

BIBLICAL FASTING

WHY FAST?

Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD. ~Joel 1:14

1. Jesus fasted.

Before He began His ministry, Jesus fasted forty days. He knew He was going to need spiritual strength to fulfill His purpose. Fasting makes us physically weak but spiritually strong and prepares us to do God's work.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. ~Matthew 4:1-2

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through the whole countryside. ~Luke 4:14

2. Fasting is an act of humility and consecration.

. . . I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. . . . ~Psalm 35:13

Humility results in the grace of God. When we humble ourselves in prayer, we have instant access to the heart of God. As we deny ourselves as an act of consecration, we are able to exercise self-control. We can keep our emotions and desires under control.

3. Fasting helps us become sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ~Acts 13:2

When we deny ourselves of our natural cravings, our spiritual antennas become sharper. We become more sensitive to His voice as we divest ourselves of worldly distractions. We are better able to focus on God and submit to His will. This opens the door for the Holy Spirit into our lives.

4. Fasting brings revival.

. . . in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. ~Daniel 9:2-3

Fasting helps us prevail in prayer and intercession. Daniel understood that Israel was headed for destruction. He also knew that in times like these, there is only one recourse – intercession through praying and fasting. Throughout human history, God has brought revival and delivered nations from destruction in response to prayer and fasting.

5. Fasting is healthy.

Fasting cleanses your digestive system from toxins. Doctors consider fasting a cure for certain allergies and diseases. By learning to deny ourselves and exercising discipline, fasting breaks unhealthy addictions in our lives.

When a man is willing to set aside the legitimate appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, he is demonstrating that he means business, that he is seeking with all his heart, and will not let God go unless He answers.

Arthur Wallis

HOW TO FAST SAFELY

As you begin your fast, you may hear from concerned loved ones and friends who urge you to protect your health. And they are right. You should protect your health. But I assure you, if done properly, fasting will prove to be a spiritual and physical blessing.

By all means, consult your doctor before you begin your fast. But, be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area, so their understanding is limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to make sure you are in good health. You may have a health concern that would make fasting unwise or dangerous. Also, if you are on any type of medication, make sure you talk to your doctor before changing your regimen. Prudence and caution are in order.

When you are assured that you are in good health, you are ready to begin your fast. Despite the absolute safety and benefits of fasting, there are certain persons who should NEVER fast without professional supervision.

For example:

- · Persons who are physically too thin or emaciated
- Persons who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders
- Those who suffer weakness or anemia
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs
- Individuals who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem such as hypoglycemia
- Women who are pregnant or nursing

PREPARING TO FAST

"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." ~ Esther 4:16

Spiritual and physical preparation is vital in sustaining a fast, no matter how long it may be.

- 1. Be in faith! Prayerfully and thoughtfully, fill out the daily reflections of this guide. Choose a prayer partner to stand in agreement with you; this person will be your accountability friend helping you stay on target from dietary and spiritual standpoints. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Be clear and specific about your faith goals in your personal life, family, finances, and church as seen on the back cover. These are what you will believe God for during the fast and the entire year. Expect God to answer. Maintain a thankful heart throughout and after the fast.
- **2. Plan your calendar.** Limit your physical and social activities during this period. You need to conserve physical energy and devote more time to prayer and reading the Bible.
- **3. Prepare spiritually.** In preparation for this special time with God, examine your heart and detect any unconfessed sin. Scripture records that God always requires His people to repent of their sins before He will hear their prayers. In your prayers, confess not only obvious sins, but less obvious ones as well. These may include worldly-mindedness, self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, unwillingness to share your faith in Christ with others, not spending sufficient time in God's Word and in prayer, or a poor relationship with your family members, your pastor, or other members of your church.
- **4. Prepare physically.** Be smart as you enter into this fast. Do not go to a buffet restaurant on the eve of the fast, hoping to stock up on food in your body. The key is to gradually prepare your body. Start eating smaller portions and meals seven days before you begin your fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable. Avoid food that is high in sugar and fat. Two days prior to the fast, eat raw fruits and vegetables only. Consult a physician if you need to.

DURING THE FAST

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men 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

1. Seek the Lord.

Commit to prayer and Bible reading during the times you usually allocate for meals. Be ready to respond when you hear from God. This guide also has a devotional that we encourage you to go through daily during the fast.

2. Commit to change.

Whatever God tells you or puts His finger upon, apply it immediately. If you need to make restitution, immediately contact people you have broken relationships with. If there are habits that need to change, make the adjustment immediately. Ask a trusted friend from your church to hold you accountable. (Have that person sign the back of this book.)

3. Practical tips

- a. Avoid medical and even natural herbal drugs. However, if you are under medication, these should only be withdrawn upon the advice of your doctor.
- b. Limit your physical activity and exercise. If you have a workout routine, adjust it accordingly. A daily one to three mile walk should be your maximum amount of exercise during an extended fast.
- c. Rest as much as you can.
- Maintain an attitude of prayer throughout the day. Intercede for your family, pastors, church, nation, our missionaries, world missions, etc.
- e. Drink plenty of clean water.
- As your body adjusts, be prepared for temporary bouts of physical weakness as well as mental annoyances like impatience, irritability, and anxiety.

Resources:

Check out www.TriumphCh.org. We will load the site with information like:

- Recipes
- Prayer Requests and Testimonies
- Frequently Asked Questions
- · Daily Devotionals
- Much More

MY THREE FRIENDS

Pray for people specifically. Pray for their personal needs. Try to look at life from their standpoint. What are the worries and joys, pressures and decisions, dreams and fears that they face?

Pray for those things.

- Pray about their spiritual life. What are the things that are keeping them away from God?
 Pray that God would soften their hearts and bring them to faith in Christ.
- If you are doing this as a group or with a friend, pray for their three friends also. Pray that
 the Lord would give opportunities to share something of His love with them.
- Believe that these three people will change during the 40 Days of Prayer & Fasting.

FOODS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR DIET **DURING THE DANIEL FAST...**

All fruits: These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned (watch for added sugar).

- Apples
- Lemons Limes
- Apricots Avocados
- Mangoes
- Rananas
- Melons
- Rerries
- Mulberry
- Blackberries
- Nectarines

Penches

Pineapples

Pears

Plums

Prunes

Raisins

Raspberries

Strawberries

Tanaelos

Tangerines

Watermelon

- Blueherries
- Onts Olives
- Boysenberries
- Breadfruit Oranges Papayas
- Cantaloupe
- Cherries
- Coconuts
- Cranherries
- Dates
- Fins
- Grapefruit
- Granes
- Grenadine
- Guava
- Honevdew melons
- Kiwi

All vegetables: These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or

canned (watch for added sugar).

- Artichokes
- Mushrooms
- Asparagus
- Mustard areens
- Beets
- Okra
- Broccoli Onions
- Brussel sprouts
 Parslev
- Cabbaae
- Peppers
- Carrots
- Potatoes Cauliflower Radishes
- Celerv

• Corn

- Rutabaaas Scallions Chili peppers
- Collard areens
- Spinach Sprouts
- Cucumbers
- Sauashes
- Eggplant Garlic
- Sweet potatoes Tomatoes
- Ginger root
- Turnins Watercress
- Kale
- Yams
- Leeks Lettuce
- 7ucchini
- Green heans

Whole Grains.

- Whole wheat flour
- Rice (preferably brown)
- Millet
- Quinoa e Onts
- Rolled onts
- Plain Oatmeal (not instant barley)
- Grits (no butter)
- Whole wheat pasta
- Whole wheat tortillas
- Plain rice cakes
- Popcorn
- 100% Whole wheat bread

Seeds.

