God places in our lives to the giver of those good things.
- God remains greater than anything and everything else in our lives.

#### 2. Fasting makes our hearts tender toward God and helps us find our "satisfaction" in Him

- John Piper once said: "God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him."
- The discipline of fasting is something that can bring us to that place of satisfaction.

#### 3. Fasting exposes the heart

- Richard Foster says: "More than any other thing, fasting reveals the things that control us."
- It reveals what is really inside.
- It can reveal to us the things that are holding us back.
- It can expose the one thing that is reinforcing that barrier between us and God.

Fasting can be extremely overwhelming. What can I eat? What can I not eat? Can I have this? Can I have that? These are questions that bombard our minds when we break from our normal eating routine. The struggle is ok. In fact, it's good as long as our motivation for staying true to the fast isn't rooted in guilt!

## WHAT FASTING DOES NOT DO

### 1. Fasting does not motivate God to love you any more than He already does.

- God says in I Peter 2:9 that we are chosen by Him and are already His treasured possession! He already loves you as much as He possibly can!

### 2. Fasting does not make God enjoy you any more or any less.

- God already enjoys you. In fact, He delights in you! In Zephaniah 3:17 God says that He already exalts over us with shouts of joy!

### 3. Fasting does not put you on a “fast track” plan to a righteousness and holiness.

- God has already made us righteous, holy, and blameless through Christ’s finished work on the Cross.
- We don’t fast to get more of God, but that we would experience, in a more profound way, the reality of God’s presence in our lives.

### 4. Fasting is not a trade-off with God for His forgiveness.

- We fast because He has already forgiven us! The Apostle Paul said our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ! (Ephesians 1:7)

### 5. Fasting is not a replacement for obedience.

- Some people fast as penance believing their fasting will somehow balance out their disobedience. But our relationship with God is not based on law, it’s based on grace....not of works, lest we become boastful and prideful and rob God of His glory. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Sometimes, when we are not walking intimately with God, the inward reality of our faith begins to fade, and we retreat to the outward forms of the faith like fasting. It never works! The bottom line is that whenever we embrace a spiritual discipline in order to get God to love us, to find satisfaction in us, or to forgive us, we have completely missed the point! As you fast, set yourself free! Don’t fast under the belief that God is going to develop a greater approval of you because of your sacrifice. Fast in freedom, with a holy desire to give more of yourself to God!

## **PRAYER**

As you prepare for the next 21 days, it can be tempting to start thinking of a laundry list of prayers you would love to see answered. Fight that temptation and keep this simple. Think about two or three things most pressing on your heart and zone in on those with God. Write these down in the space provided below and be open to hearing what God wants to show you in those areas. The breakthroughs, miracles and answers to your prayers will be by-products of drawing closer to Jesus.

When praying, make your primary goal to know Jesus and experience His presence deeper than ever before. Pray prayers of total surrender and aim to glorify God with your life. Focus first on what is right about Him, such as His goodness and His greatness. Determine to see everything else through that filter. And, make time to pray daily. Do not overcomplicate this! Just talk to God. Have that place and time where you can seek Him

every day. If you do not plan to pray, you won't. If you find it a challenge to disconnect from the busyness of your day, engaging in worship music is a great way to prepare your heart for prayer.

**During this fast, we are corporately (together as a church body) praying for:**

- 1. Freedom & Wellness:** Strongholds broken, and broken places healed
- 2. Empowerment:** Live in victory and rise to leadership
- 3. Missional Impact:** Actively engaging culture with the Gospel and ministering to those around us

**Others you are personally praying for:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## WHAT ABOUT KIDS?

### Should my children participate in the fast?

We believe it is a great idea for the **entire family** to set aside time each year to specifically and intensely focus on the most important thing in our lives, our relationship with Christ. Consider the information below as you pray and decide how your family, including your children, can participate as a collective part of the Clearpoint Church Fast.

### Why should children participate?

#### 1. To help children learn what is most important in life

Life can get very busy and if we don't purposefully slow down and set aside time to focus on strengthening our relationship with the Lord and modeling that importance for our children, they may believe other, more time-consuming things in our families' lives matter more. Be intentional about this. Set aside time to focus on what your relationship with Jesus means to you, in hopes that your devotion to Christ will become a part of your legacy for future generations. Learning the importance of Christ in our lives can serve as a firm foundation that will provide stability in your children's future.

#### 2. Self-control should be practiced.

It can be so easy to become super self-focused. We live in a society of convenience and can become frustrated if we have to wait too long for our fries at the drive thru. We can develop an attitude of expectation and of constant satisfaction if we are not careful. Our lives can be driven and consumed by our desires to get what we want. This is reflected in the pace and mindset of the culture in which we live and interact daily. Fasting can help our children learn to practice self-control, to say "no" to self, to slow down, to focus on pleasing Christ more than pleasing self. Self-control and delayed gratification are life skills that will serve our children well in their futures.

#### 3. Develop life-long disciplines

Prayer, Bible Study, listening to God, giving, and fasting are spiritual disciplines which should be an ongoing part of the lives of all believers. Our children are not going to reach their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and begin to devote themselves to these disciplines. They must be trained along the way as a part of our investment in their spiritual lives. Just as we nurture our children by providing physical food, we must nurture our children by providing spiritual food. If we want our children to have a life-long commitment to prayer, we must lead them and teach them to pray. If we want them to have a life-long commitment to read, study, and depend on the Word of God, we must read the Word to them, allow them to see us reading and valuing scripture. We should quote, teach, and equip our children with scripture and lead them to meditate upon and memorize scripture. If we want to help our children depend upon Christ for leadership throughout life, we must teach and train them to listen to the voice of God. If we want our children to have the heart of *blessors*, we must allow them to see us bless others, and encourage them to be givers. We should provide opportunities for them to give sacrificially, to bless others and to give to those in need. If we want our children to devote their life to Christ and seek to know Him more, we must model and lead our children in the spiritual discipline of fasting. Our children should know what fasting is, why we participate, and how we expect God to move as we purposefully deny ourselves to give Him more of ourselves.



## How should children participate in the fast?

As parents, pray and listen to God as you contemplate how to participate in the fast. He will speak to you! Give your children options you feel are meaningful, safe, and appropriate. Allow children some ownership in the decision they make as they consider and pray thru how they should participate in the fast. Children can begin to participate as soon as they begin to have a concept of God, as early as age 4 to 5. Celebrate every move toward developing spiritual disciplines. Lead your children in this area with loving encouragement. If they set a goal, encourage them toward it. If the goal they set was too difficult, love them and help them consider what led to missing the goal and how they can participate differently. We encourage you to resist the temptation to quit and encourage your children not to quit! Make adjustments, if necessary, but deeply ponder and consider the ramifications of quitting the fast before the corporate dates are fulfilled. Not only is the surrender to the fast meaningful to you and your family, but also the corporate devotion as a church body is “something bigger” that God calls us to be a part of as the BODY of Christ. Provide guidance but allow for choice as your children consider God’s will for their lives. It may surprise you how spiritually mature they are becoming! Below is a list of ideas and testimonies. These are only suggestions to help you begin to think about how your children can participate. Please know we are praying for each of you and your families as we embark upon this important journey of faith, together. **We would never force or coerce our children to participate but offer ideas and allow them to choose within guidelines we feel are safe and age appropriate.**

