



21 DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING

We are so glad you have decided to participate in an extended time of prayer, fasting and personal devotion. There really is no better way to reset our spiritual compass and bring about refreshing in every area of our lives than through prayer and fasting. Our hope is that this time of prayer and fasting will refresh you personally but also our church as we seek His blessing and direction.

The Program was intentionally designed to be flexible so that you can participate at any level. Whether you have done a 21-day season of prayer and fasting before, or if this is your first time, you can start where you are and experience what God has in store for you in a powerful way. Daily devotions, scripture reading and suggested prayers are included in this booklet. Please commit to reading them each day. The last week will focus on the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made on the cross and the victory we have through His resurrection.

We pray that you will experience the presence and power of God in an extraordinary way as you commit yourself to Him over the next 21 days. May you become closer to God than ever before as you seek Him first.

As you prepare for the next 21 days, think about why you are fasting. Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation, or for a major decision? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your 21 days of prayer and fasting. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically. Think about the top two or three most pressing issues on your heart and zone in on those with God. Write these down in the space provided below, and be open to hearing what God wants to show you in those areas.

When praying, make your primary goal to know Jesus more and experience Him. Focus first on what's right about Him, such as His goodness and His greatness, and see everything else through that filter.

Finally, make time to pray daily. Don't overcomplicate this! Just talk to God. Have that place and time where you can seek Him every day. If you don't plan to pray, you won't.

During this fast, I am praying and believing for God to:

WHY FAST?

Fasting has the potential for significant impact in our lives. Through prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit can transform your life personally and God can speak to you in new and dynamic ways.

Prayer and fasting can also work on a much grander scale. According to Scripture, by our personal experience and observation, we are convinced that when God's people fast with a proper Biblical motive – seeking God's face not His hand – with a broken, repentant, and contrite spirit, God will hear from heaven and heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world. Prayer and fasting can bring about revival – a change in the direction of our nation, the nations of earth and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Biblical fasting is, very simply, denying oneself something for the sake of seeking and honouring God. Pastor Stovall Weems says that "prayer is connecting with God; fasting is disconnecting ourselves from the world." That's a great way to describe the feeling. In addition to food, you can also fast from other things that keep you connected to the world. These may include television, social media, video games and more.

WHY YOU SHOULD FAST:

If you do not already know of the power and importance of fasting, here are some very important facts:

- ◇ Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted at least two recorded 40-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast, "when you fast" not "if you fast".
- ◇ Prayer and fasting can restore the loss of the "first love" for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
- ◇ Fasting is a Biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, "I humble myself through fasting."
- ◇ Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance and a transformed life.
- ◇ The Holy Spirit will quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!
- ◇ Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- ◇ Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life – and make you a channel of revival to others.

If you fast, you will find yourself being humbled. You will discover more time to pray and seek God's face. And as He leads you to recognize and repent of unconfessed sin, you will experience special blessings from God.

HOW TO FAST

As you prepare to fast, it is important to choose a fasting plan that works for you. While this section provides some general information about different types of fasts, as well as some suggestions on how to create your own fasting plan, it is important to mention that there is nothing more spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another. These are simply guidelines and suggestions on different things you can do.

Fasting can include food, social media and entertainment, among other things. It should be something you are accustomed to so that it stretches you to give it up. Giving it up for a period of time enables one to focus on God. For example, when those hunger pangs happen, turn to prayer. When you usually watch your television shows, open your Bible to read and pray instead. Fast from social media or watching sports so you can focus on God.

Don't let what you eat or do not eat become the focus of your fast. Our focus should be on drawing closer to God. Remember, this is a time to disconnect enough from your regular patterns and habits in order to connect more closely to God.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind before getting started.

1. START WHERE YOU ARE:

We are all at different places in our walk with God. Likewise our jobs, daily schedules and health conditions are all different and place various levels of demand on our energy. So most importantly, whether you've fasted before or this is your first time, start where you are. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but it's very important to know your own body, know your options and, most importantly, seek God in prayer and follow what that Holy Spirit leads you to do.

Remember, the goal of fasting is not just to do without food or Facebook. The goal is to draw nearer to God.

2. MAKE YOUR COMMITMENT

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus encouraged us to fast (Matthew 6:16-18). For Him it was a matter of when believers fast, not if they would do it. Before you fast, we encourage you to decide up front the type of fast God wants you to undertake and how much time each day you will devote to prayer and reading God's Word. Making these commitments ahead of time will help sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

You may choose to fast all 21 days. Or you may choose to fast several days out of the 21 days, such as three or four days a week throughout the 21-day period. Maybe you will do that and do three to seven consecutive days at the end. This is your personal decision and should be prayerfully considered as it applies to your circumstances.

It is important to fast in a way that works for you. The goal is that you choose a fast that will be challenging for you but will work within your life. You should choose a plan that will cause you to rely on God and will create space in your life for Him to work.

SPECIFIC FOOD OR ACTIVITY FAST:

In this type of fast you omit a specific item(s) from your meal plans. For example, you may choose to eliminate all red meat, processed or fast food, or sweets. Most people can incorporate this type of fast relatively easily. It can also prove to be a great solution for people with specific dietary needs or medical conditions that may cause certain limitations.

While fasting typically refers to refraining from specific food items, you may also find it extremely beneficial to fast from a regular activity or habit. This might include things such as television, social media and the like.

Prayer and fasting are about both connecting to God and disconnecting from the world. Try to tune out some of the regular distractions from your day as much as possible. Replace that time with things that will nourish you spiritually.

DANIEL FAST:

The Daniel fast is a great model to follow and one that is extremely effective for spiritual focus, bodily discipline and purification of the body and soul. It is probably one of the most commonly referred-to fasts; however, within the Daniel fast there is room for broad interpretation.