- All nuts Sunflower
- Sprouts Sesame
- Ground flax Almonds
- Cashews
- Walnuts

Legumes:

- Dried beans · Kidney beans
- Black heans Pennuts
- (includes natural • Cannellini peanut butter)
- Pinto beans
- Beans
- Split peas Lentils
- Lentils Lupines
- Black eyed peas Peas
- Green beans
- Green peas

Liquids:

- Water (spring, distilled, filtered)
- Almond milk (naturally sweetened)
- Cashew milk (naturally sweetened)
- Soy milk (naturally sweetened)
- Herbal tea (caffeine free)
- 100% Fruit iuice
- 100% Vegetable juice

Other:

- Tofu
- Sov products
- Herbs
- Honey (small amounts)
- Sea salt (small amounts)
- Olive oil (small amounts)
- Spices (read the label to be sure there are no preservatives)
- Natural sweeteners

FOODS TO AVOID DURING THE DANIEL FAST...

- All animal products including all meat, poultry & fish
- White bread
- · All deep fried foods
- Caffeine
- Coffee (including decaf b/c it contains small amount of caffeine)
- Carbonated beverages

- · Energy drinks
- Foods containing preservatives
- Refined foods
- Food additives
- Refined sugar Sugar substitutes
- White flour
- Margarine Shortening
- Processed foods • High fat products
 - Butter
 - All leavened breads

- All dairy incl.
- Milk
- Cheese
- Yogurt
- Cream
- Eggs
- Alcohol Mayonnaise

ASH WEDNESDAY

March 5

Psalm 51:1-4, 10

Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!

Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!

Wash me completely clean of my guilt;

purify me from my sin!

Because I know my wrongdoings,

my sin is always right in front of me.

I've sinned against you—you alone.

I've committed evil in your sight.

That's why you are justified when you render your verdict,

completely correct when you issue your judgment.

Create a clean heart for me, God;

put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!

Everyone struggles with sin . Sin emerges from natural instinctual desires that get out of whack . It leads to thoughts, attitudes, and actions that hurt others and ourselves . Some are subtle, others more damaging . All negatively impact our relationship with God . You've likely already had yours flash across your mind . Ash Wednesday pushes Christians into this difficult truth . Yet it points to the path for realignment . Ashes remind us that we are going to die and have done things contrary to love . Confession is a first step . For 40 days, you'll intentionally turn toward God through prayer, fasting, and opening your heart to Jesus's transformative love . David, a chosen prophet of God, confesses to God after committing egregious acts: an affair, a cover-up, and orchestrating murder . Perhaps you can't relate to "big sins ." Some of you can . No matter, all sin separates you from God, from others, and from yourself . Like David, plea for mercy and grace.

Get on your knees. Name your sins in your own words. Plea for grace and ask God for a clean heart.



Matthew 6:1-2a

"Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people."

Jesus instructed the disciples to do good deeds and religious practices differently. It was profound, difficult, high-level teaching then, just as it is now. Jesus exposed the hidden or unconscious motivations of the religious leaders. People's unseen motives for spirituality and giving to the poor near synagogues and in the streets were intended to draw attention to them—not God. We aren't much different. People seek attention in the virtual world online, including followers of Jesus and current religious leaders. We are drawn to the spotlight, to glory, and to influence what others think of us. It's normal for us to seek approval. We want to be good, honorable, and moral people. Yet, when we highlight the ways we serve, worship, and give, it is more for us than for God. Others might not be able to see it, but God can. Jesus declares that other people's praise will be our only reward. Do it in secret next time you give something to someone, serve, or pray. And God will get the glory.

Pray: God, guide my spiritual practice to be done in secret. When I seek outer affirmation, refocus my motivation to be done for your glory.

Amen.



Matthew 6:19-21

"Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Humans are on the hunt for "more." It's baked into the human condition. It's expressed in the drive to acquire, collect, and store; it is seen in individuals, groups, and nations. We desire more power, status, possessions, and security — no matter whether there is scarcity or abundance. Review the contents of your thought world. Examine how and where you invest your time (calendar). Survey the ways you spend your money and invest your God-given talent and gifts. That's where your heart is. Jesus says in so many words that the "treasures" we chase disappear. They're temporary, like an evaporating fog in the rising sun. God yearns for a deeper relationship with you. When you invite God to shape your life, your energies, talents, and thoughts become more Christ-centered. You'll seek less the impermanent treasures of this world, and be more attentive to finding God in prayer, meditation, the Scriptures, and everyday life. You'll practice extending the same forgiveness and grace that you've experienced in Christ Jesus, and rest in the deep reality of God's love for you, your neighbors, enemies, and the world. Day by day, God will reconstruct your heart as you store up a different kind of treasure. And your heart will be God's.

Pray: God, align my heart's desire for your treasure, not the world's. Amen.

March B

Isaiah 58:5-8

Is this the kind of fast I choose, a day of self-affliction, of bending one's head like a reed and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Isn't this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke? Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and you will be healed quickly. Your own righteousness will walk before you, and the LORD's glory will be your rear guard.

God wants justice for the forgotten and oppressed. Not only through acts of mercy but through active engagement to shift the conditions that crush them. Isaiah is speaking for God and is pointing to the people's hypocrisy. They are pining after God's favor through all kinds of rituals of prayer and fasting. Yet, they simultaneously ignore the oppressed, the mistreated, the naked, and the hungry. God wasn't impressed. Many of us prefer worship and rituals over engaging in the work of justice. Jesus said follow me, not worship me. But finding ways to do justice isn't easy. We aren't sure how. Jesus invites us to gaze upon the places in the world or our community that break our hearts. It is there that you might be called.

Pray: God, illuminate ways for me to participate in untying the ropes of injustice so that Your Light shines. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

March 9

Psalm 91:1-2, 14-16

"Living in the Most High's shelter,
camping in the Almighty's shade,

I say to the LORD, "You are my refuge, my stronghold!
You are my God—the one I trust!"
God says, "Because you are devoted to me,
I'll rescue you.

I'll protect you because you know my name.
Whenever you cry out to me, I'll answer.
I'll be with you in troubling times.
I'll save you and glorify you.
I'll fill you full with old age.
I'll show you my salvation."

Sundays are not counted in the forty days of Lent because they serve as "little Easters." Lenten sojourners are called to pause from repentance, fasting, and denial for one day to remember that Resurrection Day is coming. Little Easters offer sustenance for the remaining journey. Psalm 91 connects us to the reality that God's presence is so near to us that his shade covers us, no matter the circumstances we are facing. Call to mind a difficult situation in your life or a loved one's. Cry out to Jesus Christ. Believe that God will both accompany you as you trudge the road to the cross and show you his salvation—which will elicit deep joy and prompt your praise for who God is and all that God has done.

Bring to mind a situation when God has met you in a challenge. Thank God and experience the power of today's Little Easter.

Luke 4:1-2a

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There he was tempted for forty days by the devil.

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. That's troubling. Equally distressing is that it occurs immediately after his affirmation by God and his experiencing being "full of the Holy Spirit." The wilderness is a dangerous and unwelcoming place. Worn down, Jesus encounters the devil who peddles deception in an attempt to thwart God's redemptive plan for creation. The wilderness is an experience of struggle, deception, and seduction. But it is a necessary experience that prepared Jesus to live his mission. And we will be drawn there too. Following Jesus means temptation. Receiving God's Holy Spirit necessitates engaging with subtle and strong powers that attempt to deceive you from God's path for your life. They will come in large decisions and small. Whispers fill your mind and heart when you are weak and will point you to an alternative path—one that edges God out. They will be powerful and seductive. Like Jesus, you can resist. It won't be easy and you will feel alone. You aren't. Utilizing scripture and calling upon God will enable you to endure them.

Breathe deeply. Name a reoccurring temptation that prevents you from being all you can be and offer it to God. Ask Jesus Christ to give you strength. Find a scripture that you can memorize and proclaim in your struggle.