1. Very young children (4-7) can give up TV and electronics time and/or a favorite toy. When the child asks to play with the toy set aside during the fast or to watch TV, (or during the day’s normal TV/electronic time) encourage them to pray and read their Bible and remind them about their commitment choice. Our family loves *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones (it is great for children and adults!) If Bible reading time is not a practice you have yet developed as a family, this may be a great time to begin! Let your children hear and see you praying and studying God’s word. Use your participation in the fast as a time to talk to them about the food you are eating and not eating and why. Share with them the story of Daniel. This can be a great time to teach children about the sacrifices we make, and the sacrifice God made on our behalf. Keep the time positive and encouraging, your children should not feel as if they are being punished, but rather choosing to make a sacrifice for something better! I bet they will LOVE Bible time with mom and/or dad as much or more than they loved their toy, device, or TV program. Begin planting the seeds of faith early and watch with amazement as they grow and blossom!
2. Children (8-14) can give up some food or food for one day under your leadership. Our children began giving up food for a day as early as 8 years of age and have changed their involvement each year. They decided how they wanted to participate, discussed their ideas with us and prayed about their involvement leading up to the fast. For example, Saturday may be a good day to fast all food, drink juice and have a glass of milk or a protein drink before bedtime. They may choose to fast from meat, sugar, or drink only water for 21 days. They may choose to make every Saturday a juice only day. Fasting can be scary! Teaching your children early can give them amazing confidence as they obey and dedicate themselves to the development of spiritual disciplines. You may wonder if it was hard as parents to witness our young children hungry and in need of food. It was very difficult, but also helped us better understand the heart of God as we fast as adults. It helped us admire our children for their strength, devotion, and determination to develop this spiritual discipline. It made our hearts move toward our children deeper than before as we wanted to bless them for their sacrifice and encourage them in their struggle. In all of this, we learned even better how God’s heart is moved toward us as we

fast. Children need to learn coping skills to deal with disappointment, discomfort, and struggle. Fasting is a great time to develop those skills.

3. Our children began participating FULLY in the fast as early as 14. It was very difficult to see our daughter going off to school for an entire day with nothing but a bottle of juice in her backpack knowing she had PE and other very difficult tasks to complete in the day as a growing, maturing young lady. It strengthened our prayer lives as we interceded hourly on her behalf. Literally, every time I struggled with hunger or weakness, I prayed for my daughter that her pain would be manageable. The interventions of God were nothing short of miraculous as she would come home and report the PE Coach was absent on the juice only days, so she did not have to work out or that the test had been postponed when she had been too tired and too weak to study as much as she wanted the night before. We began to realize how much it pleased God when we have a heart to deny ourselves to make more of Him in our lives! This is His plan, and he miraculously applauded and encouraged our child as she did the hard work of fasting. All of our faith grew as we celebrated the “wins” together and were amazed at how much God loved on us in the midst of our very real struggles.
4. Another great way to participate is by sacrificing something we want in order to bless others we feel led to bless or others we witness in need. For example, a child might donate their allowance or birthday money to the children’s ministry, give to their favorite mission project, purchase a gift for a single mother or give a gift to someone they have a heart to bless and encourage. The key to giving must be **sacrifice**. The child should give up something of personal value to bless someone else. This is also a great area in which we can lead our children. If God leads you to give a gift to someone, share that with your children as a step of obedience in your life and teach them about your struggles, victories, and the great blessing of being a vessel of giving that God can use to bless others.

We hope these thoughts and ideas will provide guidance and encouragement as you consider your family’s involvement in the fast. We believe we have been gifted to be a part of the family of God in the household of Clearpoint Church. It is our heart that all of God’s children would participate in some level during the fast this year. If you are new to Clearpoint, young in your faith, or just afraid of fasting, know we are praying for you and encourage you to start somewhere! If you need to start with some of the ideas for children and your entire family give up technology and/or TV, then begin there. If you are more mature in your faith, go ALL in and watch God supply all your needs and meet you in your want. He is faithful and will complete the work He is beginning in you this day. If you have particular needs or if you need encouragement, feel free to call, email, Facebook message, or stop by. We are in this together and look forward with eager anticipation to the amazing work God is going to do in His family of faith!

# Fasting Calendar

## 21 Day Fasting Calendar

<i>Plan your fasting week</i>	<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
<i>Use this area of your fasting calendar to choose what days of the week you will fast and what each day will look like.</i>	<p><b>Day 1</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 3</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 4</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 5</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 6</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 7</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>
<i>This is a sample of what one variation of the Daniel Fast can look like and may include soy protein. You may also choose to exclude legumes &amp; whole grains altogether &amp; eat only fruits, vegetables &amp; water (&amp; soy protein)</i>	<p><b>Day 8</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 9</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 10</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 11</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 12</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 13</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 14</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>
<i>Some people also choose to modify their overall fasting plan to end with a special 3 day fast as indicated here. Again, these are just samples of what your fasting plan can look like.</i>	<p><b>Day 15</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 16</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 17</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 18</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 19</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 20</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 21</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>



## FASTING INFORMATION & DEVOTIONS



Fasting Info: [www.clearpointchurch.org/fast](http://www.clearpointchurch.org/fast)



Devotions: [www.clearpointchurch.org/blog](http://www.clearpointchurch.org/blog)



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@MyClearpoint

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## FASTING QUESTIONS



Phone: 281.991.9700



Email: [fasting@clearpointchurch.org](mailto:fasting@clearpointchurch.org)

# Pre-Fast Lessons

## Pre-Fast Lesson #1: You Can't Fast and Eat!

Text: II Corinthians 10:5

By Heather Lambert

*“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (II Corinthians 10:5)*

For the past 6 years, I have committed to do the 21 day fast with the people of Clearpoint. Each year has revealed new and different struggles in my heart and life and produced new and different breakthroughs. I want to tell you about the huge breakthrough I experienced fasting in the very first year. When Brian approached me about the idea of the 21 day fast, I wish I could say I embraced the idea. I did not. (That resistant spirit should have been the first clue to me that God wanted to do a major work in my life through fasting and the enemy wanted to keep his strongholds.) I remember reluctantly committing to the fast saying, “Fine, it won’t even be hard for me, I don’t struggle with food.” Well, I was eating those words before the end of the first 24 hours!

Fasting is hard! Harder than I ever imagined. It takes discipline, commitment, and mental strength. It takes constantly taking every single thought and hunger pain captive and beating it into subjection to Christ and his desire for us to develop as spiritual warriors with great strength. II Corinthians 10:5 is a scripture I held to and recited numerous times daily. It teaches, *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*

I had to admit it, I was struggling. I was afraid this just wasn’t going to work for me. My mind began to grow weaker and weaker. I justified the idea of quitting. People who fasted in Biblical times did not have the demands of current life schedules, I thought. I had lost over 20 pounds and my thoughts were starting to get very foggy. I was working over 40 hours a week, going to grad school, parenting, and fulfilling obligations. I needed my strength! In my desperation, I found myself sitting on a stool in my pantry. Reasoning with myself turned into prayer and justifying myself to God.

One of the greatest things about fasting is creating space and developing the discipline to listen to God. Creflo Dollar says, “Prayer is simply communicating with God. It is not a monologue where you’re the only one talking. It is a dialog where you’re talking to God and he’s talking back to you.” In that pantry, in my time of weakness and desperation, I had a great conversation with God. I was trying to devise a way to satisfy the letter of the law and continue the fast and to eat. I remember asking God if I put some crackers in the blender and added some water and blended them up finely, made them liquid, then would I still be keeping to the fast? (I told you I was desperate for food.) I remember the Lord clearly saying to me, “Eat. I will love you no more if you continue the fast and no less if you break the fast.” That moment, that revelation unlocked some performance-based idea of love of Christ and set me free. God loves me completely no matter my actions! His love is not dependent on my goodness, but His. Then, the Lord said, “But you can’t eat and fast.” I was instantly reminded of Matthew 6:24, ““No one can **serve two masters**, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You **cannot serve** God and money.” In my case, I could not serve God and my comfort or my food. For the first time in my walk with Christ, I wanted to serve him out of LOVE, not out of obligation or expectancy. I cried out to him for strength, left the place of temptation in the pantry and fellowshiped in my new understanding of a God who loves me, perfectly!



## Pre-Fast Lesson #2: Return to Me

Text: Joel 2:12

By Brian Lambert

*Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (Joel 2:12, NKJV)*

If we look at the kind of fasting that took place in the Old Testament, it would be easy to assume that the reason we fast is to prove our repentance to God in order to obtain His mercy. Under the Old Covenant, a fast of repentance is seen time and time again. But now, because of the complete work of Jesus on the cross, things have changed.

