



A JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

A GUIDE TO PRAYER AND FASTING
INTO EASTER

Introduction

The season leading up to Easter Sunday is one of the most significant times in the calendar year for us. While our culture celebrates the season with Easter eggs and family holidays, for us as Christians, it is a celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which is at the very heart of Christianity and our own personal lives as disciples.

Starting from Monday the 22nd of March, we are calling the whole church to a 2-week prayer and fasting journey leading into Easter. We will break fast on Easter Sunday together after the Sunday service. However, if you are only able to join us in fasting for 1 week, you are welcome to start on Monday 29th March.

We have compiled this booklet from a range of resources as a prayer and fasting guide for you. This journey is aimed towards directing your heart to God and deepening your understanding of the events that led to Easter. Each day there is a guide that comprises of three components:

1) Feeding on the Word

It is made up of a gospel reading that follows the narrative of Jesus' own journey to the cross from the gospel according to Mark. There is a devotional that raises thought on some aspect of the reading and focus on themes around the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ.

2) My Fasting Journal

Jesus said that, 'Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'. The fasting journal provides you a space to reflect on what God is saying to you through His Word. Journaling creates a record of God's work, power and leading in your life.

3) My Prayer

Using the words from various liturgical resources, these prayers close each day as an added way to commune with God and express your desire to be transformed by his Spirit. We encourage you to pray it out loud and use it as a prompt for God to guide you into your time of prayer around your prayer goals.

To prepare for this prayer and fasting journey, you will need to decide on:

1) YOUR PRAYER GOALS

Who will I specifically pray for by name for the next two weeks?

What specific circumstances or issues will I pray and ask God to do a work in?

2) WHAT KIND OF FAST ARE YOU GOING TO DO

(See Appendix at end of booklet for details on fasting and how to fast)

FOOD FAST:

MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY FAST(S):

OTHER:

This guide will help point you to Jesus and our aim is to reflect meaningfully on His journey to the cross, so that it might increase our appreciation of Easter and love for Jesus. Let's journey together as our corporate act of worship as we pray and fast for two weeks into this incredible celebration of Jesus.

God Bless

The Leadership Team

Monday 22nd March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people." And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

[MARK 14:1-9]

Devotional

Shortly after sin had entered the world and God had pronounced judgment on sin, we read the following in Genesis 3:21: "And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them."

God looked at their clothes and said, "*Nope. That's not going to work.*" The clothes that Adam and Eve had made for themselves were not adequate covering to face the new fallen world in which they were now living. Remember when they first sinned? Sin opened their eyes, but not in a good way. Sin laid them bare, left them feeling exposed. For the first time, they realised they were naked. So, they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths, single-piece garments. And ever since, the human race has engaged in an enterprise of self-covering that always falls short.

God knew that Adam and Eve needed something more substantial for covering. They needed something made by his hands, not their own. When we read Genesis 3:21, it is apparent that some animals died in order that the man and woman could be sufficiently clothed. This is the first hint of substitutionary atonement that we see in the Bible. "Substitutionary atonement" is just a fancy way of saying that an innocent one died so that a guilty one could be covered. You see, covering sin is not simple, quick, and easy (like grabbing some leaves off a tree and sewing them together). Covering sin is costly, painful ... bloody. Sin produces suffering and death, so the cost of covering sin involves suffering and death. It involves sacrifice.

Did Adam and Eve think they could just sweep things under the rug, tidy up the disastrous mess they had made without any cost, without any price being paid? Do we think that? When we try to cover our own sin, we are engaging in a futile self-salvation project. We are essentially saying, "I can atone for my own sin." But this is a gross under-estimation of both the breadth and depth of sin's devastation.

The death of the animals in Genesis 3 is the first biblical hint that atonement requires sacrifice. It points us forward to the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus Christ suffered and bled and died so that we could be adequately clothed—clothed in his righteousness. The blood of Jesus is our atonement, our covering. Just like Adam and Eve, we can't cover our own sin. God must do that, and he has made that possible with the costly sacrifice of his own Son. In light of this: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Is. 61:10).

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Everlasting Creator-Father, I bless you for the everlasting covenant, for the appointment of a Mediator. I rejoice that he failed not, nor was discouraged, but accomplished the work you gave him to do; and said on the cross, 'It is finished.' I exult in the thought that your justice is satisfied, your truth established, your law magnified, and a foundation is laid for my hope. I look to a present and personal interest in Christ and say, Surely, he has borne my griefs, carried my sorrows, won my peace, healed my soul. Justified by his blood I am saved by his life; glorying in his cross I bow to his scepter; having his Spirit I possess his mind. Lord, grant that my religion may not be occasional and partial, but universal, influential, effective, and may I always continue in your words as well as your works, so that I may reach my end in peace.

Prayer Goals

Tuesday 23rd March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him. And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

[MARK 14:10-21]

Devotional

Philippians 2 says this of Jesus Christ: "He made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death" (2:7-8) Not only was it a sacrifice for God the Son to take on human flesh, you might say that Jesus' entire life was marked by sacrifice—giving up his rights and spending himself for the sake of others. From the beginning of his life, his feet were always walking toward the ultimate sacrifice of death on a brutal Roman cross. This brings a question to mind: Why is sacrifice so central to God's plan of redemption and reconciliation? Why couldn't God just forgive people of their sins without sacrifice?

If you think about what it means to bring about reconciliation in a human relationship, you can see how sacrifice is always part of the process. Let's say I offend you or hurt you in some way. If we are to reconcile our relationship, you will necessarily have to sacrifice. It will cost you something to forgive me, because you will have to absorb the pain of the offense. You will have to sacrifice your right to be angry and move toward me with forgiveness. But I will have to sacrifice too. I will have to lay my pride on the sacrificial altar if I am going to move toward you with confession and repentance. The bottom line is that without sacrifice there is no reconciliation. There is only hardness of heart and death of relationship.