In the book of Daniel we find two different times where the prophet Daniel fasted. In Daniel 1, it states that he ate only vegetables and water, and in Daniel 10, while the passage does not give a specific list of foods that Daniel ate, it does state that he ate no rich (or choice) foods, as well as no red meat or wine. So based on these two verses, we can see that either of these, or combinations of the two, constitute a Daniel fast.

Again, it is important to mention that there is nothing inherently spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another. The foundation of the Daniel fast is fruits and vegetables. Some starchy vegetables and dairy could be included, but that depends on the individual. Your goal should be to seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do.

JUICE FAST:

A juice fast is simply consuming vegetable and fruit juices and water instead of solid food. Many people include whey protein in their liquid plan as well. Even if you choose not to make your entire fast liquids-only, substituting one or two meals for liquids could be a great alternative.

FASTING 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 we want to encourage you that if done properly, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual blessing, but a physical blessing as well.

You may, however, have a physical problem that would make fasting unwise or dangerous. This could include tumors, cancer, blood diseases, diabetes or heart disease. If that is the case, include your doctor in your decision on how to fast. Also, if you are under any type of medication, you may want to talk with your doctor before changing your regime.

FASTING WHILE NURSING OR PREGNANT:

Strict fasting while nursing or pregnant is not recommended. If you are in this season of life, here are some great options for you to consider – with the approval of your physician:

- ◇ a modified Daniel fast including whole grains, legumes, whey protein, calcium and iron supplements
- ◇ fasting sweets and desserts
- ◇ fasting red meat
- ◇ fasting non-food activities like television, Facebook/Twitter, movies, etc.

FASTING AND EATING DISORDERS:

If you have struggled with an eating disorder, this situation is a battle that you can win through Christ (Philippians 4:13). Remember, fasting is a tool used to get closer to God, and it actually should keep us from being preoccupied with food. If your method of fasting is going to cause you to obsess about what you eat in any way, you will either need to change your approach or your mindset.

If giving up food is a stumbling block to you, then consider fasting of TV, Facebook, reading (other than the Bible), or shopping. There are many distractions and ways that we use to stay in control that we could eliminate from our daily routine. If you can identify such other things, maybe you can give those up instead of food.

Remember that you are covered by God's grace. God will show you what to do and give you His peace.

3. BEGINNING AND ENDING YOUR FAST WELL:

Depending on the type of fast you choose, it may be important to prepare your body ahead of time before beginning the fast. Take a week or so to transition into your fast; otherwise it may be difficult on your body. For example, if you would like to go on a fruits and vegetables or juice fast, start eliminating meat, white grains, and refined sugars from your diet the week before. Also you may want to start to cut back on dairy products and some of your caffeine intake.

The same principle applies to breaking your fast. When your fast is over, add foods back in very gradually. You won't want to break your fast with a greasy cheeseburger!

The goal for this 21-day fast is that you would experience a new intimacy in your relationship with God. As you prepare to begin, we encourage you to prepare your heart spiritually. The foundation for prayer and fasting is repentance. Unconfessed sin can hinder your prayers.

Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

Remember that God is your Father and He loves you and is for you.

- ◇ Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness - (1 John 1:9).
 - ◇ Seek forgiveness from people whom you have offended, and forgive those who have hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3,4).
-

-
- ◇ Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to his command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14,15.
 - ◇ Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord; refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1,2).
 - ◇ Begin your time of prayer and fasting with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).
 - ◇ Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16,17).

4. FINAL FASTING TIPS:

- ◇ Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need. Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give into temptation.
- ◇ Make it a priority to attend church, prayer meetings and connect groups during your 21-day fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.
- ◇ If you are fasting with others, you may want to meet together in a small-group setting. You can share what God is showing you in your devotional time as well as spend time in prayer together.
- ◇ If you mess up, don't get discouraged. Just get right back on track and keep going. God's mercies "are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23). He wants you to finish, and He will give you the grace and strength to do it!
- ◇ Journaling: We encourage you on a daily basis to write down what God is saying to you, how you are feeling and changes you are aware of. Changes will take place! We believe God will speak to everybody during this time of prayer and fasting. He may speak to you during the day or the night-time, so be ready with pen and paper or notebook in anticipation of hearing God's voice.

If you sincerely humble yourself before the Lord, repent, pray and seek God's face; if you consistently meditate on His word, you will experience a heightened awareness of His presence (John 14:21). The Lord will give you fresh, new spiritual insights. Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened and you will feel refreshed. Our prayer is that this will be a significant time in your life where you experience God's presence like never before!

JOHN 10:22-30: THEN CAME THE FESTIVAL OF DEDICATION AT JERUSALEM. IT WAS WINTER, AND JESUS WAS IN THE TEMPLE COURTS WALKING IN SOLOMON'S COLONNADE. THE JEWS WHO WERE THERE GATHERED AROUND HIM, SAYING, "HOW LONG WILL YOU KEEP US IN SUSPENSE? IF YOU ARE THE MESSIAH, TELL US PLAINLY." "MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE, AND I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME." JESUS ANSWERED,

"I DID TELL YOU, BUT YOU DO NOT BELIEVE. THE WORKS I DO IN MY FATHER'S NAME TESTIFY ABOUT ME, BUT YOU DO NOT BELIEVE BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT MY SHEEP. MY SHEEP LISTEN TO MY VOICE; I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME. I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE, AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH; NO ONE WILL SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY HAND. MY FATHER, WHO HAS GIVEN THEM TO ME, IS GREATER THAN ALL; NO ONE CAN SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY FATHER'S HAND. I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE."

