

COVENANT
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



2023



[COVUCC.ORG](https://covucc.org)

A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23 ESV).

A term now commonly used in the world of sports and athletic conditioning is cross-training. Cross-training refers to the combining of exercises to work various parts of the body. Often one exercise works certain muscle groups, but not others; cross-training aims to eliminate this. In the world of organizational management, cross-training is the practice of training people to work in several distinct roles or training them to do tasks that lie outside their normal responsibilities.

Many of us are often enamored by the promises of God, so much so that our expectations of a life in faith is that we lean into the blessings of God, while subsequently ignoring the responsibilities of our commitment. Here Jesus tells us that the prerequisite of following Him is to deny ourselves and daily take up our cross. This daily “cross-training” should be our central focus in our efforts to fully pursue Christ. The growing necessary to walk in the way that God has prepared for you, requires us to be fully devoted to cross bearing, to be fully developed as Christian disciples.

The Lenten season is an incredible opportunity to take the first step necessary for this training. By engaging in a season of self-denial, we are preparing ourselves to carry the cross of Christ. There are very few practices like fasting and praying. In fact, there is a story in Matthew 17 where Jesus delivers a young boy from possession. When asked by the disciples why they could not cast out the spirit, Jesus tells them that “this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21 New King James Version). There are many things that can constrict our abilities to live fully into the call of God, but by

doing a bit of “cross-training,” we can become the disciples and disciple-makers that we are called to become.

If we are to be disciples, we must be trained in the way of the cross (cross-training) so that we might live out a lifestyle of discipleship in Christ. Our goal is to fully equip church membership, and in particular, church leadership and potential leadership to better understand our role as disciples of Jesus Christ and how that plays itself out at every level at Covenant UCC, so that we might more effectively work to our intended end – to connect the disconnected to Christ and to equip the connected to be more like Christ. Please read the guide provided below, which will assist you in prayerfully entering this fast. I believe that through your participation, you will experience God’s powerful presence in your life in a deeper way as together we support each other in the cross-training efforts of being, becoming and making disciples.

Prayerfully,



Rev. Dr. Patrick L. Daymond
Senior Pastor

WHAT IS FASTING?



Fasting is denying yourself food or other comforts for a specific period. Fasting is something that the people of God practiced throughout the scriptures for many different reasons. People fasted while waiting for insight from the Lord, as a prayer practice, to battle temptation, as an act of humility toward God, and to intercede for others. The bottom line is fasting is an act of spiritual devotion that is focused on having less of the physical things of the world to have more of the things of God. Great leaders in the Bible fasted routinely, including Moses, David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. Jesus expects that we will fast regularly. In Matthew 6:16, Jesus addresses fasting specifically saying to the disciples, “When you fast. . .” Notice Jesus says “when” not “if.” Fasting is not an option. Though Jesus assumes that we will fast, it is not a requirement. We do not *have* to fast. We get the opportunity to fast. Like all intentional spiritual practices, fasting should not be legalistic – we are not earning anything from God through fasting.

WHY SHOULD WE FAST?

When we give something up through a fast, it allows us to find more of God’s presence and an increased reliance on God’s grace. Our lives and souls are overwhelmed with things we rely on to satisfy and distract us: entertainment, social media, food, drink, coffee, exercise, full schedules, you name it. Fasting is intentionally setting aside something that we routinely rely on for comfort or sustenance. In turn, we pursue God, asking God to fill that space instead. This process helps us to discern God’s will and often brings a clearer look at our own spiritual health. Fasting is an act of sacrificial

worship and prayer. We are making a sacrifice as an act of reverence and reliance on God. We are saying to God, “I trust you all the time even in times of going without.” Fasting helps us to break the cycle of dependency on things of the world and grow more dependent upon God. Many fast on behalf of others to carry their burden and as a petition (cry of prayer) toward God.

HOW SHOULD WE FAST?

Jesus also tells us how we should go about fasting. “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” (Matthew 6:16-18 New International Version). Fasting may be difficult, but it is doable! Jesus challenges us not to share our struggle with others but to turn our longings and struggles to the Lord, asking Him to fill the void and to draw us deeper into His presence.

DANIEL FAST



Corporately as a church we will be participating in the Daniel Fast. The Daniel Fast is a great model to follow that proves to be extremely effective for spiritual focus, discipline and purification in the body and soul. The Daniel Fast involves a spiritual commitment to God, “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank...” (Daniel 1:8 King James Version)

“In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were

fulfilled.” (Daniel 10:2-3 King James Version). It is one of the most common types of fasts. In the book of Daniel, we find two different times Daniel fasted. Daniel 1 states that he ate vegetables and water, and in Daniel 10, it states that Daniel ate no rich (or choice) foods as well as no meat or wine. The Daniel Fast consists of no meats, dairy, sugar or yeast breads for 40 days. You can eat lots of fruits, veggies, grains, legumes and peanut butter. Sundays are days of celebrating the risen Christ and therefore not fasting days.

For more information concerning the Daniel Fast visit www.daniel-fast.com.