Fasting is not something we do to obtain favor or forgiveness. Under the New Covenant, every wrong thing we have done and will do was forgiven at the Cross, and when we accept Christ as our Savior, we get to celebrate the mercy freely given to us through our relationship with Him. Fasting is about drawing closer to God and surrendering at a deeper level.

As we walk with God, there are times that we feel far from Him or disconnected. Joel's words resonate with us even if we live in the context of grace: "Return to me with all your heart." There are times we realize that though we have chosen to follow Jesus, the flame of our love for Him has grown cold.

Your time spent in prayer each day of the fast can result in a rich and rewarding connection with the Father. No matter where you are on your journey with Jesus, you can always take a step closer to Him.

***Quotable: I believe the power of fasting as it relates to prayer is the spiritual atomic bomb that our Lord has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil and usher in a great revival and spiritual harvest around the world. – Bill Bright***

**Prayer Focus:** As we begin this time of prayer and fasting, let's turn our hearts toward God. Make a commitment to seek Him daily. Pray that your love for Christ will be increased and your passion for Him will be reignited over the next twenty- one days.

## **Pre-Fast Lesson #3: False Beliefs about Fasting**

*Text: Philippians 4:11-13; Mark 2:18-20*

*By Heather Lambert*

Two great lies can keep you from committing to begin and complete the 21 days of prayer and fasting.

### **1. It is too hard; I can't do it.**

In Philippians 4:11-13 Paul teaches about the attitude of an overcomer, he says, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Through beatings, imprisonments, and all kinds of difficulty, Paul had found contentment. Even in times of hunger he learned how to depend on the strength given by Christ. I believe we can especially learn to depend on Christ in the difficult times, including the times of hunger. It creates space for God to do a great work in you. Romans 8:35-37 teaches that we don't just have spiritual strength through Christ, but that we can do more than overcome. God intends for us to live a blessed fulfilled life as victors. The scriptures teach, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." This important passage is not teaching us that life will be easy, in fact it is teaching us to expect difficulty. However, those difficult times don't rule us, they don't steal our joy, nor do they overtake us. Fasting helps us develop and flex that faith muscle that leads us to trust the deep, abiding love of Christ. Through his love we have strength and the ability to live life as victors!

### **2. Fasting doesn't matter. God doesn't call me to fasting.**

When reading Mark 2:18-20, you can see Jesus expects his followers to fast. "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day." Two great life applications can be found from Jesus' response to the Pharisees. First, being in the presence of Christ is a celebration. The disciples had no need to fast when they were physically in the presence of the Lord. Second, Jesus understood the need to fast for strength and direction. Jesus communicated the expectation of fasting for strength and clarity. He knew his disciples would need to fast to draw from his strength when he was no longer physically present.

We have access to that same strength as we commit to fast and boldly seek the presence of the Lord.

## Pre-Fast Lesson #4: Fasting Removes Unbelief

**Text: Matthew 17:18-21**

*By Brian Lambert*

*And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.*

*<sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>20</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

*<sup>21</sup> "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:18-21, NKJV)*

When we pray and fast, we don't do so to change God or His will; instead, by praying and fasting, we are the ones being changed. Aligning ourselves with God helps us curb our doubts and fears. When we pray and fast, the thing that leaves us is our unbelief. It is when we have faith to believe that we can pray with confidence and know that "nothing will be impossible."

Ask God to strengthen your heart to fully believe Him and His Word. It is okay to acknowledge that you struggle with unbelief. That's the first step in allowing God to strengthen your faith and bring you into alignment with His plan for your life.

What do you need faith to believe God for right now? Align yourself with God's Word and will during this fast. Release your unbelief. Pray with confidence knowing "nothing will be impossible" for you.

## Pre-Fast Lesson #5: Bootcamp

Text: Matthew 6:21

By Heather Lambert

Brian and I have spent a lot of time talking about our desire to be physically fit. We have several DVD packages whose infomercials promise to give us the fit bodies we desire. We had an elliptical. We have weights and workout equipment to rival any gym. We even bought a Groupon for a boot camp a few years ago. Five days a week for six weeks at 5 am promised the result of a fit, healthy body. I will never forget how excited we were about the FIRST day of the camp. After about 10 minutes, Brian was kneeling by the fence praying he would not be sick. I thought I was going to have to call in sick to work, because I physically could not stand on my wobbly legs. But, we pushed through and went back the next day. It was not better, it was worse. We were so sick and so weak. This was killing us! We liked the idea of fit, sculpted, healthy bodies, but the truth was it was just too hard for us. We quit. We didn't decide to quit, we just skipped one day, then two, then a week, then the whole month had passed, and we had gone to boot camp 4 times, not 24. We were not transformed; we were the same. Our desire to be fit proved to be weaker than our desire for comfort.

Fasting is definitely spiritual bootcamp. It is hard, very hard. Many people will quit, many people will not even start. Our desire to be spiritually fit must be stronger than our desire for comfort *if* we want change and spiritual maturity. Jesus teaches some things in our life can only come about by the practice of prayer and fasting. Life requires great spiritual strength which comes only from a commitment to the spiritual practices of prayer and fasting. In Mark 9 the disciples tried to heal a man's son who was demon possessed. They were unable, so Jesus comes on the scene, speaking to the father:

*Jesus said to him, If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help you my unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying to him, You dumb and deaf spirit, I charge you, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; so that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said to them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. (Mark 9:23-29, AKJV)*

You can see that prayer and fasting were a commitment of Christ. They gave him spiritual strength. Our desire to be used mightily by God for His work, must be greater than our desire for food and comfort. I am convinced this spiritual discipline can unlock so many areas of our life where sin and the enemy have held us trapped. That is why it is such a struggle! The enemy wants to steal our opportunity for a breakthrough to walk in spiritual strength. I know the battle that will be waging in your mind as you consider beginning the fast and struggle to honor the commitment to stay true to it for 21 days! I believe there is a work God wants to do in your life, in the life of our church that will only come about as we commit to push through and pray and fast collectively for 21 days. We cannot quit, only God knows what great breakthrough lies on the other side of our commitment to pray and fast. This can't be about us! Someone needs us to stick with it, their very life may depend on our spiritual breakthrough, our spiritual strength and power! We can, we must do it!

# **Fasting Devotions**

## **Fasting Devotional Day One:** Sunday, January 2, 2022

Text: Matthew 6:5-6

By Brian Lambert

### **Thoughts:**

As the disciples watched and listened to Jesus, they were captivated by Him in a way they had never experienced before with another individual. He had their attention, but more importantly, He had their heart. As they experienced His teaching, In Matthew 6:5-6, Jesus said:

***"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (NKJ)***

The disciples became particularly interested in what He had to say about prayer. They could relate to the message. They had witnessed the Jewish leaders praying in the synagogues and in the public streets. The disciples observed their prideful religious practices; how their haughty, elitist attitude resulted in hollow and ineffective prayer.

Consider this: Effective and powerful prayer as opposed to hollow and ineffective prayer, is dependent on this main thing: Your Attitude.

Someone once said: "The attitude of your prayer will determine the altitude of your prayer." In other words, if you want God to hear and respond to your prayers, then you must approach him with the right attitude...one of humility and authenticity.

Attitude plays a significant role in prayer, because wrapped up in your attitude is your motive and mindset to connect, communicate, and listen for the commands and instructions of the Father. The motive of the Jewish leaders was pride. Their goal was to impress others with their many words and repetitive phrases. People were the audience of their prayers. Jesus wasn't impressed! In contrast, the attitude of the disciples was, not to impress religiously, but to be faithful relationally. They desired to live out their relationship with God faithfully; to be like Jesus, connected to the Father and obedient to Him.

### **Challenge:**

What motivates you to pray? Is it your circumstances that move you pray or is it a longing to connect with the Father and do His will? In your prayer life, are you more "religious" or more "relational," longing to be like Jesus, connected to the Father and obedient to Him.