Luke 4:2b-4

"He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. The devil said to him, "Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

Jesus replied, "It's written, People won't live only by bread."

The devil is twisting three normal, human instinctual desires in the wilderness: the drive for security and survival, power and control, and approval and pleasure. All are necessary to live. By the nature of being born, all humans struggle with them. In Luke, the devil's first temptation prompts Jesus to wrestle with the normal drive for security and survival. We all have physical and security needs. The devil attempts to sow a seed of doubt by acknowledging that Jesus is God's son, but suggesting that he ought to prove it by performing a miracle that will provide for his hunger and ensure his survival. Jesus resists by connecting back to what God did in Exodus, providing sustenance for his people from heaven. He cites Deuteronomy 8 as a defense.

We struggle with acquiring more than we need. We seek more money, more things, more security. Within each of us, there's a fear of scarcity. We are tempted to believe that if there is enough in the bank, retirement, or things that will ensure security and survival, we will be secure. Those things aren't bad or wrong. But the drive for them and not trusting God to provide is the temptation everyone must contend with. God is enough.

Reflect upon ways you are experiencing fear around not having enough. Ask God to enable your trust and to rely upon God's grace, love, and provision.

Luke 4:5-8

"Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. The devil said, "I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It's been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It's written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him."

The devil contorts the natural drive for power and control into a shortcut to ultimate power and unlimited influence. To have it, all Jesus needs to do is worship the devil. It was a profoundly tempting offer that would bypass God's plan. Jesus could skip suffering to be king. He rebukes the offer with Deuteronomy, knowing that the power of God doesn't come from violence or the threat of violence, but powerless love. While you haven't been offered kingdoms, shortcuts have presented themselves to you. All that it would require is to bow down and prioritize them over God. The struggle with and for power and control shows up for us in our environments, relationships, and roles. We want agency. Shortcuts that circumvent suffering are tempting. What is inviting your worship and loyalty that is not of God?

Talk to God in your voice. Pray to God to reveal to you any tempting shortcuts and to give you the strength to be loyal to Jesus Christ.



Luke 4:9-12

The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here; for it's written: He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone."

Jesus answered, "It's been said, Don't test the Lord your God."

In the third temptation, the devil uses two tactics to trick Jesus: doubt and scripture. The last instinctual drive that the devil attempts to twist is the natural desire to seek out and receive others' approval and praise. He first plants a seed of doubt. He subtly questions whether Jesus is God's Son and wants him to prove it. The other tactic is using scripture. This should be a warning to us. Evil can use scripture. When it is used, it often is perverted for self-gratification rather than for God's glorification. If he had taken him up on it, unimaginable adoration would have ensued. All of Israel would have likely bowed down and worshipped him. But Jesus asks his followers (and us) to follow him. You are a child of God and need not prove it to others. Trusting that we are children of God removes the need to seek others' approval so we receive their love, glory, and honor.

Fill your belly by taking ten deep breaths. During the inhalation, say silently the word "Faith." On the exhalation silently say the word "doubt" and picture it leaving you.

Luke 4:13

After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

Jesus successfully resisted the devil's temptation, and he finally left him. However, not forever. The Bible doesn't tell us when he visited him again. Maybe it was in the Garden of Gethsemane or on the cross. Or perhaps it was when he was amassing many followers after his miracles. For some of us, temptations come in the dark of the night when we are suffering from misfortunes and troubles that show up in the course of life. For others, it isn't when we are low, but when successes come. Following Jesus to the cross always means we will wrestle with temptations. There will be times when we make our own way, rely upon our strength and not God's, or give in to worldly pleasures that divert us from the love of God, neighbor, enemies, and healthy self-love. Reflect upon the times when you have been most tempted. Is it when things are going well, going poorly, or when you are bored? Ask God to reveal them to you. First Corinthians 10 reminds us that "But God is faithful. He won't allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it."

Pray: God, I give thanks for your faithfulness. Reveal my patterns of temptation and ways for me to rely upon You. Amen.



Romans 10:9-13

Because if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and in your heart you have faith that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Trusting with the heart leads to righteousness, and confessing with the mouth leads to salvation. The scripture says, All who have faith in him won't be put to shame. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all and gives richly to all who call on him. All who call on the Lord's name will be saved.

Paul says that your ability to keep the law isn't what makes you righteous. Our culture says otherwise. "If we are decent folks, live somewhat moral lives, then it's good enough." Another name for this is "works-based" righteousness. Paul pokes holes in this well-held belief, saying the essentials are to confess Jesus is Lord and have faith that God raised Jesus from the dead. That's it. Your family, religious tradition, and good behavior won't cut it. Believe that God raised him for you, us, the world, and turn your life over. The essentials come easier when you are confronted with just how broken, sinful, and immoral you are or have been. Paradoxically, misalignment paves the way to realignment. Call out to Jesus, confess, and be saved. Salvation begins now and is secured for eternity.

Breathe in deeply and invite God into the places where you rely on yourself rather than God.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

March 16

Genesis 15:1

After these events, the LORD's word came to Abram in a vision, "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your protector. Your reward will be very great."

Everyone has fear. The places or situations that make you unsettled have probably already entered your mind. "Don't be afraid" is one of the most common phrases in the Bible, usually accompanying an angel delivering shocking and unbelievable news that troubles whoever is receiving it. In this passage, Abram is afraid. He has embarked on a seemingly strange and impossible journey. He is wondering if God has made a mistake. You might have not heard God in a vision or had an angel visit you. Yet you, like Abram, are a part of God's redemption plan. God is calling you to something. I don't know what it is, but it is likely to be a journey that leads out of what you know and toward a deeper love of God, others, and maybe even yourself. If you say yes, you will be scared. At times you'll question the wisdom of it all, wondering if you want to continue. Name your fears and ask God for his presence. Look up at the sky and remember, you are not alone. Ask God to reveal the journey for which you are chosen. And then hear God's words to you: "Don't be afraid, _____. I am your protector. Your reward will be very great."

As you breathe in, silently repeat the word "God." As you exhale, silently say the word "journey."

Psalm 27:1

The LORD is my light and my salvation.

Should I fear anyone?

The LORD is a fortress protecting my life.

Should I be frightened of anything?

Perhaps Jesus was channeling Psalm 27 in Matthew 10:28. He tells the disciples not to be afraid of those who can kill the body but not the soul. As you give your life—your thoughts and actions—over to following Jesus, you live salvation. But what does that practically look like? It means we practice living the virtues of faith, hope, and love. When doubt, despair, and disdain or hate creep into our minds and hearts, we claim that we will have faith, hope, and practice a fearless love. As we believe and live like God is the light, it will bring us at odds with others. It will necessitate that you engage people and systems that harm, hurt, and dominate individuals or groups. The Hebrews and then the disciples faced threats of violence, actual physical harm, and death. Many met that fate. Most of us won't. Yet, you likely will experience negative impacts as you continue your walk with Jesus Christ. It could be personal relationships, your reputation, or your bank account that is affected. Should you fear? You might, but remember, God is protecting you and will never leave you.

In your prayer, name the places where you can claim faith.

Psalm 27:4-5

I have asked one thing from the LORD—

it's all I seek:

to live in the LORD's house all the days of my life,

seeing the LORD's beauty

and constantly adoring his temple.

Because he will shelter me in his own dwelling

during troubling times;

he will hide me in a secret place in his own tent;

he will set me up high, safe on a rock.