PREPARATION

- For several days before the fast, pray and seek God on how He wants you to draw close to Him in this season and the things that might interfere with that.
- In the days leading up to the fast, continually ask God to guide and lead you through the fast, giving you a pure heart, a steadfast spirit and the strength to stay focused on Him and His will. (Psalm 51:10 provides a great meditation focus for this)
- Fasting should always be accompanied by prayer. Fasting without prayer is just a diet! We want more than a diet; we want to tap into the supernatural power of God. Therefore, I am asking all of our members to pray every day from 6:00am – 6:20am and 9:00pm to 9:20pm or intentional times that work for your schedule. The key is to have a plan for your focused prayer time and strive to stick to it. I am especially asking all members to join me for prayer every Wednesday at 7:14 am CST via our prayer line at (760)-548-9759.

DURING THE FAST

- ***As a church, we will be fasting from Wednesday, February 22, 2023 – Saturday, April 8th (excluding Sundays).*** In your focused prayer times, be patient. Wait on God. Do not be in a hurry. Ask God to teach you how to be still and quiet before him. Use this daily devotional guide written by the ministers of Covenant United Church of Christ. The devotional is broken into 4 divisions designed to help you WARM UP, LIFT, RUN and STRETCH. Meditate on the devotionals and on scripture. Journal your thoughts, taking notes on the things that God is revealing to you during your fast. There will also be a scripture provided at the end of each section to allow you to write your own devotional to not just reflect on the thoughts of others, but for you to provide an offering of reflection, a prompt, and a prayer for yourself!
- If you are fasting to carry another person’s burden or as a way to petition God for their salvation, be sure to take the time and moments that you would have been eating to pray specifically for that person. Pay close attention to the temptations and emotions you face during the fast, by asking questions like, “What is my strongest emotion today?” or “Am I drawn to an unhealthy or sinful behavior as a means of coping?”
- Keep notes on what you are learning about yourself and God.

An important note when fasting from food:

When fasting from food or observing the Daniel Fast, be sure to do this wisely.

Consult your physician if you have any health concerns. If this is your first time, do not swing for the fences. Start small and work your way up over time. Fast from certain meals, or perhaps only during the daytime (from sunup to sundown) and drink fruit juice or light smoothies throughout the day. During a fast from food, you may feel weaker than usual, irritable and find it difficult to concentrate. You may also get a headache. This is normal, but because of this you will also want to abstain from exercise and other strenuous physical activities during your fast. **Again, consult your physician!**

FOODS TO EAT WHILE ON THE DANIEL FAST

Whole grains

Amaranth, barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, freekeh, millet, oats, purple rice, quinoa, rye, sorghum, spelt, teff, whole grain pasta, whole wheat, and wild rice.

Beans and legumes

Black beans, black-eyed peas, cannellini beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), great northern beans, kidney beans, lentils, peanuts, pinto beans, and split peas.

Nuts and seeds

Almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, nut butters, peanuts (legumes but people think of them as nuts), pecans, pepitas (pumpkin seeds), pine nuts, pistachios, poppy seeds, walnuts, sesame seeds, soy nuts, sunflower seeds.

Vegetables

All vegetables are allowed (fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, and canned).

Fruit

All fruit is allowed (fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, and canned). However, any dried fruit should not contain added sugar (check ingredients to be sure).

Oils

Oils (such as coconut, olive, and sesame, for example) are allowed but should be used minimally. For example, you can sauté foods in olive oil but avoid deep-frying them.

Other

Unleavened bread (whole grain bread made without yeast, sugars, or preservatives)

All herbs, spices, and seasonings are allowed, including salt and pepper.

Soy products (such as edamame and soy nuts) and tofu are acceptable.

Beverages

Water should be the main beverage on your Daniel Fast. Distilled, filtered, sparkling, spring, and mineral water are allowed as well. However, you may have 100% fruit juice on occasion (just do not overdo it). You can also use 100% fruit juice in recipes. Also, unsweetened non-dairy milk is acceptable (such as almond milk, coconut milk, soy milk).

FOODS NOT TO EAT WHILE ON THE DANIEL FAST**Animal products**

Meat (bacon, beef, bison, chicken, lamb, pork, and turkey)

Dairy (butter, cheese, cream, milk, and yogurt)

Fish

Eggs

Added sugar

Agave nectar, artificial sweeteners, brown rice syrup, brown sugar, cane juice, corn syrup, honey, malt syrup, molasses, and raw sugar.

Yeast

Yeast and, therefore, leavened bread is not part of the Daniel Fast. (For an explanation on why it's excluded, see #1 under "Food" on my FAQs page.)

Refined grains

White flour and white rice. Only whole grains are allowed on the Daniel Fast. A whole grain product contains the entire grain kernel - the bran, germ, and endosperm.

Processed food

Foods that contain artificial flavorings, chemicals, food additives, and preservatives.

Deep-fried foods

Examples are corn chips, French fries, and potato chips. (Baked chips are acceptable if they don't contain restricted ingredients. Check the label for "baked" to be sure.)

Solid fats

Butter, lard, margarine, and shortening.

Chocolate

Milk chocolate, semi-sweet chocolate, dark chocolate, chocolate syrup, and cacao.