Puritan Preacher and writer John Bunyan, best known for his book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, said it best, "*When thou prayest, rather let thy heart be without words than thy words without heart.*"

As we begin this season of prayer and fasting, let us be reminded that fasting without intentional prayer is just a diet; and it can be a painful one! As we fast, let's be committed to set aside time for focused prayer and develop a deeper heart connection with the Father.

**Fasting Devotional Day Two:** Monday, January 3, 2022

Text: Matthew 6:7-8 *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

*By Heather Lambert*

**Thoughts:**

In our humanity, we often struggle with insecurities. When we doubt our personal worth or value, performance-ism can set in. We can begin to believe our value lies in WHAT we do instead of WHO we are and WHOSE we are. Being stressed about the impression we might make when we pray can very often be traced right back to our insecurities. Dear Friend, let me reassure you today. You are loved, accepted, redeemed, chosen, blessed, adopted, forgiven, and loved. What great news! Want some even better news? These gifts have NOTHING to do with you, but EVERYTHING to do with the goodness of our Father. All my children have made mistakes, some bigger than others, yet there is NOTHING they could ever do that would cause me to stop loving them, give up on them, or not forgive them. Why? Because I love them so! Please hear those words coming from your heavenly Father, OH, how he loves YOU! When we are assured of his love, we come to Him with vulnerability, honesty, and confession, admitting our great need for Him.

**Challenge:**

Pray! Pray! Pray! Do not allow the enemy any foothold into your prayer life by accusing you that you are not a “good prayer,” that you don’t know what to say, or that God won’t hear your prayers.

The heart of humility and confession is ALWAYS accepted, comforted, and embraced by our Father God. He is waiting to hear your heart right now! Take some time to pray, cry out to Him, He is listening.

## **Fasting Devotional Day Three: Tuesday, January 4, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:9

By Evan Christopherson

### **Thoughts:**

When we think about the gifts that Jesus has given us, we think about the most important things. Namely forgiveness from our sins and the chance to have eternal life. During his life on earth, he also gave us some smaller gifts that are significant. One of the gifts that I'm thankful for is that Jesus taught us how to pray. He did this by giving us a model of prayer that we now refer to as *The Lord's Prayer*. Ultimately, it is just a model and doesn't need to be recited word for word every time we pray. In fact, Jesus prays numerous other times in the Gospels and uses other words. But having a model of prayer is a beautiful gift for us.

In Matthew 6, Jesus begins this model of prayer by saying, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." I'll be honest with you; I've never heard the word *hallowed* outside of this passage. Hopefully, I'm not the only one who grew up in church reciting the Lord's Prayer acting like I knew what the word meant. It turns out that in the original Greek language, the word essentially means sanctify. Sanctification is a fancy word but at its core it just means the process of being made holy. So, when Jesus prays, "Hallowed by your name," he's essentially saying, "Make your name holy."

That brings us to another question. What does it mean to be holy? Again, it's actually not complicated. It just means "Set apart." Jesus then, is praying that the Father would set his name apart. This is significant for a couple of reasons.

First, names are significant. A person's name matters today, but in the first century, names were descriptive of the person. Hence, this is why God has changed names from time to time. While Jesus doesn't refer to the Father by a specific name here, he makes it clear that God's name is holy, which means that God is holy.

With this in mind, we must remember that Jesus is modeling how we should pray. He begins with entering prayer with acknowledgement that God is holy. We must enter prayer with an understanding that we are praying to one who is truly holy and perfect in every way. A conversation with someone who is holy must be done with an attitude of reverence. I think this is why Jesus begins his prayer with this statement. He is recognizing and modeling how to approach a holy God with reverence for who he is.

Lastly, as we pray to a God who is holy, it's a reminder to ourselves that we are to live a holy life that advertises to the rest of the world that we serve a holy God. God's expectation for his people to be holy is seen all throughout scripture. Leviticus 19:2, Leviticus 20:7, Leviticus 20:26, Leviticus 21:8, Exodus 19:6, 1 Peter 1:16, and 1 Thessalonians 4:7 all call God's people to be holy. In Matthew 5, Jesus tells his listeners to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect.

Our goal in this life is to bring glory to God. We can do that by knowing Him and making Him known. We must recognize that God is truly holy, and we must strive to be holy in the same way. Being holy requires a great deal of sacrifice because it means that we cannot live like the rest of the world. We are called to be a holy nation that is set apart from the way in which the rest of the world lives.

### **Challenge:**

As you continue this fast and deny yourself desirable foods, take it a step further and deny yourself desirable sins. As you say no to individual sins, you will begin to overcome all sin in your life. And when this happens, you will begin to be a person who is set apart. A person who is holy.



**Fasting Devotional Day Four:** Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Text: Matthew 6:10 *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."*

By Maria Valdivia

**Thoughts:**

To pray "thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" is a very powerful way of praying. But what does "kingdom" mean? What does "thy will" mean? Why does Jesus instruct us to pray like this? A kingdom is a place where a king rules with authority. Jesus instructs us to pray for God to reign as king here on Earth as in Heaven. God reigns in heaven, but does he reign on earth now? Since the beginning of Earth's creation, the enemy deceived Adam & Eve out of God's Kingdom. They chose to disobey God and disregard God's instruction. In a Kingdom, the inhabitants understand the sovereignty of the king and submit to their authority. Until Jesus returns, we are living in a place where God is not the official ruler, but we can still choose to submit to his kingdom by surrendering our hearts to him. A will is the legal declaration of a person's wishes. In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus teaches us (his followers) to submit to God's will. Although there are times when we don't understand his will, we must trust that His ways are for our good. When we pray for God's will to be done in our lives, we must be ready to surrender our will and accept His will for our lives.

For years I desired to be a mother. But after nearly 6 years of infertility and disappointment, I started to lose hope. I remember how hard it was seeing I remember how hard it was to see my friends and family have children and grow their families. It was a painful reminder of the "one thing" I could not have. I struggled with the idea that God's will for me was to be barren. Eventually, after several failed medical interventions my prayers changed from "God, please help me become a mother" to "God, if it is not your will for me to bare children, then let your will be done in my life. Please remove this desire from me. "Surrendering my desires to His will was the first step to my healing. It was then that God was able to move in a mighty way in my life and blessed me with a beautiful baby girl, whom I carried in my womb and birthed naturally.

Jesus is telling us that our kingdom and will are important. In Him, we are protected, blessed, and redeemed. We have a seat at his table. We are called His and He can reign over our lives. He wants nothing more than to give us abundant life. A life richer than anything this world can offer. Pray this with me, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven". Amen.

**Challenge:**

I challenge you today to pray like Jesus instructed us to pray and to let his will reign over your life.

**Fasting Devotional Day Five: Thursday, January 6, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:11 ***“Give us this day our daily bread.”***

*By Dawn Houston*

**Thoughts:**

This verse seems so simple. Depending on God for our daily needs seems so easy, and most of us probably feel like we do this pretty well. Yet there is so much more here in this verse. I can say that in my life I have never truly been hungry or gone without a basic need. My life has been easy compared to many that I have known. So, as I dig deeper into this verse, it makes me look into what I long for or truly need. Reading through Genesis this month, God showed me something I had not noticed before. Abram is longing for a child. Definitely not a selfish or bad desire. In Genesis 15:1-2 The Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, “Abram do not be afraid. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. But Abram said, Lord God, what will You give me?” Abram is so focused on what he doesn’t have that he is missing the main thing that is being offered to him. How often is the Lord wanting to give me more of Himself (The Bread of Life), and I am looking at my wants? God was Abram’s exceedingly great reward with or without a child. God is sufficient, but not just sufficient; He is exceedingly great! Having Him is enough to satisfy all longings if we daily lean into Him. We need to allow Him to be our Daily Bread. He longs to fill us.

**Challenge:**

As we go through these days of fasting, let’s turn our cravings into longing for the only thing that can truly satisfy all of our needs; even those we don’t realize we have. He is our shield, our exceedingly great reward, our daily bread. Give us this day our daily Bread!