Have you ever been searching for a radio station only to be frustrated by finding static rather than music? You then focus to fine tune the dial again, and suddenly you hear a clear signal. The fact is, the signal always existed on the airwaves; the only difference is that now you have adjusted your tuner to the correct frequency.

In our hectic lives, there are so many signals bombarding our senses that it can become difficult to distinguish God's voice from the deafening "static noise" of life. Fasting enables us to tune out the world's distractions and tune in to God. As we fast, we deny our flesh. When we deny our flesh, we become more in tune to the Holy Spirit and can hear God's voice more clearly. If you truly listen for God's voice, you will hear it. When you hear it, it will build faith within you.

If you desire to tune out the static of life and really tune into the voice of God, come to Him first and foremost with ears that are willing to listen and a heart that is ready to obey what he says. (Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 66:2) The more we practice being in His presence, the clearer and more recognizable His voice becomes.

- ◇ In this time of fasting, what is your mind tuned to?
- ◇ What distractions do you need to remove so that you can focus on God?
- ◇ Prepare your heart to hear the voice of God, and ask God to help you remove distractions that keep you from focusing on Him and hearing Him clearly.

ADDITIONAL READING:

PSALM 34:18: THE LORD IS NEAR TO THE BROKENHEARTED AND SAVES THOSE WHO ARE CRUSHED IN SPIRIT.

ISAIAH 66:2: HAS NOT MY HAND MADE ALL THESE THINGS, AND SO THEY CAME INTO BEING?" DECLARES THE LORD. "THESE ARE THE ONES I LOOK ON WITH FAVOUR: THOSE WHO ARE HUMBLE AND CONTRITE IN SPIRIT, AND WHO TREMBLE AT MY WORD.

ISAIAH 64:8: YET YOU, LORD, ARE OUR FATHER. WE ARE THE CLAY, YOU ARE THE POTTER; WE ARE ALL THE WORK OF YOUR HAND.

PRAYER:

Lord, help me to tune in to You. As distractions and temptations come, give me strength to turn to You. Teach me. Give me eyes and ears to hear Your voice. Open my heart to Your Word. As I'm challenged in the days ahead, please give me what I need to humble myself and honour You. Help me to take time to be holy, to spend time with You in the secret place, to trust in Your Word. You are the potter. I am the clay. Mould me and make me according to Your will. Thank You for being a God who I can trust. You are so faithful to me. I am Yours.

JAMES 1:2-7: CONSIDER IT PURE JOY, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHENEVER YOU FACE TRIALS OF MANY KINDS, BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE. LET PERSEVERANCE FINISH ITS WORK SO THAT YOU MAY BE MATURE AND COMPLETE, NOT LACKING ANYTHING. IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, YOU SHOULD ASK GOD, WHO GIVES GENEROUSLY TO ALL WITHOUT FINDING FAULT, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU. BUT WHEN YOU ASK, YOU MUST BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT, BECAUSE THE ONE WHO DOUBTS IS LIKE A WAVE OF THE SEA, BLOWN AND TOSSED BY THE WIND. THAT PERSON SHOULD NOT EXPECT TO RECEIVE ANYTHING FROM THE LORD.

What do you expect when you pray? When we pray with earnest expectation, we are exercising our faith. The earnest prayers of people walking in step with God can produce powerful results, and the most earnest prayers come from us recognizing our need for God.

There can be a natural tendency to shrink back when praying for the seemingly impossible, but we must remember that nothing is impossible with God. If we know the promises that God has given us, and understand His character and the principles by which He works, we can pray with confidence and trust Him for the answer. The Kings James Version of the Bible refers to it as being "unwavering in your faith." What has caused you to waiver in your expectation with God? James reminds us that faith and wavering are actually contradictory – he says "nothing wavering". Know that God never waivers in His love for you. You can trust Him completely.

- ◇ What are you trusting God for in this season?
- ◇ How can you line up your expectations with the Word of God when you pray?
- ◇ Find promises in His Word that answer your need and write them down today.

ADDITIONAL READING:

MATTHEW 17:20:

HE REPLIED, "BECAUSE YOU HAVE SO LITTLE FAITH. TRULY I TELL YOU, IF YOU HAVE FAITH AS SMALL AS A MUSTARD SEED, YOU CAN SAY TO THIS MOUNTAIN, 'MOVE FROM HERE TO THERE,' AND IT WILL MOVE. NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU."

ROMANS 8:28: AND WE KNOW THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.

ROMANS 12:2: DO NOT CONFORM TO THE PATTERN OF THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND. THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TEST AND APPROVE WHAT GOD'S WILL IS—HIS GOOD, PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL.

PRAYER:

Lord, please help me to stand firm in my faith as I walk with You.

You are my strong tower and I know I can trust in You.

Guard and renew my mind, body, soul and spirit in Christ Jesus according to Your will.

May each one line up with the Word of God.

May my life be filled with faith and expectation that You are working all things for good.

Give me faith to move mountains, knowing that You have promised to do the impossible so that You may be glorified.

May my life, thoughts and expectations reflect Yours, my King and my God.

PSALM 34:8: TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD. BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM.

Your Bible, God's Word, is life-giving, spiritual food. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Psalm 19 says this about God's words: "They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb." Proverbs 4:22 says, "For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh."

God's Word is life changing, miracle working, alive, holy, true, perfect, empowering, encouraging, trustworthy and healing. It guides us, gives wisdom, judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart, is a mighty weapon and is to be treasured! Jesus was the Word made flesh, our bread of life. When we open the scriptures, we begin to know Him better.