Caffeinated and alcoholic beverages

Alcohol, coffee, caffeinated tea, and energy drinks.

THE WARM-UP

Any activity that helps to prepare you for the demands of your chosen activity.

On your mark. Get set. GO! The phrase that anyone who has ever been in a race will know and recall. Is it possible to do anything well if you are unprepared? Preparation is our first step in our cross-training journey. The scripture is clear that being prepared is integral to our success in this walk of faith. Benjamin Franklin is credited with the quote, “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” If we are hoping to be prepared for the shift that God is calling us to make, we must be willing to prepare our hearts, minds, and bodies, for the journey ahead. This portion of the devotion is intended to encourage and motivate you to warm-up for the work! When we warm up before training, we prepare our muscles to do the work in a manner that will not cause an injury. Being prepared may not make this journey easier, but it can ensure that what may be difficult is not destructive. So, let us get ready to do the work and warm up!

Day 1 – ASH WEDNESDAY

“Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for you in the field; and after that build your house”

Proverbs 24:27 ESV

One thing many of us are afraid to admit, but I am sure is true, is we do not read the instructions for things we think we know how to use. I recently purchased a thermos mug and after unwrapping it, I tossed my favorite hot tea in and began to enjoy. While sipping the tea I saw a small manual that I discarded when unwrapping that read, “Please clean in warm soapy water before first use.” I immediately panicked realizing that while I was ready to use it, it was not ready to be used. This text in Proverbs speaks about preparing the land that you have chosen to live on, before building a house to live in. How many of us have built homes on land that is not prepared to sustain us. Before we build relationship, career paths, or faith, can we be sure that where we build, is equipped to build us?

Prompt

Are there any areas of your life that you have built, before preparing “the land?”

Prayer

Lord, teach me to prepare the land, before I build. Continue to cover me as you prepare me for the work ahead.

Day 2

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10 ESV

We often think that following God and being a disciple of Christ means that God’s part in the process is simply to call us. But the truth of scripture is that before God called you, God was preparing a place for you in His purpose! The journey of faith for you, the one reading these words right now, has already been prepared. God prepared the path “beforehand,” to ensure you would have the capacity to follow the road laid before you. If God has called us to anything, we can confidently prepare ourselves, knowing that God has prepared us for it!

Prompt

Are there any areas of your life that you know God has called you to, but you are still walking in uncertainty?

Prayer

Lord, give me the strength to trust that wherever you have called me to, is already prepared for me.

Day 3

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 1:13 NIV

How fit are your thoughts? No, seriously! Before taking action, do you take the time to consider whether you have adjusted your mindset for what you are attempting to do? It is one thing to prepare to fast by clearing out your fridge of all the things that tempt you, but have you ever considered if you have prepared your mind to fast? Very often we operate with cluttered minds and then wonder why our focus is thrown off when things do not go the way we desire them to go. If you are sure that you have set your focus on the hope of God, then the preparation of becoming soberminded, will help to maximize what you need for the journey, while providing clarity on what you don’t.

Prompt

Is your mind the hurdle keeping you from where you are called to be?

Prayer

Lord, give me a mind to do what it is that you desire. Grant me the clarity to know what I need and the strength to pursue it.

Day 4

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Ephesians 6:11 NKJV

One of my favorite things to do is putting together an outfit for an important event. Whether it is out for a fancy dinner, an important meeting, or Sunday service, I love making sure that what I have on reflects my enthusiasm for being there. Not only does my attire need to match my enthusiasm, but it also must match what I am expecting to do when I get there. Putting on the armor of God is required for the journey of discipleship. Taking it a step further, are you dressed for success once you arrive in God’s purpose? We must be sure that we are putting on the things that reflect our excitement for God’s call. We must be “dressed” for the occasion. If you have on something that does not serve where God has placed you, allow Him to give you “the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness”(Isaiah 61:3 NKJV)!

Prompt

Are you dressed for success in your calling?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for clothing me in righteousness. Please continue to cover me in what I need to continue to follow you.

Day 5

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.”

1 Timothy 2:15 ESV

Most athletic trainers will not simply show up to hold your hand while you do each workout and prepare each meal. On the contrary, while many will work out with you periodically, athletic trainers give you a plan to use when they are not present. If you adhere to the plan, you are prepared for the work with the trainer. If you do not adhere, you may not be able to keep up with what is expected of you. As believers, we prepare by what we do in the moments when we believe our “trainer” isn’t watching. Knowing the plan is one thing, but following the plan and understanding its use in our daily life is what can make a dark situation come to light. As we prepare for what God has for us, we have to ensure that we are spending time engaging God’s plan, at all times.

Prompt

Have you engaged the truth of God for you, enough to engage and enact that truth in your life?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the plan of your truth. Help me understand it and give me the strength required to not just hear your truth but do what your truth requires.

Day 6

***“So always be ready, because you don’t know the day your Lord will come.”
Matthew 24:42 NCV***

“Stay ready so you don’t have to get ready” is a phrase that most athletes have heard at some point. The game is not won out on the field of play but is won by how you prepare for it. The time spent in preparation dictates the level of success you will experience in the test. Life is filled with pop quizzes of faith and as believers we are called to not simply live in faith, but by it. In doing so, we are ready when the call of God leads us to times of trial and testing. We can never predict when life will throw a curve ball our way, but our preparation ensures we can knock it out of the park.