In a very similar way, we must sacrifice in order to move toward God with confession and repentance. We must come to the end of ourselves, killing any sense of pride and self-righteousness. But we are not the ones who move first. It is not our sacrifice that saves us. God's plan of redemption is primarily about his sacrifice, not ours.

Redemption is a term of value, so there must be a cost involved. To redeem means to buy back, to regain possession of something in exchange for payment. Because we are created in the image of God and he loves us, he considered us worth the cost of redemption. However, the full cost of redeeming a human being is staggering. What does it cost to buy a person back from the realm of sin and death, from the reign of Satan? The cost is commensurate with the destruction that sin, death, and Satan have brought to humanity. The cost is beyond our ability to pay. No amount of sacrifice on our part would enable us to cover the cost. Thankfully, the full cost fell on Jesus. All of the curses of the Fall, most notably our sin and the resulting death, were placed on Christ. His sacrifice makes our reconciliation with God possible. Thanks be to God!

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Send your Spirit among us, O God, as we meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Prepare our minds to hear your Word. Move our hearts to accept what we hear. Purify our will to obey in joy and faith. This we pray through Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Wednesday 24th March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.

[MARK 14:22-31]

Can we know for sure that God keeps his promises? Everyone knows how easy it is to make a verbal promise, but then waffle if it becomes too difficult to keep. Could this ever happen with God? In Genesis, God made a series of promises to Abraham: He promised to give Abraham many descendants and make him into a great nation, to bless him and make his name great, and to bless all the families of the earth through him. He also promised to give the descendants of Abraham a particular land. But Abraham was unsure. His circumstances didn't indicate that God's promises could actually come to fruition. So, in Genesis 15, Abraham asked God some questions: "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless," and, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess [the land]" (15:2)?

In answer to these questions, God did something that seems strange to us in our cultural and historical context. He had Abraham sacrifice some animals, cut them in half, and then lay the pieces of the animals across from each other. Then Abraham fell into a deep sleep, and a smoking fire pot and flaming torch passed between the pieces. This ceremony, common in the ancient Near East, was called "cutting a covenant." Two parties entering into a binding agreement or covenant with one another would cut an animal in pieces and pass between the pieces to inaugurate the covenant. The ceremony signified that the two parties were promising to fulfill the terms of the covenant. If they failed to keep the promises of the covenant, they were saying, "May we become like this animal." It's like they were saying, "I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die." The sacrificial ceremony was literally a pledge of one's life to keep the promises of the covenant.

When the smoking fire pot and flaming torch (which were symbols of God's presence) passed between the pieces of dead animals, God himself was assuming responsibility to make sure that all the promises of the covenant were kept. Abraham was asleep, completely passive, while God initiated and ratified the covenant. O. Palmer Robertson writes, "The solemn ceremony of self-malediction provides the Lord's reply [to Abraham's questions]: 'I promise. I solemnly commit myself as Almighty God. Death may be necessary. But the promises of the covenant shall be fulfilled'." It's a staggering thought! God was saying, "May I be torn to pieces like these animals if the covenant between me and Abraham's descendants is broken." The terms of the covenant would end up being broken—but not by God.

Abraham's descendants would be unfaithful to God and his covenant. But, God kept his promise. He had sworn on his life to bless Abraham. So, the blessing for Abraham and his descendants (which includes us as Christians) was made possible by the curse of death that fell on Jesus. In Jesus, God the Son took on flesh, and his flesh was torn apart in order to keep his covenant promises to Abraham (and us). Jesus, the covenant-keeper, sacrificially offered himself for us: "Take, eat; this is my body. Drink of this cup, all of you, for this

is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:26-28). The blood of Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, is our assurance that God keeps his promises. What better assurance could we ever have?

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

O Christ, by remaining faithful till death, you show us the road to greater love. O Christ, by taking the burden of sin upon yourself, you reveal to us the way of generosity. O Christ, by praying for those who crucified you, you lead us to forgive without counting the cost. O Christ, by opening paradise to the repentant thief, you awaken hope in us. O Christ, come and help our weak faith. O Christ, create a pure heart in us; renew and strengthen our spirit. O Christ, your Word is near; may it live within us and protect us always. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Thursday 25th March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

[MARK 14:32-42]

Devotional

Then God said [Abraham], "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him" (Genesis 22:2-3).

It's hard to imagine the complexity of emotions Abraham must have had as he made his way up Mount Moriah, the place where God had commanded him to sacrifice his beloved son. Isaac was his only child, the one he had waited decades for, the one whom God had promised and then miraculously provided. Isaac was a physical sign of God's goodness and faithfulness to keep his covenant with Abraham. He represented all the dreams and aspirations of Abraham's heart—Isaac was Abraham's treasure. There was a lot at stake.

We don't know exactly what Abraham was feeling, but we do know how he responded. Instead of arguing with God, he immediately began preparing for the sacrifice. His response was obedience: he "saddled his donkey," "cut wood for the burnt offering," and began making his way up the mountain.

This isn't like the man in Jesus' parable who found a treasure in a field and sold everything he had to buy the field. That man knew what he stood to gain. We don't mind sacrifice if we know there is a good reason or reward. However, it seems Abraham had neither of these, just a mysterious faith that he and the boy would come back together from the altar (22:5).

When they came to the altar, Abraham carefully laid out the wood, then bound his son and placed him on the wood. And just as he was taking the knife to slaughter his son, God interceded:

"But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son" (22:11-13).