**Fasting Devotional Day Six: Friday, January 7, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:12 ***“and forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”***

By Todd Houston

**Thoughts:**

As we continue to meditate on the model prayer Jesus gave us, we come to Matthew 6:12. Some versions say, “forgive us our debts” and some say, “forgive us our sins.” You may think “Why the Difference?” or even “What is the Difference?” I think Jesus is saying as we have spiritual debts because of our sin nature and our disobedience to His commands, that God forgives when we ask and are trusting in Jesus as the payment of our sin debt. Just as God forgives us then we are called and even expected to do the same for others.

People are going to disappoint, kids are going to disobey, angry & hurting people may lash out, and you may even be hurt by a close friend or family member. I know it hurts and you need to protect yourself from any abuses. Our human tendency is to hold a grudge and even possibly lash out, but God has a different nature which He demonstrates to us. He knows that holding onto anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness only hurts us in the long run. He created us in his image to be like Him. Therefore, Jesus reminds if we want to receive the forgiveness of the Father then we in turn need to forgive others in the same way we want to be forgiven. In Matthew 6:14 it even says that God’s forgiveness is contingent and even in proportion to the forgiveness He sees us extend to others. Are you willing to be forgiven by God the way you forgive others?

**Challenge:**

Today, think about those that have slighted, hurt, or even abused you. Make a list if needed and then choose forgiveness. Don’t wait for them to initiate or apologize, just forgive as you want God to forgive you. Let Jesus remove the weight of that burden from your heart. Choose love instead and experience the unconditional love and forgiveness our Heavenly Father offers in return.

## **Fasting Devotional Day Seven: Saturday, January 8, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:13

By Andrew Birky

### **Thoughts:**

During His famous sermon on the Mount, Jesus spent time teaching how to pray. Prayer is, in essence, having a conversation with God. We often view it as a chance to tell God about everything we are worried about, the pain we are going through, or the things we wish would change. Those are certainly valid things to bring to God's mercy seat, but Jesus warns us not to "heap up empty phrases," thinking we will be heard because of our many words. The truth is, *your Father knows what you need before you ask him*. How comforting is that? God already knows every care and concern you have. Instead, Jesus gives us a model to follow when we come to God in prayer. He closes this model prayer with the following statement:

***And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.***

I love the sentiment behind this closing phrase. It speaks of a heart desperate to remain pure while being hard-pressed on every side by temptation and evil. Lord, lead me not into the temptation that confronts me every day! Please Lord, deliver me from the evil that tries to consume me! We should constantly ask the Lord for His help standing up to temptation because the truth is, we face a multitude of temptations *every single day*. Temptations to spend money irresponsibly, to judge other people, to manipulate events for our own benefit; the list goes on and on. One of the great temptations during the fast is to eat the things we're used to eating. There's a good chance you are hungry right now or fighting off a caffeine headache. I get it! I feel that way during the fast every year! But I also know without a shadow of a doubt that God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability. He always provides a way of escape! (1 Cor. 10:13) How good it is to serve a loving Father who does not lead us into temptation, but faithfully provides a way for us to endure and walk in freedom instead.

### **Challenge:**

Challenge Today I challenge you to see your physical hunger as an opportunity to practice walking away from temptation. For these 3 weeks, you have a chance to deny your physical desires in order to build your spiritual discipline and focus. You will eat and drink regular food again. Don't worry, these 3 weeks don't last forever. But you will certainly be faced with a multitude of temptations once the fast is over. So right now, decide to continue in your commitment to seeking God over filling your desire to eat. Reach out to friends for encouragement when you are weak, fill yourself with God's Word, and pray that God would deliver you from evil every single day.

## **Fasting Devotional Day Eight: Sunday, January 9, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:14 **"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you."**

By Shayne Gatlin

### **Thoughts:**

I was 8 years old when my Mom & Dad divorced. My Dad struggled with alcohol and that ruled his life and decisions. Over the next few years there were many broken promises, and our relationship grew further apart. For a young boy that caused so much hurt and unforgiveness in my heart.

When I read Matthew 6:14, I can easily let my human nature and instincts take over, shake my head, and say NO to what Jesus is asking from me. Jesus, do you realize how much pain he caused me? If I forgive him then I'm letting him off the hook for all that he has done. I carried this burden and unforgiveness for over 15 years.

Finally, when I was 27 years old God led me to Biblical Manhood discipleship. First thing we talked about was letting go of unforgiveness. I realized I had to let go of this pain that had built up to move forward. My dad had passed away about 3 years before this discipleship training and it was a struggle forgiving someone who wasn't there. I couldn't tell him about the pain he had caused and release my frustrations out on him. I had to truly think about how my Heavenly Father showed me His grace and forgiveness.

***Colossians 2:14: (NLT) <sup>14</sup> "He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross."***

My Father loved us so much that He sent his son to Earth to die on the cross and He took all our sin and nailed it to the cross. When I understood forgiveness in the light of this it changed my heart. I was able to release that unforgiveness and pain and let God fill any void I thought would remain.

### **Challenge:**

First thing is to remember that our Lord died on the cross for us to wash our sins against Him away. Also, his word says in **1 John 1:9 "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."**

When we understand His love for us and the way he forgives it should change our hearts. Unforgiveness in our hearts cause so much separation from God and those we are harboring that unforgiveness against. Search your heart and ask God to show you any unforgiveness that is in your heart. Ask for forgiveness from Him for harboring that unforgiveness and to release you from that unforgiveness. Then take the next step, reach out to that person, and let them know you forgive them. It might be tough and feel unnatural, but this is what we are called to do.

***Matthew 6: 14: (NLT) "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you."***

## **Fasting Devotional Day Nine: Monday, January 10, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:15 **"But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."**

*By Teresa Gatlin*

### **Thoughts:**

Today's verse is challenging because Jesus says that if we do not forgive others for their sins, God will not forgive our sins. Does this mean that if we do not forgive others, we are not saved? I think Jesus is speaking more about God's desire for His people to come face to face with the sin of an unforgiving heart. He desires for our hearts to be aligned with His will. In Colossians 3:13, Paul says to "Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." When we hold on to unforgiveness, bitterness, and hurt, we are not making allowances for others' faults and remembering the Lord's forgiveness of our sins. An unforgiving heart is a heart in need of transformation. A transformed heart is aligned with God and results in a changed life that offers the same mercy and forgiveness received by God to others. God's forgiveness is to be shared!

Twelve years ago, I encountered a betrayal that changed my life forever. But not in the way you might think. You see, this betrayal did not ruin my life or set my life down a path of pain and suffering. No. This betrayal taught me about forgiveness. God had prepared my heart for the moment of confession. I was in a season of my faith, overwhelmed by the mercy and grace extended to me from the cross. I was learning to see myself through the eyes of God and was so thankful that He saw past my brokenness. When a heart-wrenching confession threatened to hurt my pride and have me hold my offender in contempt, I gazed in the eyes of my offender and saw myself – broken, sinful, willing to face the consequences, but desperate for grace. My eyes welled up with tears, and I looked into the eyes of the person who hurt me and said, "I forgive you." Because of where I was in my relationship with God, I felt a strong commission to forgive in the same way my Heavenly Father had forgiven me. This experience with forgiveness changed my heart forever, teaching me to remember how much God has forgiven me when someone hurts me.

Forgiveness is not easy, but it brings our lives in right alignment with God and sets us free. Lewis B. Smede said, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

### **Challenge:**

When Jesus was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount he was teaching about love- love for our Heavenly Father and love for people. Jesus made it clear that His followers should live in a noticeably different way than other people. Forgiveness is one way we can demonstrate love for our Heavenly Father and people. There's a verse in a David Crowder song that says we are "drawn to redemption by the grace in His eyes. If His grace is an ocean, we're all sinking." God's grace engulfs us! In light of His engulfing grace and our redemption, consider those that have wronged you. Do they see grace in your eyes, or does your unforgiving heart need to be transformed? A transformed heart extends God's engulfing grace to others.

## **Fasting Devotional Day Ten: Tuesday, January 11, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:16

By Brian Lambert

### **Thoughts:**

When Jesus taught about spiritual practices such as prayer and fasting, He often used the Jewish religious leaders (Pharisees) as an example of how “not” to do it. They used prayer and fasting to receive praise and applause from men, rather than to honor and please God.