Prompt

What are you doing to ensure your success in the next trial?

Prayer

Lord, help me to know what is required of me today, to be prepared for the good and bad days ahead of me.

Day 7

***“Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”
Colossians 4:2 NIV***

One of the many benefits of warming up before a workout, is to get a firm gauge as to how your body will respond to what you are about to do. Getting the body prepared for motion increases your ability to move. Spiritually we have the ability to prepare in that same way, though maybe not on a treadmill or an elliptical. By praying, we are listening to the concerns of our heart and our spirit to know what to be mindful of. By being watchful, we have the ability to know our surroundings and the things that can affect our movement. By being thankful, we can have a heart that understands that it is not of our own accord that we “live, move and have our very being” (Acts 17:18 NIV).

Prompt

What practices have you devoted yourself to, that allow you to be ready for the call and assignment of God?

Prayer

Lord, please give me what is necessary to serve you and guard my heart from being ungrateful for all that you have done and will do.

Day 8

“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”
Proverbs 16:3 ESV

In a recent visit to the gym, I saw a planned workout script that included affirmations. One that stood out to me is the phrase, “I am not doing it for them!” Curious because of the statement, I asked the staff about it, and they replied, “if we do it for them, then they have control.” If you are committed to this journey of faith, do not do it for you, or for your family. Do it for God. Commit yourself to God’s plan for you. If you do, success is certain, because you serve a God that can do anything but fail.

Prompt

Can you accomplish what God has called you to without the plan of God?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for knowing the plans that you have for me. May my commitment be to establish that plan in my life and be committed to your way.

Day 9

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.”
1 Corinthians 16:13 NIV

You have been preparing for this moment. Hear the voice of the ancestors speaking over you to live a life faithful to the God who created you, poured into you, fashioned you and holds you. This moment has been prepared for you and you for it. So, no just hanging in. You are called to STAND FIRM IN! You have prepared yourself with Sunday morning gatherings, amens, hallelujahs and Lord please. God heard and instructed. You responded by showing up and believing! You are ready for this- BE COURAGEOUS! Take hold of what is attempting to take hold of you and either rejoice or reject – no middle road. BE STRONG! Your gift is making room, even the one you told no one about. But God knows – BE ON GUARD! There are moments like this when you are questioning, and for what? Only to learn that this is the moment you have been prepared for. Face up, stand up, gird up, look up and do your part to receive what God has sent and is sending your way!

Prompt

Are you ready for what God will do next?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for giving me the awareness to be what you need, when you need it. I am ready for the next season that you have called me to.

Day 10

Today, focus and reflect on the things that you have read and that you have heard. Give yourself a moment to press into what God is “warming you up” to do. Sit with this scripture:

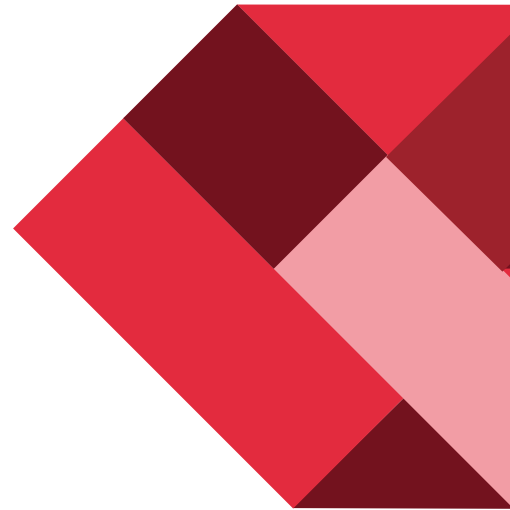
***“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.”
Proverbs 3:5-6 NRSV***

Spend some time in silent reflection, leaning into what the text is saying and when you are ready, answer this question: How much of what I do, who I am, and what I intend to become, is guided by my trust in God? Or are these things guided by my trust in my own ability? Write your thoughts and see if you are in a place to begin to carry the cross you were called to.

THE LIFT

To raise to a higher position or level.

It is incredible to think that the more you do a thing, the more efficient and adaptable you become to what it is that you are doing. Consider this, the more you sit in trial and tribulation, the more frustrated you become about other things, or worse, the more complacent you become about your circumstance. As disciples we are called to reach and lift to higher grounds. When our situation is low, our countenance should be high. When our life is confusing, we are to look up toward Christ. This is the hard work of discipleship. When you work out and endure resistance training, you are actively lifting a weight to a higher position, whether it be with bands, dumbbells, or free weights. As a disciple, the lifting we are called to may not cause us to flex in mirrors, but it will allow us to flex in God’s mercy and grace. In this section of the devotional, be encouraged to lift in the hard season and in seasons of confusion, because as you are lifting, God is drawing!