In John 4, we read about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. When Jesus met her, His disciples had gone into town to get food. When they returned with the food, they found Jesus' hunger satisfied. They were confused by this, wondering if He had eaten while they were gone. But Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Jesus was sustained spiritually by doing His Father's will. He then told them in John 6:27, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

We are spiritually nourished by feeding on God's Word and by doing His will. Ask God to open your spiritual eyes and ears to receive His Word as life-giving and sustaining. Drink deeply from His Word. Listen for His voice. Obey His promptings. Trust Him to sustain you as you pray and fast. Believe that God's Word is "sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb." He will do more than you can imagine.

- ◇ How can you create time to be in God's Word?
- ◇ Do you believe that it will nourish you and bring life to you?
- ◇ Ask God to meet you personally through this time as you seek Him. He desires to teach you. He delights in you.

ADDITIONAL READING:

JOHN 4:1-34: THE STORY OF JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

JOHN 6:35: THEN JESUS DECLARED, "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. WHOEVER COMES TO ME WILL NEVER GO HUNGRY, AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER BE THIRSTY."

JOHN 6:63: THE WORDS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU— THEY ARE FULL OF THE SPIRIT AND LIFE.

MATTHEW 24:35: HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY, BUT MY WORDS WILL NEVER PASS AWAY.

JOHN 1:1,14 (KJV): IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD AND THE WORD WAS GOD. AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, AND DWELT AMONG US, AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY, THE GLORY AS OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.

PSALM 19:7-10: THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT, REFRESHING THE SOUL. THE STATUTES OF THE LORD ARE TRUSTWORTHY, MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE. THE PRECEPTS OF THE LORD ARE RIGHT, GIVING JOY TO THE HEART. THE COMMANDS OF THE LORD ARE RADIANT, GIVING LIGHT TO THE EYES.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS PURE, ENDURING FOREVER. THE DECREES OF THE LORD ARE FIRM, AND ALL OF THEM ARE RIGHTEOUS. THEY ARE MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD, THAN MUCH PURE GOLD; THEY ARE SWEETER THAN HONEY, THAN HONEY FROM THE HONEYCOMB.

EPHESIANS 6: 10,11,17: FINALLY, BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND IN HIS MIGHTY POWER. PUT ON THE FULL ARMOUR OF GOD, SO THAT YOU CAN TAKE YOUR STAND AGAINST THE DEVIL'S SCHEMES. TAKE THE HELMET OF SALVATION AND THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD.

HEBREWS 4:12: FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS ALIVE AND ACTIVE. SHARPER THAN ANY DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD, IT PENETRATES EVEN TO DIVIDING SOUL AND SPIRIT, JOINTS AND MARROW; IT JUDGES THE THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES OF THE HEART.

PRAYER:

Lord, thank You for nourishing me with Your Word. It is life to my body and soul. Help me to realize the power of Your Word in my life. Open my eyes and ears to know You better as I spend time in the scriptures. Teach me, renew me and make me strong in You. Help me to keep Your words in my heart and to do Your will. Show me how to use Your Word to bring renewal to my life and to bring others to You. I trust You to sustain me. You are more than enough.

MARK 1:12-13: IMMEDIATELY THE SPIRIT DROVE HIM INTO THE WILDERNESS. AND HE WAS THERE IN THE WILDERNESS FORTY DAYS, TEMPTED BY SATAN, AND WAS WITH THE WILD BEASTS; AND THE ANGELS MINISTERED TO HIM.

Even Jesus disconnected from the world to fast and pray. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke speak of Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. They also describe other times Jesus pulled away from the demands of the crowds, His ministry and even His closest friends to pray.

There are times that we, too, need to pull away from the things of the world and focus on God. "The things of the world" can certainly include more than just food. In fact, in our world, it is more likely to be television, movies, Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones and internet that keep us "tuned in" to the world. None of these things are wrong in and of themselves, but they are avenues for a mental and spiritual "crowd" to gather around us and drown out the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is a means of disconnecting from the distractions of daily life and consciously choosing to bring God into greater focus. Giving up physical nourishment is the first step in engaging that process. If you think about it, though, we nourish our souls as well as our bodies. We do so through reading, talking, socialising, playing and leisure. When we fill our souls up with all those things, we don't feel a hunger for God.

During this time of fasting, we may feel physical hunger, but let's be intentional about cultivating spiritual hunger as well. Let's draw away from the crowds and lay aside, for a season, the activities we use to nourish our souls. Instead let's allow ourselves to enter a state of spiritual hunger – a hunger for righteousness. Jesus said that being spiritually hungry is a blessed state, because we can be sure of being filled with food that truly satisfies our deepest needs. (Matthew 5:6)

During this time, you will find that being still before the Lord will set you in a place of increased strength, peace and hunger for God.

- ◇ Are you disconnected from the things that nourish your body and soul?
- ◇ What do you need to deny yourself so that this can be a powerful time in your life?
- ◇ Take time to pray and read God's Word during the time you would normally do what you are fasting from. God will honour your heart and commitment.

ADDITIONAL READING:

MATTHEW 5:6: BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY WILL BE FILLED.

MATTHEW 6:19-21: DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY, AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL. BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN OR STEAL; FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO.

2 TIMOTHY 2:20-22 (NASB): NOW IN A LARGE HOUSE THERE ARE NOT ONLY GOLD AND SILVER VESSELS, BUT ALSO VESSELS OF WOOD AND OF EARTHENWARE, AND SOME TO HONOUR AND SOME TO DISHONOUR. THEREFORE, IF ANYONE CLEANSSES HIMSELF FROM THESE THINGS, HE WILL BE A VESSEL FOR HONOUR, SANCTIFIED, USEFUL TO THE MASTER, PREPARED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK. NOW FLEE FROM YOUTHFUL LUSTS AND PURSUE RIGHTEOUSNESS, FAITH, LOVE AND PEACE, WITH THOSE WHO CALL ON THE LORD FROM A PURE HEART.