To believe God means to trust beyond reason and reward that he is good, and that what he demands he also provides. It is in this sense that Abraham believed God, and so was willing to obey God, even to the point of offering up his only son.

God honours our obedience and worship by providing what we really want and desperately need: a substitutionary sacrifice. Abraham did not withhold his only son from God; “[God] did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (Rom 8:32). Isaac was the promised seed of Abraham through whom God would bless the nations; Jesus was the promised seed of Adam through whom God would bring redemption to all peoples throughout history. Isaac carried the wood on his back up to the altar to be sacrificed; Jesus carried his own cross on the road to Calvary where he would be crucified. Isaac was laid upon the altar in anticipation of his death through his father’s own hand; Jesus was slain upon the altar and cut-off from his Father. A substitutionary lamb was provided for Isaac, but Jesus *was* the substitutionary lamb provided for us all. Jesus is the greater and perfect sacrifice who empowers our obedience and worship.

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

O God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all that were ever saved were saved by you, and will through eternity exclaim, ‘Not unto us, but unto your name give glory for your mercy and truth’s sake.’ You have chosen to transact all your concerns with us through a Mediator in whom all fullness dwells and who is exalted to be Prince and Saviour. To him we look, on him we depend, through him we are justified. May we derive relief from his sufferings without ceasing to abhor sin, or to long after holiness; feel the double efficacy of his blood, tranquillising and cleansing our consciences; delight in his service as well as in his sacrifice.

Prayer Goals

Friday 26th March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." And they all left him and fled. And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

[MARK 14:43-52]

Devotional

It is so easy to feel righteous about sacrifice. When we "sacrifice" by tithing, or abstaining from sex or alcohol or food, or giving our time to help others, we feel pretty good about ourselves. We might not say it this way, but perhaps we even feel like we have earned some good graces with God. We present these things to God in our minds like we are making a case for why we deserve to be forgiven, or blessed, or noticed. However, this type of thinking prevents us from giving God the sacrifice he desires—after all, our money, our bodies, and our time all belong to him already; is it really so generous to give a small portion back? That is more stewardship than sacrifice.

It will not do to say to God, "Yes, I have sinned, but look what good I have done! Look what I have sacrificed!" God desires a different kind of sacrifice, one that encompasses our very being. In King David's famous confession concerning his adultery and murder and cover up, he comes clean with God. No excuses, just full disclosure and ownership. No ritual ceremony, just impassioned prayer. This is what people do when they have come to the end of themselves. They bring absolutely nothing to the table, and count on God to be everything to them.

But why didn't David bring this to the altar of ritual worship? He needed forgiveness, and the means of atonement in his day was the blood of an animal. He explains: "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17).

Just as "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4), nothing we sacrifice for God will "tip the scales in our favor" or satisfy his holiness. God alone blots out all our iniquities and restores to us the joy of our salvation (51:9,12). David's point was not that sacrifices would no longer be made (they would), but simply that a sacrifice in and of itself counts for nothing apart from the heart of the one who offers it.

God desires our whole heart, and the only way to give yourself completely is to let go of the notion that any part of your heart or your spirit or your life is good apart from him. When we stop trying to justify ourselves before God, when we allow ourselves to see the scope of our sin, when we understand our total depravity, our hearts will break as David's did. We will cease striving for a righteousness of our own, stop covering up our unrighteousness, and look only to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died "once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Almighty God, giver of every good and perfect gift, teach us to render to you all that we have and all that we are, that we may praise you, not with our lips only, but with our whole lives, turning the duties, the sorrows, and the joys of all our days into a living sacrifice to you, through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Saturday 27th March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows.

[MARK 14:53-65]

Devotional

We live in a culture obsessed with self-improvement. We want to change our job, our body, our house, our habits, and hobbies. We even want to "improve" the people around us. When it comes to opportunity and options for change, our day is unparalleled in history. The problem is that we also live in an age of unparalleled convenience. I can shoot a video on my phone and send it to someone a thousand miles away, all within minutes. I can take a pill and lose weight while I sleep, allegedly. Without any work of preparation, I can eat nearly whenever and whatever I want. Privileges like these have cultivated unrealistic expectations and unwarranted impatience. We cannot escape the effects of our technological age.

The Bible offers an entirely different norm for change, which is more profound and deliberate. It promises holistic change, but not all at once, and not without sacrifice. In Romans 12, after Paul has laid out the theology of the gospel, he exhorts his readers to take action, to let the gospel change them, if you will: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1). The way we take action is to present the entirety of who we are to God "as a living sacrifice" to him. This is a peculiar phrase. The allusion to Old Testament sacrifice is clear, but what is being sacrificed on *that* altar dies. So what are we to make of this "living sacrifice?"

On one hand, personal growth is sacrificial. We do not need to atone for our sins (Jesus is the final sacrifice for sin), but we do have to put to death our selfish ambition and our desire to be in control. So much of our motive for change is to secure ourselves by our own means. We want to change our bodies to secure a good image, acquire wealth to secure comfort, and gain power to secure our happiness. All of that must be put to death. But that is only part of what Paul is saying here. Our worship is sacrificial, but it is also living: "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13). In other words, our sacrifice of worship is to live for God, to present the members of our body to God as "instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:13). This is possible because "he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also [give life to our] mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in [us]" (Romans 8:11). Because Jesus offered up his body on the cross to secure our salvation forever, we can offer up our entire life to God as a continual act of worship.

The norm in our culture is to sacrifice whatever we have to get what we want. The way of true sanctification is to sacrifice everything we want because of what we already have in Christ. This is the heart of Lent. We are decluttering our lives, inside and out, testing the values and habits and desires that have become our acceptable norm. We are making room in our heart and mind to consider what Jesus gave up for us, and it is changing us. It's not all at once, because that would rob us of the joy we experience in knowing the one who changes us.