Day 11

“Jesus replied, No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Luke 9:62 NIV

The space between what is and what was is only as far or as near as you let it be. How close are you standing to yesterday? Will wasted energy cause you to miss today's possibilities? Your head, heart and feet should be aimed in the direction you hope to go. Adjust yourself accordingly. Do not miss Jesus reaching for you in the now because you are too enamored with what was. Step away from yesterday, and step toward the future with hope; toward the direction your name is being called, not faintly, but clearly. Your worth, work and life are ahead of you – God is your pillar of cloud guiding you into this day – follow Him. Yesterday will care for itself. Let today move you forward!

Prompt

Are you allowing what happened last to keep you from the light in front of you?

Prayer

God, please strengthen me to a new place. Give me grace when I look behind, and favor as you call me forward.

Day 12

Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.”

John 5:8 NRSV

In this scripture Jesus encounters an ill man, lying beside the pool of Bethesda, a healing pool in Jerusalem. Jesus commands him to stand up, carry his mat and enter the pool. Jesus is inviting this man into a relationship with God. Initially, the man retorts with reasons why he cannot be made well.

The power to walk was present with the man, but he was too afraid to continuously move. His attention was on his circumstance. But, when he shifted his attention to what was in front of him, and took action, he was made whole.

Let us proceed with an eye on the Lord and not on our circumstance, lest we miss the invitation to be co-laborers with God in producing a better congregational future.

Prompt

Are you strong enough to lift what you have laid on for comfort, and walk toward what God has for you?

Prayer

Lord, strengthen us that we may keep our attention on you and not become consumed or distracted by our circumstance.

Day 13

The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, “You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Deuteronomy 1:6 NASB

There is a saying by an unknown author, “A comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing ever grows there.” A strange truth about lifting weights is that the only way to get stronger is to lift past what was previously possible. If you want to grow, you must risk carrying something that may be too much for you currently. There must be added emphasis on currently because if you keep pressing and do not give up, then what was too big for you today, will be come too easy in your tomorrow. The trials and temptation that you have consistently struggled with are only “heavy” because you have yet to grab them, lift them, and place them on the altar. Where you are, was not meant to keep you, but to prepare you to do more!

Prompt

Are you ready to do more?

Prayer

God, help us realize that our growth is stunted because we have failed to lift our cares and concerns to you. Give us the courage to lift more to you.

Day 14

Jesus said to him, “If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes.” Mark 9:23 NRSV

One of the hardest things to grasp are the things we deem impossible. Some of the “heaviest lifting” we will ever do, is lifting our mind to a place to believe that what seems to be impossible, is possible in God’s hands. The true sign that you are doing the work of discipleship is when the list of things you question about God, become statements of faith about God. At one point you questioned if God could provide, until you met the Lord who provides. Push harder on the places that seem to be too much for you and allow them to become places where the full weight of God’s glory rests.

Prompt

Are you believing God for the impossible?

Prayer

Lord, I believe, help my unbelief in the impossible places!

Day 15

So be content with who you are, and do not put on airs. God's strong hand is on you; he'll promote you at the right time.

1 Peter 5:6 (MSG)

When you look in the mirror, do you like what you see? Too often we chase the images of others trying to become more than our reflection. It is very difficult to be someone else when you haven't fully blossomed into who God created you to be. We all go through growing pains, but we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" in the imago dei, image of God (Psalm 139:14 NIV). When we are vulnerable to God's purpose and plan for our lives, our character blooms into God's image and likeness. God desires us to be the best we can be. So as we flex and pose, we are not enamored by what we did, but in awe of what God created, when God created us!

Prompt

Are you grateful for the glory of God as revealed through you?

Prayer

Lord, help me love what you made so that I am grateful for what you will do as you lift me towards my calling.

Day 16

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have not seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

John 20:29 NRSV

Walking on a treadmill, running, or driving can be dangerous when done subconsciously, as are all things that we do confidently on a daily basis, based on our ability to see. And while that is true, it is also true that what you see can blind you to what you need. That the more you are acclimated to seeing progress, the less you give credence to the progress you need that you have not seen.

In today's Scripture, Jesus is not discrediting the value of belief in what you see but adds that a belief in what you cannot see must be acknowledged. Faith is grounded in the expectation of the tangible without knowing that what you are believing on will come. In this season, be willing to lean into God in a way that does not require us to see the growth but be diligent in trusting that God is causing the growth.

Prompt

In what area of your life is it difficult to believe the unseen work of God?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for sight, but give me the strength to believe the unseen things that you are doing!

Day 17

***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
Hebrews 11:1 ESV***

One of the most vulnerable places you can find yourself in the gym, is struggling to lift the weight that you have taken on. Heavy weight can go from something that is improbable to impossible in a second. The only thing that can cause you to even attempt to lift such weight is what you believe about it before you take it on. When you are under the weight of your circumstance what do you believe? Do you believe that you can carry it? The faith you have in this life is what will allow you to press toward the hope of growth and strength. So, before we rush to a place of wondering what will happen, do a faith check and be sure that no matter what, your assurance is placed in the hope of the one who told you that all things are possible!

Prompt

Are you sure that your hope has the potential to come to pass, or are you leaning on dead hope?