PRAYER:

Lord, give me a spiritual hunger that I have never known. Increase my thirst for righteousness, for purity, for holiness, for You! Break the power of sin and worldly habits that keep me from You. Pour Your cleansing, living water through me and make me a vessel that You can use to refresh others. Make me an instrument of Your healing and compassion. Use me in Your service. Help me to remember the value of my life and to store up treasures in Heaven.

MATTHEW 17:18-21: AND JESUS REBUKED THE DEMON, AND IT CAME OUT OF HIM; AND THE CHILD WAS CURED FROM THAT VERY HOUR. THEN THE DISCIPLES CAME TO JESUS PRIVATELY AND SAID, "WHY COULD WE NOT CAST IT OUT?" SO JESUS SAID TO THEM, "BECAUSE OF YOUR UNBELIEF; FOR ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, THAT IF YOU HAVE FAITH AS A MUSTARD SEED, YOU WILL SAY TO THIS MOUNTAIN, 'MOVE FROM HERE TO THERE', AND IT WILL MOVE; AND NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU."

When we pray and fast, we don't do so to change God or His will. By praying and fasting, we are the ones changed. Coming into alignment with God helps us curb our doubts and fears. When we pray and fast, one thing that leaves is our unbelief. It is when we have faith to believe, that we can pray with confidence and know that "nothing will be impossible" as we live to bring glory to God.

Ask God to strengthen our hearts to fully believe Him and believe His word. It is okay to recognise and acknowledge if you struggle with unbelief. It's the first step in allowing God to strengthen your faith and bring you into alignment with His plan for your life.

- ◇ What is it that you need faith to believe God for?
- ◇ Align yourself with God's Word and will during this fast. Ask the Holy Spirit to free you from your unbelief.
- ◇ Pray with confidence, knowing "nothing will be impossible for you."

ADDITIONAL READING:

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5: FOR THOUGH WE LIVE IN THE WORLD, WE DO NOT WAGE WAR AS THE WORLD DOES. THE WEAPONS WE FIGHT WITH ARE NOT THE WEAPONS OF THE WORLD. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY HAVE DIVINE POWER TO DEMOLISH STRONGHOLDS. WE DEMOLISH ARGUMENTS AND EVERY PRETENSION THAT SETS ITSELF UP AGAINST THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, AND WE TAKE CAPTIVE EVERY THOUGHT TO MAKE IT OBEDIENT TO CHRIST.

MARK 9:24: IMMEDIATELY THE BOY'S FATHER EXCLAIMED, "I DO BELIEVE; HELP ME OVERCOME MY UNBELIEF!"

PRAYER:

Lord, I confess my unbelief. I am weak, but You are strong. Increase my faith. Remind me of the relevance of Your Word for my life. I know it is powerful. Help me to use it to strengthen my spirit and to war against Satan and his efforts against me. Help me to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ. Make me an overcomer as I receive in faith the victory You have for me. I do believe. You are not finished with me yet. I praise You for Your grace and goodness to me.

ROMANS 7:18-20 (NLT): AND I KNOW THAT NOTHING GOOD LIVES IN ME, THAT IS, IN MY SINFUL NATURE. I WANT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT, BUT I CAN'T. I WANT TO DO WHAT IS GOOD, BUT I DON'T. I DON'T WANT TO DO WHAT IS WRONG, BUT I DO IT ANYWAY. BUT IF I DO WHAT I DON'T WANT TO DO, I AM NOT REALLY THE ONE DOING WRONG, IT IS SIN LIVING IN ME THAT DOES IT.

There's an internal war that often wages within each and every one of us. Paul describes this so well here in Romans 7 – we desire to do the right thing, but in our own efforts, we don't have the power to - we mess up.

The good news is that we don't have to rely on our own strength to make right decisions. We don't have to be dominated by our sinful nature and end up doing the things we don't want to do. But the only way we can live this kind of life is by yielding to the Holy Spirit and relying on the strength of Jesus Christ, not our own.

When we're facing struggles, we must rely on God's power alive within us through the Holy Spirit. When we are born again, the Holy Spirit resides in us and places in us the desire to do what is pleasing to God. (Hebrews 10:16) The Holy Spirit always wants to do what is right. He always wants to uphold the perfect will of God, pleasing the Father in every way. It is our job to lay down our stubborn fleshly will and yield to the will of God. In that moment, the Holy Spirit will be there to help us in our time of need. Instead of trusting in our own strength, let's learn to yield to, and become totally reliant upon the Holy Spirit.

- ◇ Are there areas in your life causing an internal struggle?
- ◇ Make a decision today that you will yield to the Holy Spirit and lean on His strength, not your own, to overcome obstacles of sin and selfishness in your life.
- ◇ Surrender and release those areas to God, knowing He will help you.

ADDITIONAL READING:

HEBREWS 10:16: "THIS IS THE COVENANT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THAT TIME, SAYS THE LORD. I WILL PUT MY LAWS IN THEIR HEARTS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR MINDS."

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14: THEREFORE, AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, HOLY AND DEARLY LOVED, CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH COMPASSION, KINDNESS, HUMILITY, GENTLENESS AND PATIENCE. BEAR WITH EACH OTHER AND FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER IF ANY OF YOU HAS A GRIEVANCE AGAINST SOMEONE. FORGIVE AS THE LORD FORGAVE YOU. AND OVER ALL THESE VIRTUES PUT ON LOVE, WHICH BINDS THEM ALL TOGETHER IN PERFECT UNITY.

I CORINTHIANS 13:2-13: IF I HAVE THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AND CAN FATHOM ALL MYSTERIES AND ALL KNOWLEDGE, AND IF I HAVE A FAITH THAT CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS, BUT DO NOT HAVE LOVE, I AM NOTHING. IF I GIVE ALL I POSSESS TO THE POOR AND GIVE OVER MY BODY TO HARSHIP THAT I MAY BOAST, BUT DO NOT HAVE LOVE, I GAIN NOTHING.

LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND. IT DOES NOT ENVY, IT DOES NOT BOAST, IT IS NOT PROUD. IT DOES NOT DISHONOUR OTHERS, IT IS NOT SELF-SEEKING, IT IS NOT EASILY ANGERED, IT KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS. LOVE DOES NOT DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH. IT ALWAYS PROTECTS, ALWAYS TRUSTS, ALWAYS HOPES, ALWAYS PERSEVERES.

LOVE NEVER FAILS. BUT WHERE THERE ARE PROPHECIES, THEY WILL CEASE; WHERE THERE ARE TONGUES, THEY WILL BE STILLED; WHERE THERE IS KNOWLEDGE, IT WILL PASS AWAY. FOR WE KNOW IN PART AND WE PROPHECY IN PART, BUT WHEN COMPLETENESS COMES, WHAT IS IN PART DISAPPEARS. WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I TALKED LIKE A CHILD, I THOUGHT LIKE A CHILD, I REASONED LIKE A CHILD. WHEN I BECAME A MAN, I PUT THE WAYS OF CHILDHOOD BEHIND ME. FOR NOW WE SEE ONLY A REFLECTION AS IN A MIRROR; THEN WE SHALL SEE FACE TO FACE. NOW I KNOW IN PART; THEN I SHALL KNOW FULLY, EVEN AS I AM FULLY KNOWN. AND NOW THESE THREE REMAIN: FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE. BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.

EPHESIANS 4:22-32: YOU WERE TAUGHT, WITH REGARD TO YOUR FORMER WAY OF LIFE, TO PUT OFF YOUR OLD SELF, WHICH IS BEING CORRUPTED BY ITS DECEITFUL DESIRES; TO BE MADE NEW IN THE ATTITUDE OF YOUR MINDS; AND TO PUT ON THE NEW SELF, CREATED TO BE LIKE GOD IN TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS. THEREFORE EACH OF YOU MUST PUT OFF FALSEHOOD AND SPEAK TRUTHFULLY TO YOUR NEIGHBOUR, FOR WE ARE ALL MEMBERS OF ONE BODY. "IN YOUR ANGER DO NOT SIN": DO NOT LET THE SUN GO DOWN WHILE YOU ARE STILL ANGRY, AND DO NOT GIVE THE DEVIL A FOOTHOLD. ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN STEALING MUST STEAL NO LONGER, BUT MUST WORK, DOING SOMETHING USEFUL WITH THEIR OWN HANDS, THAT THEY MAY HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE WITH THOSE IN NEED. DO NOT LET ANY UNWHOLESOME TALK COME OUT OF YOUR MOUTHS, BUT ONLY WHAT IS HELPFUL FOR BUILDING OTHERS UP ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS, THAT IT MAY BENEFIT THOSE WHO LISTEN. AND DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD, WITH WHOM YOU WERE SEALED FOR THE DAY OF REDEMPTION. GET RID OF ALL BITTERNESS, RAGE AND ANGER, BRAWLING AND SLANDER, ALONG WITH EVERY FORM OF MALICE. BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE TO ONE ANOTHER, FORGIVING EACH OTHER, JUST AS IN CHRIST GOD FORGAVE YOU.

PRAYER:

Lord, give me the desire to please You in all things.

I confess I want to do things my way. Forgive my stubbornness and pride. Help me to choose Your way. I humbly ask You for grace and a willingness to yield to the Holy Spirit who lives in me.

May my life reflect Your will for me. Help me to put away childish things and to put on love. Help me to stop actions that are harmful to me and others. Today I put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Give me grace to forgive as You have forgiven me. I love You.

JAMES 5:16B: THE EFFECTIVE, FERVENT PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN AVAILS MUCH.

Fervency speaks of our level of intensity, passion and persistence. Many times, we can lose our passion in prayer or stop praying for certain things altogether because we lose heart or give up. But God invites us to keep them before Him and trust Him for an answer in His time. (Matthew 7:7-11)

The Old Testament prophet, Elijah, practiced a lifestyle of fervent, intense prayer and he witnessed incredible miracles in his lifetime as a result. In 1 Kings 17:17-24, we read of a woman whose only son became ill and died. When Elijah heard the news he quickly took action and did what he knew best – he fervently cried out to God. Elijah fully believed that God could bring the boy back to life, and he didn't pray just once. It is recorded that he prayed three times for the boy's soul to return to him. He prayed fervently, repeatedly and he wasn't going to give up. Verse 22 reads, "then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived."

God honoured Elijah's obedience and fervent prayers and brought the boy to life. God hears your prayers as well and will bring an answer in His perfect timing. But don't be discouraged or disheartened if the answer is not exactly what you expected. Commit to praying to God with passion and persistence, trusting the answer will come in God's perfect way and in His perfect timing.

As we complete this first week, continue to pray fervently for the main areas of concern in your life. Trust God to bring an answer as you journal your thoughts and inspirations through this time.

MATTHEW 7:7-11: ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU; SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND; KNOCK AND THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED TO YOU. FOR EVERYONE WHO ASKS RECEIVES; THE ONE WHO SEEKS FINDS; AND TO THE ONE WHO KNOCKS, THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED. "WHICH OF YOU, IF YOUR SON ASKS FOR BREAD, WILL GIVE HIM A STONE? OR IF HE ASKS FOR A FISH, WILL GIVE HIM A SNAKE? IF YOU, THEN, THOUGH YOU ARE EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE WILL YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM!