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we, your unworthy servants, give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Palm Sunday 28th March 2021

By his resurrection Christ broke apart the gates of death and opened to us the way of life, announced victory to the women and apostles and brought salvation to the whole world, annihilated the power of death and renewed the entire creation, gave us the promise of resurrection so that we might rise with him in new life. We proclaim and affirm that, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, "Death is swallowed up in victory." And so we cry out: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[FROM THE WCF 20.1; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:55-57]

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

[KEITH GETTY AND STUART TOWNEND]

Monday 29th March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

[MARK 14:66-72]

Few things are more negative than "death." Death is seen as the end of something—the end of life, bringing with it much defeat and bitterness. Death is to be avoided at all costs. But the Bible, at times, tells a different story:

"You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (1 Cor. 15:36).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24).

Musician Jon Foreman echoes this same upside-down thinking when he sings, "For a seed to give birth to life, first it must die." We see this every year, all around us as the season of autumn approaches. The leaves change and the flowers fade as the cold grip of death takes hold of them yet again. Old things are dying to bring about new life. It is a strange cycle of mourning and rejoicing that makes up our days. Death brings life, or it at least has that potential.

In many ways, this is the very journey of the cross: death to life. Just as the food we eat must first die in order to sustain our life, so the old self (apart from Christ) must die daily to give birth to the new self. We put to death our self-centeredness and we are raised to life in Jesus. We deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Death brings life. Death is a looming and scary thing. But the love of God toward us in Christ compels us not to be afraid of death and what it will cost us. God held nothing back, but rather, gave up his own Son for us. Surely he will also return to us life abundantly. And that abundant life is this: gaining Jesus, being with and following him. The process of dying to ourselves and our own agenda helps us to locate our treasure (life, joy, purpose) in Jesus. It reminds us that true life is found in Jesus. When the seed of God – Jesus – fell into the ground and died, he became not just our creator but our redeemer and our seed of life. As we die to ourselves we get more of him and in turn more of who we are created to be. When you truly grasp the death of Jesus, when the truth and beauty of all that Jesus gave up for you sinks into your life, you will joyfully give up all you have and are to follow him.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

[ISAAC WATTS]

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

You are holy, O God of majesty, and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. As one of us, he knew our joys and sorrows and our struggles with temptation. He was like us in every way except sin. In him we see what you created us to be. Though blameless, he suffered willingly for our sin. Though innocent, he accepted death for the guilty. On the cross he offered himself, a perfect sacrifice, for the life of the world. By his suffering and death, he freed us from sin and death. Risen from the grave, he leads us to the joy of new life. Through Christ, all glory and honour are yours, almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Tuesday 30th March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

[MARK 15:1-15]

Devotional

The aim during the Lenten season is to identify with Jesus in the wilderness, and to follow him, in some way, through his suffering and persecution and sacrifice. The difficulty in following Jesus, of course, is that the path leads to the cross.

Nevertheless, we try—try to meditate and pray, try to give up certain comforts and pleasures to focus our attention, try to add other things to live more wisely, try to repent of consumerism and take in more of the Bible, more of our relationships, more of serving others ... we press on and try. But even in our best efforts, failure is there to greet us. Even in moments of success, failure lurks.

Six weeks is a long time to pay attention to something. Losing steam comes easily. There are moments when Lent is forgotten altogether, and thoughts begin to creep in, "Lent is just an observance. Jesus doesn't really care if I slack here or there, does he? I don't want to be legalistic, you know." We drift toward the kind of carefree attitude that is not about enjoying freedom, but about indulging the flesh.

Then there are other moments – usually when feelings of guilt sink in for indulging the flesh – when more of a performance driven attitude takes over. We recommit ourselves to our goals, which is not a bad thing, but it often is not about identifying with Jesus. It becomes about our righteousness. We have to do this right.

The constant threat of these two things – license and legalism – is always present in our lives, devilishly waiting to get us off course. Neither of these produces the kind of repentance and humility that gets to the heart of Jesus. Repentance, humility, suffering, lament, and sacrifice do not come naturally. Indulgence and self-righteousness do.

Lent is not hard because we are forgetful or because six weeks is a long time. Lent is hard because we do not want to die. Lent is about death, and we tend to avoid death. But the way of Jesus leads to the cross. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

All of our shortcomings related to Lent are but a microcosm of our ragged and duplicitous selves. We are far more sinful than anything we are willing to admit here. Indeed, far worse than we know or could even imagine. But the grace of God in Christ Jesus is far more lovely and powerful than we have ever dreamed.

Lent is pushing us toward Easter, cultivating a longing for it deep in our hearts. Not a longing to go back to our old ways, but a longing for a Saviour—one who lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Holy God, you have opened our ears to hear your Word and our lips to proclaim your truth: open our eyes this day to see in the cross the revelation of your love; through Jesus the crucified, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, be honour and praise, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Wednesday 31st March 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

[MARK 15:16-20]

Devotional

Meditating on death, at its very core, is morbid and depressing. We mourn, weep, and lament death, sure—but what is the point of taking a week (at some level six weeks) to meditate and reflect deeply on it? Is that necessary or helpful? Wouldn't it be better to keep things positive?

For the Christian, death is not exclusively negative or bad news because we have a much bigger view of the grand story. Death isn't the end; it is a subplot that gives way to glory of resurrection. Death is no longer a bitter pill to swallow; it has been swallowed up in the victory, it has lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death is the harbinger of good news for the person who is shaped by God's story. **Meditating on death should always be a means toward understanding the grander story of the gospel.**

Amid this grander story, the reality of death confronts and challenges us—it reminds us that life is frail and fleeting, and it beckons us to examine our daily life.