The iconic 1991 movie City Slickers posed an important question:

What's your one thing? Billy Crystal is the unsatisfied city slicker trying to find himself through a cowboy adventure. Jack Palance is a tough cowboy with an unpleasant disposition who challenges him to answer the question so he can discover the meaning of life. In Psalm 27, King David has discovered it. It's God, and he seeks to live it out by seeing God's beauty and adoring God in the temple. He proclaims that God will shelter him in troubling times (not that they won't happen) and provide safety. Jesus Christ shelters, protects, and saves. Psalm 27's reminder is that Jesus Christ is with us—with you. Right here and now. If things are comfortable, God is there. If life is unsettling—inside you or around you—God will not abandon you. No matter what. Seek Jesus Christ like it is the one thing and not only will you begin to live in union with God, but you will discover God's beauty and experience protection.

Hit your knees. Ask God how you can practically live in God's Presence today. Intentionally "seek" God's beauty. Gaze at the sky, the landscape, or in a loved one's eyes. When you see, share your gratitude.

Genesis 15:2-5

But Abram said, "LORD God, what can you possibly give me, since I still have no children? The head of my household is Eliezer, a man from Damascus." He continued, "Since you haven't given me any children, the head of my household will be my heir."

The LORD's word came immediately to him, "This man will not be your heir. Your heir will definitely be your very own biological child." Then he brought Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think you can count them." He continued, "This is how many children you will have."

Abram is skeptical. Understandably so. He doesn't think that God's reward will be great because he and his wife are old and have no children. No children would have indicated a lack of favor from God. In Luke 18, Jesus says it's hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom and that it is easier for a camel to get through the pin of a needle than a rich person to enter God's kingdom. Someone asks, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus reiterates what God said to Abram. What is impossible for humans is possible for God. Abram and the disciples couldn't see what God saw. Neither can you. Perhaps something in your life isn't changing. Or somebody dear to you is stymied. You have surveyed the conditions and circumstances and made the discernment that change isn't coming. You could be right—or you can't see what God can.

Talk to God in your voice about the situation or circumstance that looks impossible. Look up at the sky and survey all that God has made.

Philippians 3:17-19

Brothers and sisters, become imitators of me and watch those who live this way—you can use us as models. As I have told you many times and now say with deep sadness, many people live as enemies of the cross. Their lives end with destruction. Their god is their stomach, and they take pride in their disgrace because their thoughts focus on earthly things.

"Imitation is the greatest form of flattery" is a well-known saying. With regards to this passage, it might go, "Imitation is the greatest form of discipleship." Paul tells the church to pattern their lives after his. There were people influencing the church to believe that one had to be circumcised or follow certain food laws in order to be a Christian. Paul asserts that they are living as enemies of the cross and not to model their faith and life around them. Disciples of Jesus are to reflect the likeness of Jesus. That means that we must imitate the things that Jesus did. Paul is providing the church his example. He illustrates Christ's love and reminds them to keep the main thing, the main thing. We need examples in the here and now because who you learn faith from matters. Who lives out love and practices their faith in Jesus Christ in a way that inspires you? If someone imitates your faith in Jesus, what would that look like?

Contact a person who has shaped your faith and whose life exemplifies faith in Jesus Christ. Tell them the ways they've impacted you. If they are not present, offer a prayer of gratitude for their witness and impact.

Philippians 3:20-4:1

Our citizenship is in heaven. We look forward to a savior that comes from there—the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform our humble bodies so that they are like his glorious body, by the power that also makes him able to subject all things to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters whom I love and miss, who are my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord.

A friend of mine has an unusual calendar hanging in his house. It keeps an account of the approximate number of weeks he has remaining in his life based on his average life expectancy. Each week he fills in a small dot that indicates that he is one week closer to his demise. While the practice is sobering, it offers a meaningful, ongoing reminder that life is temporary and death will make an appearance sooner rather than later. Paul says that Christian citizenship is rooted in heaven and is the most important citizenship we hold. Paul understood this since he was a citizen of Rome which offered him certain rights. Yet in death, those rights conclude. Not for citizens of heaven. Sooner rather than later, you will pass from this life. Paul says that those in Christ experience a bodily resurrection; a transformation from what we were to something like Christ's glorious body. All of this is reliant upon our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ's power. Stand firm in the Lord.

Reflect upon the reality that someday you will pass from this existence and be transformed into new life that you'll receive. Pray to stand firm in Christ.

Luke 13:34-35 (Sorrow for Jerusalem)

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you! How often I have wanted to gather your people just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you didn't want that. Look, your house is abandoned. I tell you, you won't see me until the time comes when you say, Blessings on the one who comes in the Lord's name."

It is easier to "hear" this passage when we think Jesus is speaking to someone else. Present-day hearers can distance themselves from its stinging truth that way. The first hearers wanted a messiah who would expel the occupiers by enacting violence and leveraging the threat of violence. This is how they believed that God's kingdom would be restored and maintained. Jesus foreshadows the people's desire for this type of king by predicting that they will soon chant, "Blessings on the one who comes in the Lord's Name" as he rides into Jerusalem. The reality is that we aren't too different. Churches and governments have squashed the voices of prophets and have relied upon the power, prestige, influence, and viciousness of the world rather than the powerlessness of a crucified Savior. Jesus Christ desires to gather us. But at times, we resist.

Read the text again. Listen as if Jesus is directly speaking to you. Imagine Jesus addressing you, your religious leaders, and your congregation. Ask God for forgiveness and for the strength to trust in the way of peace.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

March 23

Isaiah 55:1-3

All of you who are thirsty, come to the water!
Whoever has no money, come, buy food and eat!
Without money, at no cost, buy wine and milk!
Why spend money for what isn't food,
and your earnings for what doesn't satisfy?
Listen carefully to me and eat what is good;
enjoy the richest of feasts.
Listen and come to me;
listen, and you will live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful loyalty to David.

Isaiah's 55th chapter is written after Israel's long experience of exile. God's people suffered many difficulties. During their extended stay in captivity, hope was challenging. They questioned where God was in the scarcity and struggle. They wondered if God had forgotten his covenant with David. But now, all of that is over. No more captivity, no longer must they live as if God is absent. Freedom reigns for the first time in generations. God's people are invited to God's divine banquet—an everlasting banquet. This was good news. The covenant that they believed was broken was reestablished. That's what it can feel like for us when we go through a long period of difficulty and our connection with God is hindered for whatever reason. God raised Jesus long ago—so the victory has already been secured. We repent, sacrifice, and self-examine in Lent. But today we remember that Easter is coming and God's everlasting covenant is secured.

Close your eyes and remember the power of God's forgiveness, grace, and abundance. Name three things for which you are grateful. God invites you to eat, drink, and enjoy on this Sunday.

Isaiah 55:6-9

Seek the LORD when he can still be found;
call him while he is yet near.

Let the wicked abandon their ways
and the sinful their schemes.

Let them return to the LORD so that he may have mercy
on them,
to our God, because he is generous with forgiveness.
My plans aren't your plans,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my plans than your plans.

Isaiah says we don't get God's plans. And we can't, because God's plans are God's plans. They are mostly a mystery because we are incapable of seeing the beginning, middle, and end of all things. Our vision is incomplete and limited to a snapshot in time. A puff of smoke in the wind. That means that many of our thoughts and plans—although well-intentioned—may not be in alignment with God. Isaiah is writing to the exiles who have been in a foreign land, disconnected, sinful, and forgetful. What behavior is producing guilt? What thought patterns are leading you away from love? Isaiah's reminder to those returning from their exile applies to you: seek God; abandon the thoughts and behaviors that sever your relationship with God, others, and yourself. God is waiting to extend extravagant mercy to you. No matter how little or how fervently you have sought God, and no matter the depth of your immoral behavior and sinful thought patterns—God's forgiveness awaits.

Get the answers to the questions in your mind. Plead for strength, confess, and ask God for forgiveness.