ADDITIONAL READING:

MATTHEW 6:9-13: THIS, THEN, IS HOW YOU SHOULD PRAY: "OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME, YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD. AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE."

EZRA 8:23: SO WE FASTED AND PETITIONED OUR GOD ABOUT THIS, AND HE ANSWERED OUR PRAYER.

PSALM 141:2: MAY MY PRAYER BE SET BEFORE YOU LIKE INCENSE; MAY THE LIFTING UP OF MY HANDS BE LIKE THE EVENING SACRIFICE.

MATTHEW 21:22: IF YOU BELIEVE, YOU WILL RECEIVE WHATEVER YOU ASK FOR IN PRAYER."

ACTS 2:42: THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING AND TO FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND TO PRAYER.

ROMANS 12:12: BE JOYFUL IN HOPE, PATIENT IN AFFLICTION, FAITHFUL IN PRAYER.

EPHESIANS 6:18: AND PRAY IN THE SPIRIT ON ALL OCCASIONS WITH ALL KINDS OF PRAYERS AND REQUESTS. WITH THIS IN MIND, BE ALERT AND ALWAYS KEEP ON PRAYING FOR ALL THE LORD'S PEOPLE.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6: DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING, BUT IN EVERY SITUATION, BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH THANKSGIVING, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD.

COLOSSIANS 4:2: DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO PRAYER, BEING WATCHFUL AND THANKFUL.

1 PETER 3:12A: FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE ON THE RIGHTEOUS AND HIS EARS ARE ATTENTIVE TO THEIR PRAYER.

PRAYER:

Lord, teach me to pray. You have given me the gift of partnering with You in prayer. Stir my heart to prayer and give me ears to listen as You speak to me in the quiet places of my heart. Increase my faith as I trust You for the answers to my prayers. Thank You for hearing me. I seek Your face and humbly, persistently ask that You will do a mighty work in my life. Use my prayers to bless and encourage others. Teach me to praise You in my prayers. You are worthy of my praise.

JOHN 11:38-44: JESUS, ONCE MORE DEEPLY MOVED, CAME TO THE TOMB. IT WAS A CAVE WITH A STONE LAID ACROSS THE ENTRANCE. "TAKE AWAY THE STONE," HE SAID.

"BUT LORD," SAID MARTHA, THE SISTER OF THE DEAD MAN, "BY THIS TIME THERE IS A BAD ODOUR, FOR HE HAS BEEN THERE FOUR DAYS."

THEN JESUS SAID, "DID I NOT TELL YOU THAT IF YOU BELIEVE, YOU WILL SEE THE GLORY OF GOD?"

SO THEY TOOK AWAY THE STONE. THEN JESUS LOOKED UP AND SAID, "FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU HAVE HEARD ME. I KNEW THAT YOU ALWAYS HEAR ME, BUT I SAID THIS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLE STANDING HERE, THAT THEY MAY BELIEVE THAT YOU SENT ME."

WHEN HE HAD SAID THIS, JESUS CALLED IN A LOUD VOICE, "LAZARUS, COME OUT!" THE DEAD MAN CAME OUT, HIS HANDS AND FEET WRAPPED WITH STRIPS OF LINEN, AND A CLOTH AROUND HIS FACE.

JESUS SAID TO THEM, "TAKE OFF THE GRAVE CLOTHES AND LET HIM GO."

The story of Lazarus' death and resurrection reflects the power of Jesus' spoken Word. He already knew in His heart the miracle that was about to take place, but His words spoke the miracle into existence.

While prayer is our declaration of our dependence on God, our spoken words can be the manifestation of what's happening in our hearts. There is power in our spoken words – whether they are used to build up or tear down. It is so important to keep our hearts filled with the truth from God's Word so that our words will produce good fruit.

As you seek God in prayer, ask Him for the words and discernment that may help someone today. Pray that your words would be encouraging, edifying and aligned with the truth of God's word. Building others up around us with our words allows us to be God's instrument – a vessel for His good work.

As God continues to fill us through this season of prayer and fasting, He wants to take what is now in our hearts and share it with others. How can you use the power of your spoken words to speak God's truth in the lives of others?

ADDITIONAL READING:

ISAIAH 50:4: "THE SOVEREIGN LORD HAS GIVEN ME A WELL-INSTRUCTED TONGUE, TO KNOW THE WORD THAT SUSTAINS THE WEARY. HE WAKENS ME MORNING BY MORNING, WAKENS MY EAR TO LISTEN LIKE ONE BEING INSTRUCTED."

EPHESIANS 4:29: "DO NOT LET ANY UNWHOLESOME TALK COME OUT OF YOUR MOUTHS, BUT ONLY WHAT IS HELPFUL FOR BUILDING OTHERS UP ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS, THAT IT MAY BENEFIT THOSE WHO LISTEN."

MATTHEW 12:33-37: "MAKE A TREE GOOD AND ITS FRUIT WILL BE GOOD, OR MAKE A TREE BAD AND ITS FRUIT WILL BE BAD, FOR A TREE IS RECOGNISED BY ITS FRUIT. YOU BROOD OF VIPERS, HOW CAN YOU WHO ARE EVIL SAY ANYTHING GOOD? FOR THE MOUTH SPEAKS WHAT THE HEART IS FULL OF. A GOOD MAN BRINGS GOOD THINGS OUT OF THE GOOD STORED UP IN HIM, AND AN EVIL MAN BRINGS EVIL THINGS OUT OF THE EVIL STORED UP IN HIM. BUT I TELL YOU THAT EVERYONE WILL HAVE TO GIVE ACCOUNT ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT FOR EVERY EMPTY WORD THEY HAVE SPOKEN. FOR BY YOUR WORDS YOU WILL BE ACQUITTED, AND BY YOUR WORDS YOU WILL BE CONDEMNED."