Prayer

God, we have struggled to find hope and the hope we have is not assured. Continue to help us grow in the assurance that You are our hope.

Day 18

“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”

James 1:2-3 NRSV

While growing up, I often heard that “your misery becomes your ministry.” While it is an optimistic approach to understanding our struggles in life, I find it more appropriate to believe that our misery prepares us for our ministry. Not in the sense that misery is the direction that God calls us to, but rather misery gives us the ability to learn how to stand in our God given purpose, even when the purpose becomes painful. If we have not learned to trust God, know God, and love God when our circumstances suggest that God is not covering us, then how can God trust us, when he has called us to produce and cover others?

What we need as believers is not to seek opportunities to simply be covered by grace, but allow the moments that we are covered in trial to find ourselves in God’s face.

Prompt

How do you manage your trials?

Prayer

God, help me to allow what You allow, to bring me closer to You.

Day 19

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely[a] on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew 5:10-12 NRSV

One of my favorite quotes comes from Strength to Love by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King states: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” Written in the 1960s, King learned to lead under the pressure of racism and injustice. If I could go back in time, I would ask him how his faith was strengthened when tested, and where did he find his strength to love “when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely.” As Christians, our faith grows under the pressure of challenge and controversy even as we are nourished like a seed by Christ’s love for us. No matter how your faith gets tested, you are reminded to “rejoice in the Lord always.” (Philippians 4:4 NIV)

Prompt

How is your faith nourished when the vicissitudes of life weigh you down?

Prayer

God, help me to rejoice in good and in bad times. Let me be mindful that despite what I am going through, I can rejoice in the Lord always for it is in You, Lord that I get my strength.

Day 20

Lifting and working out results in the tearing/breaking down of muscle fibers so that they can repair themselves, resulting in them being stronger and more resilient. The weight of struggle results in a rise in strength. Consider this text:

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:1-5 (NRSV).

What do you think are the ways your struggle has resulted in your success? As Fredrick Douglass stated, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” Spend time considering not how your trial has hindered you, but how it has helped you!

THE RUN

Moving at a speed faster than a walk, never having both feet on the ground at the same time.

Lifting is a skill of growing in strength and endurance. Cardio, like running, is about having the ability to move. It is less about staying where God has called you to, and more about moving in faith toward the new thing God has called you to do. This work requires a different type of endurance. Endurance that is birthed in the expectation that as you move, you not only can go longer but you can go farther. This section of the devotional is about building up our ability to run towards the call of God. As we continue in the “race” in each season, we can go further than the season before it! Successful runners train, have proper form and proper attire. No one can get off the couch and run a marathon, yet many jump into this faith journey believing that we can run the marathon of growing in discipleship and in faith. I ask that as you engage each devotional, you begin to train by writing the prayer and the prompt for yourself. Train your heart and mind for the race ahead of you by placing one foot of faith in front of the other!

Day 21

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Hebrews 12:1-3 NIV

Stay in your lane. For some, that is an offensive term to suggest that we are not able to do more than one thing. If we look at it from another perspective, “staying in your lane” suggests that there is a task set and mapped out, just for your feet to trod and that your success is contingent on your ability to run your race. Comparison kills. The expectation that you will get the benefits of someone else’s calling is not consistent with believing in a God who made you as an expression of His glory. Are you sure footed in your journey, or are you tracing the steps of others? God expects us to run with perseverance toward a finish line, with your name on it.

Prompt

Prayer

Day 22

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

2 Timothy 4:7 NIV

Upon hearing this scripture, many think about the end of life. However, the finished race should not always be viewed as the end of life, but as the end of certain stages in your journey. If you have ever raced, especially long distance, you often find that runners map their journey with specific markers to denote where they are. When they reach certain points, the part of the journey that is behind is over. Moreover, finishing the race doesn't mean there aren't more races to run. Just because a part of your journey has ended, does not mean your story is over. Contrarily, when the race you are running is over, it is time to train for the next race!

Prompt

Prayer

Day 23

“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?”

Galatians 5:7 NIV

One type of race I find interesting to watch are the hurdles. Running as fast as you can is one thing, but doing so while avoiding objects that you are closing in on is another. In so many ways, running the hurdles is a mirror image of life as a disciple of Christ. You must develop the ability to focus on the finish line, while avoiding things that keep you from moving forward. Hurdles are barriers in front of you that if you can get over them, the result is they are now under you. Trials are hurdles. Tribulation is a hurdle. They are never meant to stop you or redirect you. But a simple leap of faith can put it underneath you! Do not let your circumstance keep you from continuing your race of faith.

Prompt

Prayer

Day 24

“Then the LORD replied: “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.”

Habakkuk 2:2 NIV

In grammar school, one of the best ways to teach teamwork is to participate in a relay race. Winning the race is not simply a matter of your ability to run, but also your ability to execute the handoff and trust the next runner. We do not do this life of discipleship alone. We are in a journey toward Christ with those that preceded us and those that are after us. God’s plan began before us and extends beyond us. Our role as good followers of Christ is to carry our task to the next runner to complete their leg of the race. Let us not be so focused on our individual success that we forsake the goal of victory in the body of Christ.