Luke 13:1-5

"Some who were present on that occasion told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices. He replied, "Do you think the suffering of these Galileans proves that they were more sinful than all the other Galileans? No, I tell you, but unless you change your hearts and lives, you will die just as they did. What about those eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them? Do you think that they were more guilty of wrongdoing than everyone else who lives in Jerusalem? No, I tell you, but unless you change your hearts and lives, you will die just as they did."

An age-old question is posed to Jesus with another lurking just beneath it. Jesus is asked whether tragedy befell on people because they sinned more boldly than others. He answers unequivocally and addresses the lurking question of, "Did they deserve it?" Jesus asserts that they died not because they are more sinful; and he doesn't speak to why they died. The amount of sinfulness isn't the issue. Pivoting quickly, Jesus delivers a difficult message: Change your hearts and lives or you'll die too. Yikes. Seems harsh. Jesus is calling each of us to change and become more like him. Everyone falls short, including you. We can start anew with repentance, which is the foundation of change.

Contemplate what needs to change in your life. Invite the Holy Spirit to shift your attitude, beliefs, and thoughts.

Luke 13:6-9

Jesus told this parable: "A man owned a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. He said to his gardener, 'Look, I've come looking for fruit on this fig tree for the past three years, and I've never found any. Cut it down! Why should it continue depleting the soil's nutrients?' The gardener responded, 'Lord, give it one more year, and I will dig around it and give it fertilizer. Maybe it will produce fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'"

Jesus reiterates his message from the previous five verses: Repent or perish. God is the owner who plants the fig tree in his vineyard. Jesus is the gardener, and the people are the tree. God returns each year to see how its health and growth are doing. And for three years, the results have been nil, zero. It's not only failing to produce, which is bad enough. Worse, it is depleting the nutrients from the soil which will affect the growth of the other trees. The owner wants to cut it down. The gardener pleads with the owner for patience. He still believes in the possibility of the tree's growth. He outlines a healing regimen for its stagnation. He will dig around the tree and infuse it with fertilizer to spark its growth. If in a year it doesn't produce, it will be removed. What is the fruit on your tree?

Read the scripture slowly. Imagine yourself there. After the reading is complete, picture yourself asking the gardener what fertilizer you need for a more fruitful life.

1 Corinthians 10:3-7

All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. However, God was unhappy with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. These things were examples for us, so we won't crave evil things like they did. Don't worship false gods like some of them did, as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink and they got up to play.

Paul's message in this passage to the church at Corinth is, "Learn from their mistakes." He is referencing the Israelites' time wandering in the desert while they were waiting for the promise of entering the Holy Land. But their lower appetites and desire to worship things other than the one true God were preventing it from being realized. The church and the Israelites had things in common. They were chosen by God for a mission, given instructions, provided for, called to be a light to the world, and were aimlessly wandering off course. In verses eight through ten, Paul warns them to not fall into sexual sin, to put Christ to the test, or to complain. They turn back toward God.

Take a few deep breaths. Invite the Holy Spirit into your life. Request that God's love will rule in your life today.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has seized you that isn't common for people. But God is faithful. He won't allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it.

Paul builds off his warning to the Corinthians not to repeat the mistakes of the Israelites. He states that temptations are normal and that yours are not unique. He offers good news: There is a way through them. The temptation that you experience can be subtle or overt, approved by the culture or considered taboo, well disguised or not at all. Chances are that you know most of the ways you are tempted. By their very nature, temptations run counter to God's vision for our lives and are rooted in seeking "too much" of a natural desire. Whether it is seeking sex, money, approval, or pleasure, too much of a good thing usually isn't a good thing. Some desires are rooted in your past hurts or an overcompensation for something you didn't have. You seek connection in people or things that are fleeting. Seeking Jesus Christ offers freedom from the unhealthy habits, hang-ups, and wounds we experience during the course of life. Paul asserts that no matter the temptation and its grip on our thoughts and minds, God has given us the ability to resist and a way out. But it will take reliance rather than defiance. The Holy Spirit will guide you to know the action to take. Ask and it will be revealed.

Pray for the strength to resist and for the best way out.

Psalm 63:1

God! My God! It's you—

I search for you!

My whole being thirsts for you!

My body desires you

in a dry and tired land,

no water anywhere.

King David is in the wilderness. Uncertainty clouds his future. Will he make it out alive? He says his whole self longs for God. Maybe it is fueled by love. Perhaps it is a mixture of his profound love of God and the tangible fear of his bleak circumstances. Bring to mind a season when you felt like you were in the wilderness. A time when you wondered if God would show up, and you didn't see a way forward. In the remaining verses of Psalm 63, David declares his trust in God's presence, power, and glory. He believes that God will show up, provide protection, and his enemies will be conquered. And he proclaims this amidst his unknown future. Think about something uncertain in your life, the community's, or the world's. God's invitation today is to seek God, to thank God for God's powerful presence, and to believe that God is at work—in the uncertainty of the wilderness and in the Promised Land.

Practice breath prayer for 2 minutes. On your in-breath, quietly say "Jesus." During your exhale say, "Trust."

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 30
Psalm 32:1-5

The one whose wrongdoing is forgiven, whose sin is covered over, is truly happy!

The one the LORD doesn't consider guilty—
in whose spirit there is no dishonesty—
that one is truly happy!

When I kept quiet, my bones wore out;
I was groaning all day long—
every day, every night!—
because your hand was heavy upon me.

My energy was sapped as if in a summer drought.
Selah
So I admitted my sin to you;
I didn't conceal my guilt.

"I'll confess my sins to the LORD," is what I said.
Then you removed the guilt of my sin. Selah

Forgiveness heals the forgiven. Psalm 32 offers a picture of the nature of forgiveness. King David offers a way to usher it in, and he contrasts the state of being forgiven with living in guilt. He knew both states intimately; so do you. When we block ourselves with dishonesty and silence, a weight falls upon us that inhibits freedom. Energy depletion, repetitive thoughts, and a shameful sense of self ensue when our thoughts, behavior, and outcomes are misaligned with God's love. The weight can emerge slowly, building up over time, or drop on us suddenly. The vivid description of bones wearing out, groaning all day long, and energy-sapping summer drought reigns true. Yet, the simplicity of admitting guilt and turning to God to confess frees us for true happiness. This week we will be diving into a great exploration of forgiveness through the Prodigal story. Admit, confess, and be joyful! In and through Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

If you have unconfessed wrongs, confess, and enjoy the true forgiveness found in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!" God caused the one who didn't know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God.

Paul is begging for the church in Corinth—which was a mess—to be reconciled to God. Paul asserts that they must be ambassadors of reconciliation. A Christ-ambassador represents Christ tangibly in their lives and as a faith community. They must serve, live the greatest commandment, and forgive everyone like their Lord and Savior. Additionally, Christ-ambassadors share God's saving work on the cross and resurrection for the world, reconciling a shattered humanity with God and not counting their brokenness, stupidity, hate, stubbornness, and all sinfulness against them. Paul pleads with them (and you) to remember, acknowledge, experience, live, and share that truth.

How are you expressing reconciliation with God to the world? Can the world see it? Are your family, friends, church, community, and enemies experiencing the ministry of reconciliation? It might be the only Bible they ever read. Paul is begging...represent Christ.

On your knees, ask God to reveal to you the way you can live reconciliation and be an ambassador today.



"All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him.

The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

The power of the Prodigal story reveals the stunning nature of God's grace extended to EVERYONE, scandalous to "moral" people and "religious leaders." Their opposition was well-founded, based upon scripture and church tradition. Yet, the story was a salve to people who believed and who were told that they weren't worthy of God's love because of their family, nationality, behavior, or ability to purchase the appropriate sacrifices to keep "the law." Modern-day Christians and "spiritual" people have a difficult time comprehending the Pharisees' and Bible experts' shock and outrage because most have heard the story. The exclusion and judgmentalism are so evident to us. Yet . . . I suspect that we are allured into believing that we would have been different. We would have welcomed Jesus's message and not resisted it, which is a generous perspective. As the stories, words, and messages cascade into our minds and hearts this week, God's grace can reveal that we have parts of every character within us; and that God's grace extends even there.