To fast, means to go without food for a set amount of time. It is giving up food to focus on God over a certain issue. It is to be so consumed with the issue that it becomes more important than food. Fasting is a way to enhance our prayer life and seek God for an answer or an end to the issue.

Fasting was a common practice in Israel. The Day of Atonement was the only required fast, but other fasts were implemented at various times in Israel’s history. Because Jesus paid for our sins once and for all on the Cross, New Testament Christians do not observe the Day of Atonement, so fasting is never commanded. However, it is implied that Christ expected believers to fast, but differently than the Pharisees.

**“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (Matthew 6:16)**

Jesus noted that the religious leaders abused the practice of fasting. He called it hypocrisy. They appeared in public to be sad or mourning. They often “disfigured their faces” with dirt and ashes so others would notice. They would commonly wear old and dirty clothes so people would recognize they were fasting. Their fasting was a show, and they received their reward which was the applause and praise of the people. It was hypocritical. Their practice of fasting missed the mark of its intended purpose.

### **How do we fast faithfully?**

#### **Challenge: Fast Privately, Be Yourself, Stay Focused on God**

- 1. Fast Privately:** There will be times that you do not eat, and others will take notice and ask why you are not eating. It is ok to explain that you are fasting and why you are doing it. And of course, we will share with others during a corporate fast and for the sake of accountability. However, as much as possible, we should practice fasting privately. Why? Because our hearts are susceptible to spiritual pride and loving the praise of others. Privacy is a form of protection – protecting our hearts from sin and remaining faithful to the purity and purpose of the fast.
- 2. Be Yourself:** There is no need for extravagant changes in your daily routine or drastic adjustments to how you present yourself or relate to others (mood, tone, body language). Be yourself. Act normal.
- 3. Stay focused on God:** The purpose of fasting is not to get attention, impress others, or to prove our level of spiritual maturity. The main goal is to seek God differently and to connect with him in a deeper way.

If we can rise to this challenge, God will reward our faithfulness!

## **Fasting Devotional Day Eleven: Wednesday, January 12, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:17-18

*By Steve Christopherson*

### **Thoughts:**

**17 “But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”**

Jesus is teaching his disciples and a crowd as he brings the sermon on the mount. The first thing you need to know is that this can easily be called the “but” chapter of the Bible. Read that the right way! Please don’t get that confused or you will miss the point! The word “but” is used in this chapter so much because Jesus is comparing what others, including the Pharisees, to what true followers should do. As you read the chapter, notice the many times He uses the word “but.” You see, we are SUPPOSED to be different from the world. We are supposed to do things differently than the world. In these two verses Jesus talks about fasting. He does not speak with the word, “if.” He uses the word “when.” WHEN you fast.... It’s not an option; it’s an expectation! Options are for non-followers. YOU are a follower of Christ, and He EXPECTS you to fast! And His instructions are to fast without advertising it to everyone, so they see you being all holier-than- thou. That would be your reward. He says BUT when you fast, take care of yourself and don’t flaunt it as you are being holy but rather do it in secret. Well now, if you do it in secret, others will not know it BUT God will! That should feel good BUT it should also let you realize that God actually sees you in secret! He knows what you do, think, feel, and say! He knows your heart!

### **Challenge:**

So, as you fast during this time, be mindful of His presence in your fast and honor Him with good intentions in your heart. Simply put, I would rather be on the right side of the “but” rather than the wrong side of, “Depart from me. I never knew you!”



## **Fasting Devotional Day Twelve:** Thursday, January 13, 2022

Text: Matthew 6:19-21

By Bill Brod

### **Thoughts:**

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus cautions us not to store up treasures on earth but instead “**store up treasures in heaven.**” Two questions immediately come to mind in this passage, what are my treasures and how can I store and get credit for them in Heaven? The world, as communicated via social media, plainly defines treasures as material possessions, fame, and accomplishments. But none of these are credited to our account in Heaven. The best way to understand heavenly fortune is to know what God values as treasure.

When asked “which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’”

There it is...we know through Jesus that **God treasures love** more than anything else! But how to store and get credit for it? As crazy as it sounds, you store it and get heavenly credit for love...by giving it away!

There are five different ways of expressing love: *words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch with no expectation of receiving something in return.*

We store up treasure in heaven by loving God and loving others, which demonstrates the greatest of all sacrifices that God made for us, His son Jesus Christ!

### **Challenge:**

This week, make a point to deliberately express your love to someone outside of your love comfort zone. Some examples could include a homeless person, someone who has wronged you or that you don't necessarily like, someone at church that you've not met before. Do it with a sincere heart and no expectation of receiving something in return. My prayer is your expression of love will make their day better and, in the process, you will treasure the moment and receive heavenly credit at the same time!

## Fasting Devotional Day Thirteen: Friday, January 14, 2022

Text: Matthew 6:22-23

By Angie Brod

### Thoughts:

Is your eye “good”? That’s the question you must ask yourself after reading Matthew 6:22-23. Jesus tells us that our eye is the lamp to our entire body. It lets light in. If it is good, healthy, and clear, your whole body will be full of light. If it is bad, unhealthy, or blind, you are filled with darkness. The older I get, the less “good” my physical vision becomes. I’ve always relied on contacts or thick glasses for distance, but now I need help seeing things that are nearby. Often, I hand my phone or recipe to someone younger so they can read it to me. If you are younger and you are around me, be ready! But what does Jesus mean when He teaches about a “good” eye? He isn’t speaking about our physical vision; He is speaking about our spiritual vision. How do you view the people and the world around you? Do you see through the lens of God’s Word and what He tells us is worthy of pursuit? Or do you let the world’s influence teach you what is valuable? I think we all know that what we take in through our eyes has tremendous power. The Bible warns against the lust of the eyes and tells us to guard our hearts and our minds by “taking every thought captive.” Don’t let in all the things that distort your vision! Instead, let in the good. What is it that you should see? You can only see one thing at a time. If you are spending your time and energy seeing the good things, you won’t have room to see the bad things. Scripture is very clear. We are instructed to see God. Romans 1 tells us we see God in His creation. ***“They know the truth about God because He has made it obvious to them...Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities— His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.”*** Seeing God inspires us to seek after Him with all our hearts. Scripture also makes it clear that we are to see one another. Mankind is God’s masterpiece! When we see other people, do we treat them as the masterpieces they are, or do we judge based on outward appearances? Do we love people enough to invest in their lives, to spend time with them? Most importantly, do we share with them the hope we have in Jesus?

### Challenge:

#### • Get rid of the bad

- When you are letting something in through your eyes and you feel conviction, listen. Don’t rationalize and justify your actions; listen as God speaks Truth and then obey. He has something better for you!
- Be aware that some things, though not inherently sinful, just aren’t good for you. Social media can be an example of this. It can leave you feeling unhappy and discontent. It can also be a huge time waster. Pay attention to the role you are allowing media to have in your life.
- If you are dealing with something that has a stronghold on you, find a trusted believer with whom you can share your struggles - someone to hold you accountable.

#### ☐ See the good!

- Spend some time in nature! Let God reveal Himself to you through His creation.
- Invest your time in praying and reading His Word – there is no better way to “see” someone than by spending time with them.
- Ask God to help you see people the way He does, to help you love them the way He does. Look for the person who needs a friend. At church, seek out someone you don’t know instead of staying in your comfort zone with people you already know.
- The best way to love someone is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with them. Who has God placed on your heart that you can share the Gospel with? Make specific plans to do this!