To be a Christian means to have located your identity, your worth, your value in Jesus—he has become your treasure. A life well lived is one that treasures Christ above all (Philippians 3:7-8). Death, therefore, must serve as a constant reminder of where to place our treasure:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

A life well lived is one that keeps the impending nature and finality of death in view because death causes us to examine what we are treasuring. **Meditating on death should always be a means toward gaining an eternal perspective that results in treasuring Christ more deeply.**

Above all, though, **meditating on death should always be a means toward understanding and receiving the grace of God through Christ.** Death is a direct result of the fall, as sin entered into our reality. Our world – and our own lives – are filled with death and decay because of the power and presence of sin.

We are nearing the end of this Lenten journey. And for this journey to become truly real to you, you must come face to face with the depth of sin that is present in your heart and life. You have to see yourself for who you really are: a sinner fully deserving of God's just and holy wrath (Romans 3). We have to see ourselves how God sees us because it is only as we believe what God says about us that we will be able to believe what God has done for us. God has given you his only begotten Son, our true Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. God has given you his best to redeem you. That is what God has done for us!

God does not ignore our sin, he atones for it. He does not look past who we are, he redeems us. And it is his great love for us that empowers our redemption: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that

God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10). Because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, we are accepted by God, we are saints in the kingdom of God. It is only as we believe in the depth of our sin that we can truly understand and believe in the overwhelming grace, mercy, and love of God. And this is the gospel: God’s grace and mercy through the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is so much deeper and greater than what we see in our own hearts. Praise Jesus!

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Lead us, O God, in the way of Christ. Give us courage to take up our cross and, in full reliance upon your grace, to follow him. Help us to love you above all else and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, demonstrating that love in deed and word by the power of your Spirit. Give us strength to serve you faithfully until the promised day of resurrection, when, with the redeemed of all the ages, we will feast with you at your table in glory. Through Christ, all glory and honour are yours, almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Maundy Thursday 1st April 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

[MARK 15:21-32]

Devotional

On Maundy Thursday we remember the last evening Jesus shared with his disciples in the upper room before his arrest and crucifixion. The name "Maundy Thursday" comes from the Latin *mandatum novum*, referring to the "new commandment" Jesus taught his disciples. In John 13, Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:34-35). But the disciples do not fully comprehend how deeply Jesus has loved them.

In these last words to his disciples, Jesus is defining what it means to love him. Five times Jesus said that love for him was connected to obeying his commands. And five times he said that his command is that we love each other as he has loved us. The point is unmistakable: our commitment to and love for Jesus is expressed by our love for one another. We are not only united with God in Christ; we are also bound together in Christ, for better or for worse. We married into a family—the family of God. But like the disciples, we do not fully comprehend how deeply Jesus has loved us.

Take in the deep love of God for you through the person of Jesus:

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 3:1, 4:9-10).

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).

"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. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).

Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died, so that God can adopt us into his family. He sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6) God gives us the thing we most desperately need—himself.

God’s love for us is most powerfully displayed in the death of Jesus on the cross. Love is defined at the cross of Jesus. To the degree that you are able to comprehend and soak in the love of Jesus for you, to the degree that it sinks deep into your fabric—this is the degree to which you will be empowered to carry out the new commandment that Jesus gave to us.

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you, for the honour of your name. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Good Friday 2nd April 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

[MARK 15:33-41]

Devotional

Today is called Good Friday, which is not really good because "good" is too neutral a term. The events of Good Friday are the ultimate paradox—at once atrocious and wonderful, scandalous and beautiful, the worst kind of hate and the best kind of love. On this day we were convicted and pardoned, condemned and freed, cursed and blessed.

It was the darkest day. Many who had followed Jesus up to now fled from the events of Friday. And those who stayed to watch wept in horror: the phony trial, the mob that cried out for the blood of the man who was unbending in the weight of their demands and expectations. The brutal beating, the savagery of the soldiers, the grueling walk through the city he had entered to cheers just five days before. Finally, the nails pounded into flesh, the tortured body slouched over, the naked man died as his enemies jeered.

To his disciples – those that had forsaken everything in order to follow Jesus – this day was anything but good. This man, in whom they had put all of their hopes, was hanging dead on a tree. This was the death of their faith, the crushing of all their hopes for a new kingdom, and the end of all they believed in. Or so it seemed.

As his followers laid Jesus in the tomb on that same dark day, Easter Sunday lied in wait for them, but on Friday they couldn't see it. They couldn't see the defeat of death, the glory of the resurrection, or the advancement of God's kingdom. They couldn't see the whole story. There was no way around Good Friday, only the way through—through pain and death and burial.

It is the same for us; we cannot get around this day. We must go through the pain and death and burial to get to the resurrection. We must go through the darkness of Good Friday to get to the light of Easter.

God is a God of light: darkness cannot survive in his presence. We, who have dark hearts full of sin, should tremble at this fact. But Jesus, who was completely good, cloaked himself in the darkness of our sin and stood under the wrath of God for us. On the cross, he was destroyed and cut off from his Father. It was to have been our fate. On the first Good Friday, in the midst of our darkest hour, God did not cut us off. Jesus Christ, our true light, plunged himself into the darkness so that we might live in the light.

We can go through the darkness of this day because Jesus went through it before us. He is saving us and bringing about our everlasting joy, in a way only God could have chosen. Easter is not far away!