Is there a group of people you find yourself grumbling about? Does a political party, politician, family member, coworker, or institution come to mind? Jesus tells you this parable.

Read Luke 15:1-32. Imagine yourself in the story. Pray for the person or group that you grumble about.



"Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the inheritance.' Then the father divided his estate between them. Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living."

The younger son's unusual request for what he was not yet due—the inheritance—would have heaped shame upon the whole family and maybe even the town. The request was disgraceful and unheard of in their culture. Asking for it ahead of his father's death and before his older brother received his share was steeped in greed, arrogance, and entitlement. Strangely, the father satisfies the request. Not long after, the younger son takes what was given, departs, and wastes all of the inheritance on debauchery. Why did the father say yes? Reflection on his answer could lead to the conclusion that he was profoundly generous or amazingly unwise. The father could have said no; instead, he offered him freedom of choice. His decision reflects God's gift to humanity—free will. Some things you can't choose, like parents; genetic makeup; and the cultural, social, economic, and faith environments in which you were shaped. However, free will ensures your agency to respond to blessings and challenges, and how you allocate and invest your time, talents, strengths, and money. You can be greedy or generous. Today, remember that you get to choose.

Thank God for your life and for the freedom of choice. Find one tangible way to be generous today.



"When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, but I'm starving to death! I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.""

The younger brother who once had everything now had nothing. All by his own doing. Still relying upon self-sufficiency, he wasn't done. Although he was in discomfort, it was not enough to make him change. So he took a job working with pigs, considered unclean and forbidden by Jewish law. He sunk lower. Out of options, he hit bottom and "came to his senses." Pain is a great motivator for life changes. The younger son came to believe that a different life was possible. What is the place where you're broken and in pain? Decide to turn to God. Like the younger brother, you might soon discover that your understanding of the Father's generosity is too small.

Pray: God, I confess that I have fallen short and am broken. I offer myself to You. Amen.

April 4
Luke 15:20-24

So he got up and went to his father.

"While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate."

The younger son made a plan and acted upon it. When his Father saw him a long way off, he was "moved with compassion," and ran to him. His boy confesses his transgressions, yet he doesn't even respond to his admission. The Greek word for compassion means to be moved as to one's bowels. The bowels were believed to be the seat of love and pity. The Father saw his son with deep love. His disloyalty, disastrous living, and absence didn't disqualify him from restoration and being celebrated. God sees you with compassion in your failures and meets you when you are turned to him but still far off. You will more deeply comprehend God's love for you not by doing it right, but by doing it wrong. You are called and commanded to do the same.

As you breathe in, silently repeat the word "Jesus." As you exhale, silently say the word "Mercy."



"Then the older son was furious and didn't want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. He answered his father, 'Look, I've served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you've never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.' Then his father said, 'Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found."

The older brother's visceral reaction to his brother's return and father's response to it can be seen in his referring to his brother as, "this son of yours," and refusing to enter the party. His rage, long-standing resentment, and pride are oozing. He believes that his younger brother doesn't deserve this honor or generosity; he does. After all, he was the one who was loyal and faithful. He did everything right. Yet, his heart is filled with unforgiveness. He must repent. The father goes out to meet him and reminds him that celebration is necessary. When have you felt God wasn't giving you what you deserve? Where do you hold unforgiveness?

Request Jesus to reveal when you have been the older brother and for a change of heart.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

April 6
Psalm 126:1-6

When the LORD changed Zion's circumstances for the better, it was like we had been dreaming. Our mouths were suddenly filled with laughter; our tongues were filled with joyful shouts. It was even said, at that time, among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them!" Yes, the LORD has done great things for us, and we are overjoyed. LORD, change our circumstances for the better, like dry streams in the desert waste! Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts. Let those who go out, crying and carrying their seed, come home with joyful shouts, carrying bales of grain!

Resurrection Day is in two short weeks. It happened then, and we can see clearly it in the rearview mirror. What God did in and through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection is recorded. While walking through the challenges of life and picking up our crosses, we know Easter is coming. Psalm 126 represents the Israelites' survey of God's work in the past to deliver them from Babylon. They remember the adversity and struggles of their exile. But they also can see God's work and faithfulness in that hardship because they know how it ends. They can now readily trust in God's promises and hope for the future because they remember. It was harder then. The exile seems like a dream. The dryness, wailing, tears, and lack of hope are no more. Now are flowing streams of gratitude, joy, and abundance. What worry can you invite Jesus Christ into today? Remember how the story ends.

Read verse 6. Bring to mind your worry. Pray for strength in adversity.

April 7
Isaiah 43:16-19

The LORD says—who makes a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and battalion; they will lie down together and will not rise; they will be extinguished, extinguished like a wick.

Don't remember the prior things; don't ponder ancient history.

Look! I'm doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don't you recognize it?

I'm making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness.

Do it again, Lord! That's the cry we will make today. Isaiah is speaking to the southern kingdom of Judah when they are in exile and longing to return home. Pervasive in their captivity was the belief that they were forgotten and might never return home. Isaiah is speaking words of hope and encouragement: "Remember!" The Israelites are not to "remember" their past failures. That will cause only disillusionment. Rather they are called to remember God's power that was unleashed and freed them after 400 years in Egypt. Could God do it again? Could they recognize the sprouts emerging from the nutrient-deficient soil?

New possibilities for our lives, churches, and communities are rooted in "remembering" God making a way in the past. Connect to how

God has delivered you or someone close to you from difficult circumstances in the past. No matter whether the challenges were created by others, you, or some combination—God says let it go and believe in something new. Do you recognize it?

Pray to remember, to let go, and for clarity to see the new thing sprouting in your life.

April B
Philippians 3:4b-7

though I have good reason to have this kind of confidence. If anyone else has reason to put their confidence in physical advantages, I have even more:

I was circumcised on the eighth day.

I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin.

I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

With respect to observing the Law, I'm a Pharisee.

With respect to devotion to the faith, I harassed the church.

With respect to righteousness under the Law,

I'm blameless.

These things were my assets, but I wrote them off as a loss for the sake of

Christ.

Identity and worth aren't defined by the externals. Paul is imprisoned in Rome and tells the hearers of this letter that he has reason to boast if lineage and adherence to the rules were paramount. He had all the right credentials, he was a Jew through and through. Circumcised at the right time, from the tribe of Benjamin, a strict Pharisee, harassed the early Christians, and blameless according to the Law. In our day, the credentials might be being baptized as an infant; attending weekly worship; giving 10 percent of our income to the church; serving as a faithful volunteer; our family being integral to our home church; and being a law-abiding, good, and moral person. While those things are often an expression of our faith, and therefore admirable, they aren't what saves. Only faith in Jesus Christ does. Our ability and desire to live a life worthy of God's calling are Spirit-enabled.

Praise God for your identity in Jesus Christ and rely upon him, not outer performance.



But even beyond that, I consider everything a loss in comparison with the superior value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have lost everything for him, but what I lost I think of as sewer trash, so that I might gain Christ and be found in him. In Christ I have a righteousness that is not my own and that does not come from the Law but rather from the faithfulness of Christ. It is the righteousness of God that is based on faith. The righteousness that I have comes from knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the participation in his sufferings. It includes being conformed to his death so that I may perhaps reach the goal of the resurrection of the dead.