**Fasting Devotional Day Fourteen:** Saturday, January 15, 2022

Text: Matthew 6:5-7:23; Scripture Focus: Matthew 6:24

By Lynn Smith

**Thoughts:**

In today's passage, Jesus had just taught his disciples how to pray, using "The Lord's Prayer" as an example (v. 9-13). After teaching on prayer, Jesus moved on to fasting (v. 16-18). Then he moves on to possessions and money. He warns them not to try to accumulate possessions but instead heavenly possessions. V. 21 – ***"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"***. He concludes his teaching on possessions with our focus verse (24), ending with ***"You cannot serve both God and money."***

Much has been written about money and possessions. Jonathan Swift said, "A wise man should have money in his head, but not in his heart." Money is something which affects everyone in one way or another. We need money to pay for the things we need – food, shelter, clothing, etc. If we are blessed enough to earn more money than we need to live, then we have the freedom to buy things we want rather than just what we need, or we can invest and let our money work for us. Most of us barely have enough money to survive and maybe have a few extras along the way. Many people spout the following quote, supposedly Biblical: "Money is the root of all evil." But that is a misquote. The Bible does not say that, but rather says the **love of** money is the root of all evil. So, today's passage reminds us of our focus must always be on God and not on possessions.

**Challenge:**

If you want to find out where a person's priorities lie, you could get a very good clue in two places: 1) how and where they spend their time and 2) how they spend their money. Where are your priorities? Do you live to work, or do you work to live? When you make your budget, receive your paycheck, and begin to pay your bills, what is the first bill you pay? When you have free time, how do you spend that time? I ask these questions of myself as well as to you my dear readers. Take some time today and evaluate where you spend your time and money. Are you using your time and money to further God's kingdom? It has been said money makes a good servant but a poor master. Who are you serving today?

## **Fasting Devotional Day Fifteen: Sunday, January 16, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:25-32

*By Justin Jaramillo*

### **Thoughts:**

“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” Jesus challenges us from beginning to end in this section! What is the point of focusing on earthly things that do not affect us in eternity? Jesus draws comparisons to the beauty and splendor of nature to remind us that these simple things take no thought, yet they thrive in such a way that makes us stop and admire such as the birds soaring free or the beauty of a flower that might not ever be seen by human eyes. The flower is provided for without ever moving and the birds are fed yet they do not farm. WE, God’s favorite creation, often spend our lives in a constant state of struggle and noise worrying if we will be provided for. In verse thirty-one we are told again. “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” And the solution is simple in verse thirty-two he tells us, “For the Lord KNOWS we need these.” Life is hard, and God has provided everything we need to be sustained and thrive as his servants. It's that simple God is telling us TRUST in him, and you will not hunger or thirst.

I think back to when my wife and I first began to tithe, 10% might as well have been a fortune to us in those years. We struggled to truly trust in him at that time, and the first time we did, my wife received a scholarship for twice the amount we gave. That was God's affirmation of his plan for our growth moving forward.

### **Challenge:**

So many times, putting faith in God to provide is a challenge, my faith has been tested and at every turn God has provided for my family, yet we still struggle to trust in God and his plan. Take this time of reflection to hear God's words, remove the noise from the daily grind and sit with God and ask what, where, who is my focus today God? Challenge yourself to focus on this instead of fixating on hunger, on thirst, on money. Allow God to be in the driver seat today to do his will, and not only for today let this change takeover in me and let THIS become my hunger.

## **Fasting Devotional Day Sixteen: Monday, January 17, 2022**

Text: Matthew 6:33-34

By Taylor Jaramillo

### **Thoughts:**

Jesus is telling us not to worry. That seems easier said than done. We have demanding jobs, bills to pay, deadlines to meet, and families to raise. All these things in addition to serving the Lord and living our life according to his purpose. It can be overwhelming and not surprisingly...stir up feelings of worry. How are we going to manage being a faithful servant of Christ, wife/husband, sister/brother, mom/dad, friend, neighbor, employee, and all the other roles we fulfill?

It is easy to get caught up in the things we have to do that we fall victim to the mindset of, "If I can just make it through this week, if I can just survive this presentation, once I finish this semester, just make it through this season of life, THEN I can focus on my relationship with Christ." But Matthew 6:33 says ***"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*** This scripture from the sermon on the mount gives us freedom from worry. By focusing on our relationship with Him, then He will provide everything we need to meet our deadlines, pay our bills, and MORE. The next verse (Matthew 6:34) goes on to say, ***"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*** Again, this verse frees us from worry. We must seek first his kingdom and take each day one at a time. Tomorrow is not promised so how can we glorify God today?

I must confess, starting my residency program at Memorial Hermann Texas Medical Center has been tough. I feel like I have no time for anything other than work and it has put my relationship with Christ in the back seat. But praise God for His holy spirit and conviction! I was rounding with my team in the transplant intensive care unit discussing treatment plans for a patient. The nurse asked me how I was doing, and I said, "Eh, surviving I guess." When I asked how he was doing, he simply said, "I am blessed. God is so so good." WOW my heart exploded. In that small moment he was able to glorify God, spread joy, and allow the Holy Spirit to move through him to convict my heart. Life is hard. Residency is tough. The days are long. But when I seek first His kingdom, I can see His face every day. I can exude joy and seek to glorify Him one day at a time. Most importantly, I can trust Him with my life. What is all this work for if I am not putting Him first? It is worthless without Him. By changing my mindset to seek FIRST His kingdom and not worry about tomorrow, I can freely live in His calling on my life.

### **Challenge:**

As we continue through this prayer and fasting journey, think about how you can glorify God right now... TODAY. Remind yourself with this scripture that we can have freedom from worry when we seek first His kingdom. We can trust that He will provide for us in every aspect of our life. He will not just meet the need but exceed all expectations. When we give Him our all, He gives us even more.

## **Fasting Devotional Day Seventeen: Tuesday, January 18, 2022**

Text: Matthew 7:1-6

By Jared Chen

### **Thoughts:**

In quite possibly one of the most controversial verses in the entire Bible, Jesus tells us to not judge others, and we will not be judged. This verse, taken at face value, is what many nonbelievers use as the sharpest arrow in their quiver when attacking the Christian faith. To them, the Bible says, “Do not judge one another” and “who are we to judge?” As today’s society evolves, it is not hard to turn on the tv, talk to a neighbor, or drive by a billboard, and encounter this theme on a daily basis. We are constantly being bombarded by the idea that all actions and thoughts ought to be immune to any judgment or accountability. But as is the case with all scripture, when taken out of context and isolation, a few words can take on a whole new meaning. Understand that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, people notorious for their hypocrisy and double standards. They were often rebuked for condemning others while they themselves did the exact same things. Jesus goes on to say that the standard we use to judge will be the standard by which we will be judged by God, and if we condemn others while we ourselves are mired in sin, what good would that do? In the end, the hypocrite will stand to greater judgment as he refuses to take the “log out of his own eye.” It is a classic case of the blind leading the blind. To be clear, Jesus is not saying that we have no right to make moral judgments about human behavior and certainly is not restricting us from watching out for our brothers and sisters by holding each other accountable for our sins and struggles. In fact, he calls us to carry each other’s burdens and restoring brothers who are caught in sin. He is simply addressing hypocrisy and sin in the church.

Imagine if your small group leader advised you to not spend so much of your focus and energy working late nights to accumulate wealth but encouraged you to instead spend quality time with your spouse. But you later find out that he has been secretly losing every last bit of his child’s college fund gambling online every weekend. Or what if you were told by a fellow church member that you should be more loving and caring in your interactions with others only to find out they are simultaneously making hateful and offensive social media posts. Does this make you *actually* want to work on your own sins? Unfortunately, the church’s reputation is often defined and damaged by these hypocritical people.

### **Challenge:**

- Strive to uphold the integrity of our faith - to restore a reputation that truly represents Christ’s namesake.
- Humbly correct one another in line with Jesus’ teachings and building each other up with accountability.

But in order to do so, we need to be qualified first, and that starts with our own hearts. By grieving about sin in our own lives, we can take the first step in *truly* waging war as one against sin!