Prompt

Prayer

Day 25

***“but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”
Isaiah 40:31 NIV***

Something that frustrated me the first time I tried it was running cross-country. While I understood the difficulty of the sport, I could never escape the feeling that the race would never end. I watched as people ran past me, feeling the pain rise in my legs and lungs. I could not help but to ask, when will this be over? Many of us find ourselves in this place in our life. We find it difficult to continue in what we are doing because we have grown weary and can't escape feelings of defeat. To this we must have the perspective of my coach at the time. He would often tell me that when you get tired, do not think about what you feel, but rather think on what you hope to feel. You start with a desire to finish the race and that grows and grows until you are consumed by the hope of victory. As a disciple, we are encouraged to lay hold of the victory that lies ahead of us in Christ. Weariness wanes when we place our hope in the Lord!

Prompt

Prayer

Day 26

“If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?”

Jeremiah 12:5 NIV

How do you handle adversity? One of the most difficult conditions to run in is when you must run against the wind. While running with the wind at your back can aid you, running against the wind can tire you. God never promised us that conditions will always be favorable on our journey. Often, we wait for conditions to get better but sometimes they get worse. Sometimes we not only have to deal with the winds of life, but also the storms of life. And the question we are confronted with is what will we do when the challenge we face seems more formidable than what we are prepared for? Are we establishing habits of trust today that will carry us through the increasing hardships and tests of tomorrow? Life is a set of mountains and valleys with a series of storms. You are either going into a storm, in a storm, or coming out of a storm, and there are various glimpses of blue sky in between. How are you responding? Do you really trust the Lord to see you through?

Prompt

Prayer

Day 27

***“I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.”
Psalms 119:32 NIV***

When moving with a destination in mind, often we have a path laid out before us. We have been given directions for the best way to get to our chosen destination. Our walk of discipleship requires us to be aware of the steps of the one we are following. When we are excited about the one we follow, we do not simply walk in the path of righteousness, we run in the path of God’s commands. We should desire to attain God’s grace, mercy and to be so overwhelmed by His glory that we rush toward what God has for us as the path is made clear, and the goal is made evident. As we venture toward the way of Jesus, we must be prepared to not simply focus on the end, but pursue the path of God’s direction.

Prompt

Prayer



Day 28

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Romans 5:3-4 NIV

While running can improve your overall health, the question often forgotten is why you are running? Too many of us are running from, and not running to. We are running from our past, running from our pain, and often running away from trial, turmoil, and tribulation. What we must understand is that more is often gained from failure than success. That is not to suggest that we should try to lose, but rather the pain of the loss often teaches us more about ourselves and our situation than any win can. Our trouble is critical to not only gain an understanding of what we are made of, but more importantly to discover who our God is. Never ignore what you have experienced, rather seek to unwrap the glory to be revealed through sufferings.

Prompt

Prayer

Day 29

“They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course.”

Joel 2:7 NIV

While watching sporting events, you may see teams gather before the game and proceed toward the field of battle together. One of the ways that we can be sure not to be deterred in our pursuit of God is that we do life together. We are to be so connected with those on the same path as us, that we align together to evidence the might and strength of the body. When running, every part of your body must be aligned. As the church we must ensure that all parts of the body of Christ are aligned so that we may all be successful. There is a strength and power that can only be revealed in you, if you pursue the battle, connected to those that Christ has called you to! Do not just get it alone, but in every way possible, GET IT TOGETHER!

Prompt

Prayer

Day 30

Running has many purposes. For some, running is an escape. For others, it aids in preparing for a task or an event. Take a second to consider this text:

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV).

Hopefully during this section of the fast you have asked yourself questions necessary to push you toward a life of discipleship. By now you should have a firm understanding of the prize you are running for. Are you running toward discipleship? Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of the cost of discipleship. When the cost is in view, many give up in the race because they fail to see the value. Have you determined that the prize you are pursuing in your faith is worth chasing?

Prompt

Prayer

THE STRETCH

To become extended in length and/or width without tearing or breaking.

After any workout it is incredibly important to stretch. We must be able to elongate the muscles that we have worked out to prepare it for the next work. Stretching in the correct way can relax the muscles and reduce the risk of strain and pain, while ensuring that the muscle stays toned and flexible. As a disciple, we often go through an experience that wears us out, and we never take a moment to breathe and reflect on what we experienced and how we can be and do better the next time! During this section of the fast, this is a time to breathe, to reflect, and to prepare for what your walk of discipleship will look like after the fast. Do not let this fast be the end of your journey but let it prepare you for the next season of sacrifice that God is calling you to!

Review the scripture for each day and reflect on the text that lends itself to you being silent, being still and being fully yourself! Do not simply read the reflection prepared for you but consider writing your own reflection as well. Each day builds on the previous day, so read them collectively or read it alone, whichever works best for your understanding of the text and the reflection.