Paul holds nothing back. Earlier he calls those saying that Gentiles needed to be circumcised to be saved "dogs" and "evil workers." Paul proclaims that his identity is dung and renounces his reliance upon external adherence to the law. Believing that salvation comes through "doing it right" or "being good" is folly. Those then and now who believe that their own "goodness," where they are from, their morality, or how moral they are, have missed the point. They don't get it. Desiring to experience

the love of God revealed in Jesus transforms. Nothing in life or death is as important. Even in suffering for the sake of the Gospel, Paul is steadfast. His reliance upon the power of resurrection allows him to be in solidarity with Jesus in life and death.

Confess your reliance upon anything other than the Resurrection.



It's not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. Brothers and sisters, I myself don't think I've reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God's upward call in Christ Jesus.

The theological concept is called sanctification. You are called to become more and more like Christ Jesus. It's about progress, not perfection. You must strive for a more perfect love of God, neighbor, and enemy, but you will never achieve it fully. That doesn't mean you don't reach for it. Paul says that in order to do that, he must let go of the past. You must forget too. Acknowledge any setbacks and failures you experience in the faith journey, while simultaneously persevering. God makes this possible because you are his child, and gives you the strength to press forward. Jesus said the path is narrow; Paul said it's an upward call. Traveling the narrow path and pursuing the upward call requires cultivating a deeper relationship with God so you can reflect his image, grace, and love. The prize is eternal life that happens not by your efforts but by the gift of God's grace solidified by faith in Jesus Christ.

Reflect on the ways you have made progress and ask God to reveal ways to pursue the prize.



Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table. Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound, of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume.

The first verse cues the readers to remember the aroma found in the previous chapter. Jesus arrives four days after Lazarus died, and his sisters are sad and angry. Struck with grief, Jesus weeps. To illustrate God's power and prove that he was indeed sent by God, Jesus resurrects Lazarus. But before rolling the stone away, Martha warns Jesus of the dizzying aroma of death that would be unleashed after having the stone rolled away. Today in their home with Lazarus present, there is no such stench of death. But death is approaching. This scene foreshadows Jesus being laid in a tomb; Mary's generous act prepares him for it, and she doesn't even know it. Her gratitude for who Jesus was and his raising Lazarus shouldn't be overlooked or understated. How do you express your gratitude for Jesus? Bring to mind the ways God has given to you beyond measure.

Name the three things for which you are most grateful. Praise God for them. Imagine an aroma that is pleasing to you and reflect upon Jesus's sacrifice for you.



"Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), complained, "This perfume was worth a year's wages! Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it.)

Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. This perfume was to be used in preparation for my burial, and this is how she has used it. You will always have the poor among you, but you won't always have me."

Outer appearances don't always tell the story. Mary pours a year's wages on Jesus's feet and then wipes them with her hair. Since they didn't have much, others present were probably thinking what Judas courageously said. Yet his objection, which appeared to be rooted in care for the poor, wasn't. He argues that the act withholds blessing from a group who could have used it. His deceptive heart gushes with greed and malice. The others probably didn't know it at the time. Jesus charged the Pharisees with this deception in Matthew's Gospel. He accuses them of keeping the outside of the cup pristine, while the inside remains filthy with greed and self-indulgence. Judas's cup seemed clean. The revelation is revealed in six days. Perverse motives and corrupt intentions aren't disguised forever. While it's easy to quickly judge Judas, we protect hidden motives while projecting outer virtue.

Confess to God any hidden motives you have or held in the past. Ask Jesus to clean the inside of your heart.

SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT

(Palm/Passion)

Psalm 118:25-26, Luke 19:35-38

pril 13

LORD, please save us!

LORD, please let us succeed!

The one who enters in the LORD's name is blessed;

we bless all of you from the LORD's house.

They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it.

As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road.

As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. They said, "Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens."

The Messiah they expected wasn't what they received. Jesus's triumphant entry appeared to be the fulfillment of the Jewish people's long-suffering hope. As Jesus descended from the Mount of Olives, his excited disciples believed that the prophecy was being realized. They would be delivered and saved; Rome would be expelled violently, and Israel would rise again to the pinnacle of its power. The coup had begun. Their preconceived notions of the Savior would be dashed soon enough. Their joyful praises, chanting, rejoicing, palm waving, and spreading of their clothes would soon turn to fists thrust in the air, angry cries for an execution, and the ripping and stripping of his garments. Holy Week begins.

When have you expected God to show up in a particular way and then were mistaken, disappointed, or angry?
Talk to Jesus about it.

BREAKING THE FAST

"Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." ~ Acts 14:23

1. Reintroduce solid food gradually.

You should break your fast the same way you prepared for it. It will take your body just as many days as you fasted to adjust to a normal diet. Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid food immediately after your fast. Start with fruits, juices, and salad. Then, you can begin adding vegetables and boiled potato. Take it slowly from there. Eat small portions spread throughout the day.

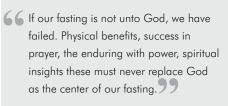
2. Continue praying.

Do not let your prayer life end on the day you finish the fast. Build from the momentum you

gained during the fast. Let it transform your prayer and devotional life. Carry the newfound passion with you throughout the year.

3. Be expectant.

Be in faith and believe God will answer your prayers soon! Do not give up; persevere in prayer even if you do not see the answers immediately. Make sure you keep the copy of your prayer points. You can check it at the end of the year and see how God has answered your prayers. It can be your thanksgiving list at the end of the year.



Richard Foster

CONCLUSION

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us . . . \sim Ephesians 3:20

Just as Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness, our 40 Days of Prayer & Fasting gives us the opportunity to realign our lives according to His will and consecrate the coming year to Him. As we humble ourselves corporately to Him in prayer, we can expect Him to move mightily in our midst.

God's will is for each and every one of us to experience breakthrough and victory in our lives. Be in faith for God to move miraculously in your life this year beyond what you can ask or imagine. You have a fresh mandate. Be ready for God to accomplish greater things through you this year!

SAMPLE RECIPES

Two-Bean Burger

- 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- 1 cup canned black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup canned great northern beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 tablespoons flaxseed meal
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1. Mash beans in a large bowl, leaving about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the beans whole and set aside.
- 2. Heat olive oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add onions, and cook until soft and translucent. Place in a bowl with beans, and add flaxseed meal, garlic powder, cumin, and salt.
- 3. Return skillet to medium heat, and add a teaspoon of olive oil, if needed, to prevent burgers from sticking. Scoop about cup of bean mixture for each burger. Use a 1/4 cup measuring cup to scoop bean mixture, and add to skillet. Flatten with a spatula.
- 4. Cook 5 minutes, or until bottoms are browned and slightly crispy. Flip, and cook another 5minutes.

Recipe Notes

For more texture, stir in 1/4 cup brown rice.

Spread burger with Guacamole with a Little Kick or Super Easy Guacamole.

Top with tomato slices, lettuce, and/or onions.

Try with Taco Seasoning instead of using cumin, garlic powder, and salt.

Vegan Bean Taco Filling

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 2 (14.5 ounce) cans black beans, rinsed, drained, and mashed
- 2 tablespoons yellow cornmeal
- 1 ½ tablespoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 cup salsa
- 1. Heat olive oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Stir in onion, garlic, and bell pepper; cook until tender. Stir in mashed beans.
- 2. Add the cornmeal. Mix in cumin, paprika, cayenne, chili powder, and salsa.
- 3. Cover, and cook 5 minutes.

Mexican Rice & Beans

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup diced red onions
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 ½ cups water
- 1 ½ cups brown rice, uncooked
- 1 (10-ounce) can diced tomatoes and green chilies (Ro-tel)
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley or 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1. Rinse rice in a strainer under cold running water for 30 seconds, swirling the rice around with your hand. Drain, and set aside.
- 2. Heat olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onions, and cook until soft and translucent. Add garlic, and cook one minute, stirring frequently so garlic doesn't burn.
- 3. Pour in water, rice, tomatoes and chilies, cumin, and cayenne pepper. Heat to boiling. Reduce heat and cover. Simmer 45-55 minutes or until rice is tender and nearly all of the liquid is absorbed.
- 4. Add beans, and stir well. Cook another 8-10 minutes. Add parsley, and serve.