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Holy God, you have opened our ears to hear your Word and our lips to proclaim your truth: open our eyes this day to see in the cross the revelation of your love; through Jesus the crucified, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, be honour and praise, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Saturday 3rd April 2021

FEEDING ON THE WORD

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

[MARK 15:42-47]

Devotional

Tomorrow is a celebration. Tomorrow is also the acknowledgement of the “already, but not yet” tension of the gospel. “Already, but not yet” is a phrase that theologians often use to describe the reality of the current age we live in.

On the one hand, the kingdom of God has already come in the person of Jesus. This is Good News! As the incarnate God-man, he died on the cross so that through his death

and resurrection he might destroy Satan, sin, and death (Heb. 2:14).

On the other hand, the perfect kingdom toward which he pointed awaits his personal return to earth. Until then, we experience the tension of living between the “already, but not yet” aspects of the kingdom of God.

Easter is a celebration of this beautiful tension:

There is real life right now for those who trust in Christ.

- » We have new hearts (2 Cor. 5:17)
- » We have been made alive with Christ (Eph. 2:5)
- » We have received a spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15-16)

But there is more to come that has not yet been fully realised.

- » We will have transformed bodies, not just hearts (2 Cor. 15:50-55)
- » We will be resurrected like Christ (Rom. 6:5)
- » We will experience the fullness of being adopted by God (Rom. 8:23)

[LISTS ABOVE FROM JUSTIN HOLCOMB]

The salvation that God brings is here! It is finished, and it is coming. Our hope is in Jesus who accomplished for us the “already, and yet to come.” Jesus, through his death, has already delivered his people from slavery to sin. Jesus, through his resurrection, has already conquered death, our worst enemy. But Jesus has not yet allowed us to experience a world without sin, death, and brokenness. He has not yet established his kingdom in full. His promise is to come back and do so.

Until then, we walk by faith in him. We look in hope to his coming, knowing that God does not fail to deliver on his promises. Because he was faithful in the already, we can trust that he will be faithful in the not yet. Jesus has inaugurated the reign of God so that the age to come has invaded the present age. One day, however, at the appointed time, the present age will finally give way to the fullness and completeness of the rule of God in Christ. He will usher in his kingdom in full—a new earth where only righteousness dwells. A land of promise—where there is life, abundance, satisfaction, delight, and rest.

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).

MY FASTING JOURNAL

MY PRAYER

Giver of life, we wait with you to offer the hope that comes from the cross to earth's darkest places. Where pain is deep and affection is denied: let love break through. Where justice is destroyed, let sensitivity to right spring up. Where hope is crucified, let faith persist. Where peace has no chance, let passion live on. Where truth is trampled underfoot, let the struggle continue. Where fear paralyses, let forgiveness break through. Eternal God, reach into the silent darkness of our souls with the radiance of the cross. O you who are the bearer of all pain, have mercy on us. Giver of life, have mercy on us. Merciful God, have mercy on us. Amen.

Prayer Goals

Resurrection Sunday 4th April 2021

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

[MARK 16:1-8]

Christ, the Lord, is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Lo! the Sun's eclipse is over, Alleluia!
Lo! He sets in blood no more, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Hail, the Lord of earth and Heaven, Alleluia!
Praise to Thee by both be given, Alleluia!
Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia!
Hail, the resurrection, thou, Alleluia!

[CHARLES WESLEY]



APPENDIX A

WHAT IS FASTING?

The goal of fasting is to experience God.

To learn what it means to practically put Him **FIRST** in our life. Fasting is to voluntarily abstain from eating/drinking for an extended period of time. “Eating” and “drinking” can represent anything that is holding you back. What you “consume” in terms of social food, intellectual food, spiritual food, and emotional food. Fasting helps you identify the things that distract you from growing in your relationship with God?

You may not even realise you have an addiction. For example, if you “have to have” coffee every day, and you are not willing to give it up, you are addicted. Maybe your fast needs to just be about coffee. Ask God and He will show you. Try to identify the things in your life that you are relying on that have nothing to do with God.

Everyone doing a physical fast should consider consulting a physician first. If you have medical issues, consider fasting TV, media, or social media. The point is that there is something God wants you to separate yourself from for three weeks so that you can see Him more clearly. Don't cheat yourself by removing yourself from the fast entirely.

There are other benefits to fasting (breaking addictions, losing weight. etc.), however if you make those benefits the reason for fasting you will not experience God in the way He intended. A fast is not for YOUR needs or desires but to help you focus on the fact that your life is all about Jesus. A fast gets your eyes off your needs and on to your greatest need – the presence of God.

Here are some examples of fasting in the Bible:

- Special revelation - Exodus 34:27-28
- In times of war - Judges 20:26
- Courage and wisdom - Esther 4:3,16
- In times of grief - Nehemiah 1:4, 2 Samuel 1:12, Samuel 31:13, 1 Chronicles 10:12
- Spiritual recuperation - 1 Kings 19:1-9 • Mourning - Daniel 10:1-3
- Repentance - Jonah 3:5, Daniel 6:18 • Ministry preparation - Matthew 4:2
- Spiritual power - Mark 9:29
- Ministry commissioning - Acts 14:23
- Set aside self for holiness - 1 Corinthians 7:5
- Spiritual discipline - 1 Corinthians 11:24-28 (Paul “fasted often”)



PREPARING FOR FASTING

1. Prepare your heart. In 2 Chronicles 7:14 we read, “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” The challenge for us is to open our hearts to Jesus and be willing to do what He says. Take time to confess and repent of your sin. Ask Jesus what he wants you to change in your life. What direction does he want you to walk? How much time does He want you to pray and read His Word. Tell God that you want to be fully surrendered and submitted to Him and His ways.