Day 31

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

James 1:19 NIV

Being still may be the most difficult thing to do as believers. We’ve become so accustomed to the idea of doing that we forget that our “being” is more critical than our “doing.” We want movement, assuming that being still is being stagnant when that cannot be further from the truth. Even the writers of scripture support this truth claim. If you read the book of Psalms, you will often see the word ‘Selah.’ It is best understood as an instructive guide to stop and uplift, cast up or exalt God. Said differently, it is an instruction of stillness. Stillness was so vital in biblical times that the ancient church debated the nature of practicing the Sabbath as an instruction for rest. Can you be still in moments that you feel required to react? Can you rest from responding in moments that you are compelled to say something out of provocation? Listen to the heart of God so that you can hear what is required and not what you desire.

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer

Day 32

“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!”

Psalms 37:7 ESV

When we are moving and active, our attention is (or should be) on the things around us as we move. Our desire should be to be intentional with every step. Being still provides us with an opportunity to shift our focus from the things around us, to the things inside of us. Much of this world’s chaos is what we internalize. Our experiences inform our expectations which inform our expression of the faith we so desperately cling to in the storms of life. Remember the instruction and authority Jesus displayed in Mark 4:35 as Jesus rebuked the winds of the storm by saying “peace be still.” Maybe the joy, peace, love, grace, and mercy that you are looking for would be easier to grasp if we would cease being a part of the storm and seek instead the fruit and gifts of God in the space of being still.

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer

Day 33

“And to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you.”

1 Thessalonians 4:11 ESV

One of the reasons it becomes difficult for us to manage our lives is because we often place too much emphasis on how others are managing their lives. Said differently, too many of us cling to what others do instead of being still long enough to catch what God is doing and will do in our own lives. We avoid consideration of our own lives out of fear that way may discover something about ourselves that brings us to a place of responsibility and accountability. Knowledge of self affects our ability to move toward what we need to become. If we could only silence our hearts and minds long enough to hear God speak now, it would allow us to focus on who we are today and leave behind what we were yesterday, so that we might be prepared for our future. Jesus says, in the book of Matthew, that each day has enough worry for itself. If we draw that out, we can assert that each moment has its own worry and does not need us to add our own concern to it. Lift your ears so that you can hear what it is that God will have you to do. Said differently, MIND YOUR BUSINESS!

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer

Day 34

***“A time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak.”
Ecclesiastes 3:7 NIV***

It is always interesting to me the natural inclination we have to speak more than we listen. Many times, we find ourselves arguing and in disputes based on our inability to do one thing, to be silent. Noted in the idea of stillness, the act of prayer requires us to listen and that listening presumes our silence. As I was told as a child, the words “silent” and “listen” are derivatives of the same idea as proven by the use of the same letters to spell both. Being silent allows for us to not focus so much on being heard but our hearing. By being silent we surrender to the moment. We become aware of ourselves, our God, and our environment, making it possible to utilize the necessary and critical gift of discernment.

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer

Day 35

***“For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” But you were unwilling.”
Isaiah 30:15 ESV***

The direction to be silent is not to withhold that which God compels us to speak, but rather to give ourselves a moment to be assured that what we speak comes from a heart in pursuit of God and not a mind consumed by emotion. Stillness allows us to pause. That pause should be spent listening to yourself and more importantly to God. Silence allows you to assess what you need from God and shows a level of disciplined intent toward knowing and understanding God’s voice. As Jesus remarks in John 10:27, “My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me.” In this season, let us never stop speaking for the voiceless, but let us make space to be silent in pursuit of the will of God for our lives, our families, our church, and our world.

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer

Day 36

***“It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”
Lamentations 3:26 ESV***

What are you waiting for? As you sit silently and still reflecting on where you are, what is at the heart of what you are wanting to happen. If we narrow down our desire to its core, the heart of what we all desire, is to be saved. I do not necessarily mean that in a theological sense, but that we all have situations and circumstances that we want resolved. You, me, and those around us simply want to have our lives fixed. Many attempt to be the savior in their own stories. And while that may produce some wins, at what cost? What God presents to us, is the opportunity to be saved, not simply from the penalty of sin, but to have a provided way out of our situation. The escape, however, may only be achieved if we wait for the guidance of God. When putting our hands and understanding on it, we often begin creating a “to do list.” Resist the temptation to do and heed the guidance of God. Instead of rushing, just wait.

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer

Day 37

“The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered. Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.”

Proverbs 17:27-28 NIV

There is a quote that says, “Don’t argue with fools because from a distance people can’t tell who is who.” How often have you been so compelled to speak that you felt foolish by even engaging in the discourse? How often has the fool in the situation been you? Asked differently, how often have you spoken foolish words over and against the wisdom that God may have provided to be silent in the situation? Something we must learn in the recovery phase of our life is to be silent and listen for the voice of God, while sorting out the sounds of the foolish, even when... especially when, the voice of the foolish is our own.

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer

Day 38 – MAUNDY THURSDAY

“And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Romans 8:38-39 NLT

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer

Day 39 – GOOD FRIDAY

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”
Isaiah 53:5 NIV

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer



Day 40 – HOLY SATURDAY

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

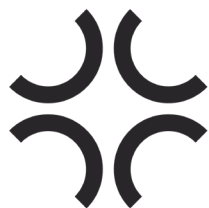
John 14:27 NKJV

My Reflection

Prompt/Questions

Prayer





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