SAMPLE RECIPES

Caribbean Wild Rice

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 (8-ounce) can unsweetened pineapple tidbits, juice reserved
- 2 tablespoons Bragg's Liquid Aminos or soy sauce
- 1 ½ tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 cup sliced carrots
- 1 cup chopped snow peas
- 1 cup chopped zucchini
- 1/2 cup chopped jarred roasted red bell peppers, drained
- ½ cup black beans, rinsed and drained
- ½ cup canned chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 2 cups cooked wild rice
- Avocado slices
- Chopped macadamia nuts
- 1. Heat olive oil in large skillet over medium heat. Stir in onions, and cook until soft and translucent. Add garlic, and cook 1 minute, stirring constantly so garlic doesn't burn.
- 2. Add ½ cup pineapple juice, Bragg's Liquid Aminos, and lime juice. Stir in carrots, snow peas, zucchini, red peppers, black beans, and chickpeas.
- 3. Increase heat to medium high, stirring often. Cook 5 minutes, or until ¾ of the liquid is absorbed and vegetables are slightly softened.
- 4. Add wild rice and pineapple. Increase heat, and stir-fry until heated through. Serve immediately.
- 5. Garnish with avocado slices and chopped macadamia nuts.

Spicy Pinto Bean Bake

- 1 recipe "Refried" Beans
- 3 cups cooked brown or wild rice
- 2 (10-ounce) cans diced tomatoes and green chiles
- 1/2 cup chopped green pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped green onions (green parts only)
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/3 teaspoon black pepper
- Toppings: Avocado slices, black olives, shredded lettuce
- 1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly rub bottom and sides of an 9 x 13-inch baking dish with olive oil.
- 2. Pour "Refried" Beans into dish, and spread evenly across bottom.
- 3. Add rice, distributing evenly across beans.
- 4. Mix tomatoes, green chiles, green pepper, green onions, cayenne pepper, garlic powder, salt, and pepper in a small bowl.
- 5. Stir well, and pour over rice and beans.
- 6. Bake 20 minutes.

Banana Milk

- 2 very ripe bananas, peeled
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup ice
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1. Mix all ingredients in a blender until smooth. Use immediately.
- Yield: 2 servings (serving size: about 8 ounces or 1 cup)

Recipe Notes

Substitute water with unsweetened almond or rice milk.

Serve with Nutty Fruit Cereal for breakfast.

Pour over Granola for a snack.

Dip Oatmeal Raisin Cookies in it!

SAMPLE RECIPES

Nutty Fruit Cereal

- 1 banana, peeled and sliced (about 1 cup)
- 1/3 cup fresh blueberries
- 1 tablespoon chopped almonds
- 1 tablespoon chopped walnuts
- 1 teaspoon unsweetened coconut flakes
- ½ cup unsweetened almond or rice milk
- 1. Place banana slices in a bowl and top with blueberries, almonds, walnuts, and coconut flakes. Pour in almond milk.

Ethiopian Cabbage Dish

- ½ cup olive oil
- · 4 carrots, thinly sliced
- · 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric
- ½ head cabbage, shredded
- 5 potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1. Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat.
- 2. Cook the carrots and onion in the hot oil about 5 minutes.
- 3. Stir in the salt, pepper, cumin, turmeric, and cabbage and cook another 15 to 20 minutes.
- 4. Add the potatoes; cover. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook until potatoes are soft, 20 to 30 minutes.

Addictive Sweet Potato Burritos

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- · 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 6 cups canned kidney beans, drained
- · 2 cups water
- 3 tablespoons chili powder
- 4 teaspoons prepared mustard
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper, or to taste
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 4 cups mashed cooked sweet potatoes
- 12 (10 inch) flour 100% whole wheat tortillas, warmed
- 8 ounces shredded Vegan cheese
- 1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).
- 2. Heat oil in a medium skillet and sauté onion and garlic until soft. Mash beans into the onion mixture.
- 3. Gradually stir in water; heat until warm, 2 to 3 minutes.
- 4. Remove from heat and stir in the soy sauce, chili powder, mustard, cumin, and cayenne pepper.
- 5. Divide bean mixture and mashed sweet potatoes evenly between the tortillas; top with cheese.
- 6. Fold tortillas burrito-style around the fillings and place on a baking sheet.
- 7. Bake in the preheated oven until warmed through, about 12 minutes.

• 1 (10 ounce) package frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained

Hearty Vegan Slow-Cooker Chili

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- · 1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
- 2 onions, chopped
- · 4 cloves garlic, minced

- 1 tablespoon dried parsley
 ½ teaspoon salt
- 72 leaspoon sai
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 (14.5 ounce) cans diced tomatoes with juice
- 1 (15 ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup frozen corn kernels, thawed
- 1 zucchini, chopped
- 1 yellow squash, chopped
- 6 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

COMMON FAQS

What about prepared foods?

Read the labels of all prepared foods. Remember, the Daniel Fast is sugar-free and chemical-free. If you use any canned fruits, vegetables, packaged foods, or prepared sauces, you must read the label to be aware of all ingredients.

What about pasta?

Make sure the label says whole grain pasta with no additives. (Watch for sugar.) Whole grain pasta offers 7 grams of protein per serving (3/4 cup of dried pasta).

What about salad dressing?

Olive oil and lemon or lime are an option. You may also try looking for organic options at your local grocer.

What about nuts? I know it says raw, unsalted nuts, but what about roasted nuts?

The goal would be to stick to raw, unsalted nuts, but these are harder to find. In a pinch, just make sure you get plain roasted, unsalted nuts with no preservatives.

How do I get enough protein in my diet while on the fast?

The following protein-rich foods are allowed on the Daniel Fast: almonds, sunflower seeds, lentils, quinoa, brown rice, split peas, whole grains, and tofu.

What kind of peanut butter is allowed?

A natural peanut butter with no additives. Watch for sugars including molasses. Smucker's creamy natural peanut butter has nothing but peanuts in it.

How can I identify whole grain foods?

Typically, if the ingredient lists "whole wheat," "rolled oats," or "whole corn" as the first ingredient, the product is a whole grain food item. Another way to identify whole grains in the foods you eat is to look at the nutritional facts information and check to see if the food item contains dietary fiber. If it contains a significant amount, it most likely contains whole grains. "Wheat flour" is not a whole grain and therefore does not indicate a whole grain product.

Do I need to eat organic foods while on the fast?

No, but it is suggested because organic foods are produced without the use of feed or fertilizer of plant or animal origin and without employment of chemically formulated fertilizers, growth stimulants, antibiotics, or pesticides.

Where can I go out to eat?

You can go anywhere. Order cautiously and ask questions of the wait staff. You may have to order a salad with olive oil and a baked potato with no extras.

What about bread?

We recommend the Ezekiel bread found in the freezer section of your grocery / health food store. You may also eat Whole Wheat Bread.

How much can I eat?

We recommend eating until satisfied with no limits as long as you eat the appropriate foods.

THIS YEAR I'M BELIEVING GOD FOR

MYSELF
Spiritual Revival • Physical Healing • Prosperity and Abundance • Rich Generosity
MY FAMILY
Restoration of Relationships • Household Salvation
MY CAREER/SCHOOL
Excellence • Promotion
Excellence Fromolon
MY MINISTRY
Victory • Group Growth • Salvation of Colleagues, Classmates, Bosses & Employees
Select a Prayer and Accountability partner
who will join you in this journey to help
encourage you and pray with you. Prayer Partner

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on Earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." Matthew 18:19