2. Check your motives. Ephesians 3:1 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” God’s heart is to assign spiritual blessings to His children. The problem is many of his children never discover those blessings. Fasting prepares you to hear and receive what God has for you. Maybe God wants to bless you with the spiritual blessing of wisdom, a fresh anointing in your life, powerful and effective prayers, a teaching gift or words of discernment and encouragement. His blessings are endless. Fasting helps us eliminate the things in our life that steal our focus on God and helps us see things about ourselves and God that we never knew.

3. Prepare your body. There are a lot of different fasts that you can choose to take part in (they are mentioned later in this article). When you choose to fast food be prepared for changes physically. You may initially feel sick or tired – don’t give up. Press through those initial stages. Remember, this is not a game to see if you can eat less or how long you can resist posting on Facebook. Rather, it is all about experiencing God in a powerful and fresh way in your life. As you continue to fast, you will realise that you don’t experience hunger pains as often as you thought you would. Without a preoccupation with food, you will be surprised at your ability to be sustained for a number of days without eating food and how you will take advantage of your time to seek Jesus more diligently

4. Order your schedule. As you begin your fast decide when and where you are going to take time to meet with God. As someone once said, “People who don’t make appointments with God end up being disappointed with God.” The question you are going to have to answer and settle is “when you fast will you seek God, listen to Him and give Him the time He deserves?” If you are fasting meals use those times to spend praying, reading God’s Word and journaling. Don’t let yourself become distracted – be intentional about spending scheduled time with God – if you do you can expect to hear Him clearly.



FASTING GUIDELINE

- Explain to your family in advance what you are doing.
- Request privacy from those who find out what you are doing.
- Ask them not to discuss it with you until your fast is over.
- Never complain or brag about your fast, and avoid talking about it.
- Establish an accountability partner for prayer & encouragement.
- Stay away from negative people.
- Spend as much time as possible alone in solitude and prayer.
- Acknowledge that your flesh cannot be trained, but must be crucified.
- Journal as you pray and meet with the Lord. Write down the miracles God does in your life!



TYPES OF FASTS

COMPLETE FAST

- Drinking only liquids, typically water and/or light juices. • Broth or soup may be included as options.

SELECTIVE FAST

- Removing certain elements from your diet.
- The Daniel Fast - abstaining from meat, sweets, or bread; drink water and juice, and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables.

PARTIAL FAST (a.k.a. The Jewish Fast)

- Abstaining from eating any type of food in the morning and afternoon.
- Fast during specific times of the day, e.g. 6AM-3PM, or from sunup to sundown.

SOUL FAST

- Common for: anyone new to fasting food; those with health issues that prevent them from fasting food; those wanting to refocus specific areas of life that are out of balance.
- Suggestions: abstain from engaging in social media, shopping, watching television, etc.



DEALING WITH DOUBTS

Fasting is counter intuitive to what your body has come to expect. Your mind and your memory will initially try to convince you that what you are doing is not normal. Your body has been trained to eat at certain times every day and to feed the urges that you have always paid attention to. Your mind and your memory will do everything it can to bring you back into line with what has always been normal. This is what it means when Paul wrote in Galatians 5:24 that “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Your “flesh” will encourage you and even beg you to give up and feed it. It is at that point that you will be faced with a decision: Do you give up or keep moving forward? When you feel as though you want to give up, you must ask yourself a few questions. Is the pain you are experiencing worth the prize you are pursuing? Is the prize you are pursuing worth the pain you are enduring? If you do give up, where and to what will you go back to? In John 6:66, the disciples were asked by Jesus if they wanted to go back to their old lifestyle. Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of life.”



DEALING WITH PEOPLE

Should you tell people that you are fasting? Since fasting is a discipline of self-denial and consecration unto the Lord, constant discussion about it will be a distraction. Jesus said this about fasting in Matthew 6:16-18, “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 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.”

Those are words worth heeding in order to experience the maximum benefits that come from fasting. Keep it between you and God as best as you can. If your fast lasts only one to seven days, it will be easy to conceal it. As time goes by and you begin to lose a considerable amount of weight, it will become more difficult to avoid questions about your appearance. Do your best to avoid looking dehydrated and keeping yourself well groomed. Eventually there will be those who find out that you are fasting, but you can turn this situation into an edifying one. There is a balance between drawing attention to yourself and giving glory to God. You have to decide when and how to discuss it, because your testimony can be used to encourage others to fast.



SAMPLE MENUS

SAMPLE MENU 1 - FRUITS, VEGETABLES, JUICES & WATER

- Breakfast - Fruit smoothie with protein powder
- Mid-morning Snack - Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables
- Lunch - Raw vegetable salad with light dressing and vegetable broth soup
- Mid-afternoon Snack - Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables
- Dinner - Fresh salad with light dressing and steamed grilled vegetables

SAMPLE MENU 2 - LIQUIDS ONLY

- Breakfast - Fruit smoothie with protein
- Mid-morning Snack - Herbal tea or vegetable broth soup
- Lunch - Raw juiced vegetables
- Mid-afternoon Snack - Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with protein
- Dinner - Vegetable juice or vegetable broth soup

SAMPLE MENU 3 - MODIFIED DANIEL FAST

- Breakfast - 1 - 2 servings whole grains with fresh fruit juice
- Mid-morning Snack - Fresh fruit or fresh chopped vegetables
- Lunch - 1 - 2 servings whole grains; fresh salad with legumes and light dressing
- Mid-afternoon Snack - Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with protein
- Dinner - 1 - 2 whole grains; fresh salad with legumes and light dressing



THE DANIEL FAST

The concept of a Daniel fast comes from Daniel 1:8-14 where it says, “But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods. Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel. But he responded, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded.”

Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. “Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,” Daniel said. “At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king’s food. Then make your decision in light of what you see.” The attendant agreed to Daniel’s suggestion and tested them for ten days.