## **Fasting Devotional Day Eighteen: Wednesday, January 19, 2022**

Text: Matthew 7:7-11

By *Cindy Dickerson*

### **Thoughts:**

***Ask, Seek, Knock, Find Matthew 7:7-11***

As I read this passage, I see a highlight reel with an abundance of unanswered petitions and closed doors. Maybe I didn't fast enough, wait long enough, pray enough...? Or maybe, God provided a way through the situation, instead of a way out of the situation? Yet scripture says, "You will receive it." Maybe *it* is eternal, on earth as *it* is in Heaven (Matthew 6:10). All the people in Heaven know Jesus, maybe the *it* we receive, is more of Him, what could be better than that? God does not give as the world gives (John 14:27). *All* of the gifts He gives His children are good and eternal. I realize my temporal mindset brings small expectations and views of how things should be in this broken world.

In Luke 5, the fishermen, defeated and disappointed, are ready to move on after a night full of empty nets. Jesus gets involved and they catch more than their nets *and* their neighbor's boat can sustain. They are in awe of Him and leave *everything* to follow Him. They thought they needed fish, but they needed Jesus. I need Jesus. And I will pick up my disappointments, insecurities, failures and go after Him. For the rest of my life, I will be asking, seeking, and knocking, because I know, I will *find*.

### **Challenge:**

I encourage you to *ask* God to give you insight into something you are wrestling with maybe a doubt, fear, regret, desire or that *thing* that resides in your mental space. *Seek* someone out, invite him/her in and share what you are bringing to the Lord, have him/her pray for you and with you in agreement. Get alone and *knock* on Heaven's door as you enter His presence with praise and thankfulness. When you *find*, share, and let us rejoice together.

## **Fasting Devotional Day Nineteen: Thursday, January 20, 2022**

Text: Matthew 7:12

By *LeChelle Smith*

### **Thoughts:**

I do not believe there is one person who has not grown-up hearing, “Treat others as you would like to be treated.” In my case it was my parent’s attempt to rid me of wanting to seek revenge on someone who I felt treated me wrongly. However, the saying goes much deeper than what we see on the surface if we look into the scripture. Matthew 7:12 states “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (NIV). The scripture gives us insight on how we should interact with one another. When I read the scripture, I get an image from Christ’s perspective. There are countless times when He models how we should act. By His modeling He treats us with grace and mercy. I feel that by learning to love Christ as He loves us and showing that to others is our purpose. By doing so we are able to reflect Christ in all areas of our life. Our attempts to treat others as Christ treats us with love, compassion, forgiveness among others allows us to display our true faith and bring glory to Him.

For me, when I feel hurt, it is hard for me to think Christ-like thoughts. No matter how hard I try at times I do not want to treat others the way I would like them to treat me. I want to treat them as I feel they deserve. I thank the Holy Spirit during these times who reminds me that it is not for me to judge or obtain justice, but simply to hold onto my faith and love people as Christ has taught me. I struggle mostly with this while parenting. There are times when I want to scream or yell at my children but remind myself that I am to be a model. Do I appreciate them screaming or yelling at me? Certainly not, therefore, I must model how Christ would react. It is not easy, but with Christ by my side I can turn to him for wisdom and guidance. So, I say to you, be intentional to model what you would like to see from your brothers and sisters in Christ. We cannot do good works with unclean hearts. We are called to bring glory not to ourselves but to Christ.

### **Challenge:**

I challenge you to do your own heart check. Are you purposely living your life as a model for others and with pure focus or are you displaying what you want others to see?



## **Fasting Devotional Day Twenty: Friday, January 21, 2022**

Text: Matthew 7:13-14

By Jose Valdivia

### **Thoughts:**

**13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.**

In today's verses, Jesus gives an illustration of two Gates; A Narrow gate that leads to eternal life and a wide gate that leads to destruction. He does not give a 3rd Option, implying there are only two options. Jesus starts this message with instruction and a choice. His followers must **CHOOSE** the narrow one. As a follower of Christ, we must choose Him back. Why do I say "back"? He has chosen you already (Ephesians 1: 4). He wants to spend an eternity with you but doesn't want this to be forced. He, The Creator of All things, wants you to genuinely and wholeheartedly choose him as well. This choice is not easy by design. We are told by choosing Him we must pick up our cross and follow. (Read Matt 16 :24-26) When we choose Jesus, there is a cost because sacrifice is involved. These are not sacrifices that are religious in nature but sacrifices which serve as evidence that we indeed Believe in Jesus. If I told you to toss your brand-new phone out of a moving car on the Highway (without backing up your files) and I would give you ten million dollars, would you do it? You would have two choices; Believe me or not believe me. If you actually believed me, would you just agree and go on with your day? Or would actually toss the phone out? You probably would measure the cost of losing your precious photos and video files, maybe you had bank information or passwords that kept you safe. But, if you believe that I will give you the ten million dollars, you will open the window and drop the phone. The action of dropping the phone is evidence that you believed what I said. In the same way, Jesus is asking his believers that their Treasure is in Heaven and not in this life. But the only way is to Choose the Narrow Gate and to walk the difficult path. This time, instead of tossing our phones, we must choose to drop things in our lives that contradict Jesus or his teachings. His Followers (aka Believers) must choose to drop things and strip down to our bare soul in order to walk through the narrow Gate. The narrow one only has space for you. It's like a strainer designed to leave behind what doesn't belong and to let through only what God wants (our Soul). Those who cling to things of this world won't be able to carry them through the narrow gate because they won't fit. Remember God's home (Heaven) must be kept Holy, so there is no room for our Earthly treasure (comforts, pleasures, materials), no room for Sin, no space for other gods. On the Contrary, The Wide Gate is wide enough to cling to your comforts, habits, issues, problems, and the treasures of this life. This is why many choose this road. But the end of the Road is Eternal Destruction (Hell). We must learn how to choose Jesus in every circumstance. His followers must choose to drop things and follow him. Jesus is the Gate; his Path is hard because not many choose to walk in his ways and choose not to let go.

### **Challenge:**

What is one treasure, one habit, one Sin you can start letting go of this week? What does letting go look like? How can you show that Jesus is more important than what you are letting go of? When will you do it?

### **Prayer:**

Father, thank you for making a way for me to dwell with you in Eternity. I do not want to take it for granted. Help me see what I'm clinging to that I need to let go of. Help me desire you more than I desire this (fill in). Show me the way Lord and let your spirit guide me in this. In the name of Jesus Christ my Lord!

**Scripture to read:** Ephesians 1: 4-5, Matthew 7: 13-14, Matthew 16: 24-26, Matthew 19: 16-26

## **Fasting Devotional Day Twenty-One: Saturday, January 22, 2022**

Text: Matthew 7:15-23

*By Greg Dickerson*

### **Thoughts:**

This passage reminds me of early on in our first home. I was in our backyard, and our neighbors had this big orange tree. Hanging on our side of the fence were these large bright oranges that looked amazing, and if you shook the limbs hard enough, a couple would fall to the ground. Do not worry, I confessed and asked forgiveness later, so having "found" oranges in our yard, I decided to try one. As I peeled the orange, the fragrant sweet citrus smell filled the air. Then as I pulled it apart, the juices dripped over my hand to the ground, and I was ready for this forbidden fruit. I took the first juicy bite, immediately regretting my decision, and spat out the most bitter, sour, and awful orange I have ever tasted. You see, sometimes it's not easy to spot a bad tree, and I think Jesus is challenging us to look deeper (v21-23). Just looking good through nice deeds or pretending to bear fruit isn't really bearing "good" fruit, and Jesus is the taster of our fruit because what's on the inside counts. Bearing good fruit starts with the seed of Jesus Christ living in us, then through the power of God's word, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the communication of prayer, we develop into the tree God has called us to be.

### **Challenge:**

I challenge you to look inside and examine your heart and the fruit you bear from your everyday life. Have you tasted God's goodness today (Pa 34:8) or connected with Jesus (John 15:5) that you may bear much fruit? It is not your responsibility to grow others, but we are called to share the loving seeds of Christ and be a fountain that spreads the living water from God (1 Corinthians 3:6-9), then allow God to do the rest. Does your fruit look and taste like (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal 5:22)? Is your heart and soil ready for God to use your fruit that not only looks good but taste amazing that a greater harvest could be seen (Matthew 13:23)?