Because Daniel and his three friends were servants of a pagan King (King Nebuchadnezzar) who ruled Babylon they were expected to follow the rules of the palace. They were to learn the beliefs, customs, laws and practices of the Babylonians which included their eating habits. Being Jewish, much of the dietary menus of the Babylonians were not in agreement with the Mosaic Law and thus labelled “unclean” to them. As a result Daniel asked if they could be excused from eating the meat that was most likely sacrificed to Babylonian false gods and idols.

They were granted permission to do this and in the end were seen as more healthy and fit than the others who ate the Babylonian food. Thus, the Daniel fast is simply a fast that consists of eating only fruits and vegetables and abstaining from meat. It is one example of how to deny yourself in order to grow closer to God. It is not a fast that is commanded in Scripture but rather an example of a fast that can be practiced in your life.

FOODS TO INCLUDE

All fruits. These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned. Fruits include but are not limited to apples, apricots, bananas, blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, cantaloupe, cherries, cranberries, figs, grapefruit, grapes, guava, honeydew melon, kiwi, lemons, limes, mangoes, nectarines, oranges, papayas, peaches, pears, pineapples, plums, prunes, raisins, raspberries, strawberries, tangelos, tangerines, watermelon

All vegetables. These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned. Vegetables include but are not limited to artichokes, asparagus, beets, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chili peppers, collard greens, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, ginger root, kale, leeks, lettuce, mushrooms, mustard greens, okra, onions, parsley, potatoes, radishes, rutabagas, scallions, spinach, sprouts, squashes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, turnips, watercress, yams, zucchini, veggie burgers (an option if you are not allergic to soy).

All whole grains. Including, but not limited to, whole wheat, brown rice, millet, quinoa, oats, barley, grits, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat tortillas, rice cakes, and popcorn. All nuts and seeds, including, but not limited to, sunflower seeds, cashews, peanuts, sesame. Also, nut butters, e.g. peanut butter and almond butter.

All legumes. These can be canned or dried. Legumes include but are not limited to dried beans, pinto beans, split peas, lentils, black eyed peas, kidney beans, black beans, cannellini beans, white beans.

All quality oils. Including, but not limited to, olive, canola, grape seed, peanut, and sesame.

Beverages: Spring water, distilled water, or other pure waters.

Other: Tofu, soy products, vinegar, seasonings, salt, herbs, and spices.

FOODS TO AVOID

All meat and animal products. Including, but not limited to, beef, lamb, pork, poultry, and fish.

All dairy products. Including, but not limited to, milk, cheese, cream, butter, and eggs.

All sweeteners. Including, but not limited to, sugar, raw sugar, honey, syrups, molasses, and cane juice.

All leavened bread, Including Ezekiel Bread (it contains yeast and honey) and baked goods.

All refined and processed food products. Including, but not limited to, artificial flavorings, food additives, chemicals, white rice, white flour, and foods that contain artificial preservatives.

All deep fried foods. Including, but not limited to, potato chips, french fries, corn chips.

All solid fats. Including shortening, margarine, lard, and foods high in fat. Beverages. Including, but not limited to, coffee, tea, herbal teas, carbonated beverages, energy drinks, and alcohol.



AFTER YOU FAST

Ending your fast properly is just as important as beginning your fast properly. Just as you prepared yourself to begin a fast, you must prepare yourself to stop or break your fast. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself as you end your fast:

- What are the key lessons I learned?
- What new habits or disciplines do I want to keep? • What new dietary rules will I follow?
- What foods will I begin eating and not eat anymore? • What dreams and visions have I seen pertaining to
- my personal walk with the Lord or my ministry?

DECIDE TO MAKE FASTING A PART OF YOUR LIFE

Before you end your fast make a decision to practice this discipline on a regular basis. This is vital if you are going to apply and live out the lessons learned during your fast. 1 Corinthians 11:24-28 says that Paul “fasted often.” But why? You must view fasting as a new way of life, not just a vacation from the old way. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, “The old is gone and the new has come.” Fasting regularly will help you maintain a level of discipline and spirituality that is necessary to hold the ground surrendered by Satan.

Regular fasts will keep the flesh in submission and serve as a reminder as to who is in charge of your life. Choose a regular fasting schedule to follow. There are those who have chosen to fast one twenty-four hour period per week. Others fast sun up to sun down, one day per week. You must pray and design a format that you feel God wants for you, a system that you can be faithful to and consistent with.

PHYSICALLY

Controlling your eating habits when you end your fast will be important. Once you begin to eat again, if you are not careful, you will feel uncomfortable. Your stomach will feel bloated and full. Introduce solid food slowly. There is a very good chance you will experience stomachaches and diarrhea from the shock on the digestive system.

EMOTIONALLY

Satan will be working to take back the ground he has surrendered over to the Lord and he will use your emotional vulnerability to accomplish his goals. It could be an intense time of discouragement leading to depression. Remember to be mindful of this and to eat wisely once you break your fast. In 1 Kings 18-19, when Elijah is challenged by the 450 prophets of Baal who all followed Jezebel in a most vile and immoral religion. God confronts and defeats them through one man, Elijah. But after this great spiritual victory, Elijah finds himself running for his life from one woman, Jezebel. She had threatened his life and he felt all alone. He became incredibly discouraged and asked God to end his life. Elijah experienced a supernatural and spiritual high, followed by an emotional low. You very well could experience this same type of roller coaster ride. Be aware of this and hold firm to the victory you have in Jesus.

Resources Cited

READINGS & DEVOTIONS FOR LENT

Kendal Haug & Will Walker

FASTING APPENDIX FROM

<https://mainstreetchurch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PRAY-FIRST-2019.pdf>