PROVERBS 18: 21: "THE TONGUE HAS THE POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH, AND THOSE WHO LOVE IT WILL EAT ITS FRUIT."

PROVERBS 12:18: "THE WORDS OF THE RECKLESS PIERCE LIKE SWORDS, BUT THE TONGUE OF THE WISE BRINGS HEALING."

PRAYER:

Father, Thank You that Your Word is life and power to me and to others. Your Word brings hope to things that appear to have no hope. May Your words take root in my heart so that I can bring life, power and encouragement to others who are weary. Place a deep hunger in my heart for Your words so that I can memorise and recall Your words when needed. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

MATTHEW 17:14-16: "AND WHEN THEY HAD COME TO THE MULTITUDE, A MAN CAME TO HIM, KNEELING DOWN TO HIM AND SAYING, "LORD, HAVE MERCY ON MY SON, FOR HE IS AN EPILEPTIC AND SUFFERS SEVERELY; FOR HE OFTEN FALLS INTO THE FIRE AND OFTEN INTO THE WATER. SO I BROUGHT HIM TO YOUR DISCIPLES, BUT THEY COULD NOT CURE HIM."

What a great example of humility – this man approached Jesus and knelt before Him in the midst of a crowd. As the father approached Jesus, he believed that Jesus would bring his son relief. But even in his belief, his approach was humble and submitted to what Christ would choose to do. Looking further into the story, we find the father was also persistent and resisted taking offence. Though the disciples were not able to help him, he set aside his temporary disappointment in their failure and continued to seek after Jesus – the solution to his circumstance, the source of relief through his trial.

Being humble before God is realising our need of Him, submitting to His will, pursuing Him and being confident the outcome will occur in God's perfect timing.

Be encouraged that approaching God with a heart of humility will always position you to find relief in Jesus. Don't be ashamed to humble yourself before God, even in the midst of others looking on. Offences and disappointment may come but continue in your pursuit of Jesus. You may not get relief right away but know that God is never late and His solution is always perfect.

Prayer is a posture of humility. Humble yourself before the Lord each day and bring your cares to Him. You may want to consider how you present your body to the Lord in prayer. Getting down on our hands and knees or stretching out on our faces on the floor puts us in positions of humility that can help us focus. He wants to meet you where you are and answer your every need. Is there discouragement in your heart today? Write it down and release it to our perfect God.

ADDITIONAL READING:

ISAIAH 66:2: "HAS NOT MY HAND MADE ALL THESE THINGS, AND SO THEY CAME INTO BEING? DECLARES THE LORD. THESE ARE THE ONES I LOOK ON WITH FAVOUR: THOSE WHO ARE HUMBLE AND CONTRITE IN SPIRIT, AND WHO TREMBLE AT MY WORD."

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14: "THEREFORE, AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, HOLY AND DEARLY LOVED, CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH COMPASSION, KINDNESS, HUMILITY, GENTLENESS AND PATIENCE. BEAR WITH EACH OTHER AND FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER IF ANY OF YOU HAS A GRIEVANCE AGAINST SOMEONE. FORGIVE AS THE LORD FORGAVE YOU. AND OVER ALL THESE VIRTUES PUT ON LOVE, WHICH BINDS THEM ALL TOGETHER IN PERFECT UNITY."

JAMES 4: 6-10: " BUT HE GIVES US MORE GRACE. THAT IS WHY SCRIPTURE SAYS: GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD BUT SHOWS FAVOUR TO THE HUMBLE. SUBMIT YOURSELVES, THEN, TO GOD. RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. COME NEAR TO GOD AND HE WILL COME NEAR TO YOU. WASH YOUR HANDS, YOU SINNERS, AND PURIFY YOUR HEARTS, YOU DOUBLE-MINDED. GRIEVE, MOURN AND WAIL. CHANGE YOUR LAUGHTER TO MOURNING AND YOUR JOY TO GLOOM. HUMBLE YOURSELVES BEFORE THE LORD, AND HE WILL LIFT YOU UP."

PRAYER:

Lord, I bow before You realising You are sovereign, almighty, and all powerful. I thank You that in Your greatness, You still love and care for me. Your ways and thoughts are so much higher than mine, and I acknowledge my need for You. May I have a meek and humble spirit like Jesus. Remove pride from my life, for I confess I am nothing without You. I submit my life to You once again. I pray You remove disappointment and discouragement from me as I trust in You and Your perfect will. Help me to be humble and gentle to those around me. Thank You for working in my heart. I love You.

ROMANS 8:5-6: FOR THOSE WHO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, SET THEIR MINDS ON THE THINGS OF THE FLESH, BUT THOSE WHO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT, THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT. FOR TO BE CARNALLY MINDED IS DEATH, BUT TO BE SPIRITUALLY MINDED IS LIFE AND PEACE.

Have you ever looked up at your ceiling fan blades or in the deep recesses of your couch cushions and noticed the filth that builds up over time? Even though we might clean on a regular basis, there are times when we need to go a little deeper. We realise that what appeared to be clean on the surface was in all actuality, quite filthy.

The same thing can happen spiritually. As we go about our daily lives, there are things that can build up over time. Even if we regularly worship, pray and read our Bible, the different pressures and cares of this world can quietly build up, and end up consuming our lives. Without even realising it, we can lose our peace, our joy, and our passion for the things of God. Our service to God, which used to fill us with life and excitement, becomes a duty that we must fulfill.

Fasting is the deep cleaning that helps us take our mind off of the things of this world and instead have a refreshed focus on the things of the Spirit. It is an incredibly effective way to get into the nooks and crannies of our soul and bring all those dusty old habits, broken mindsets and rusty attitudes out into the light of God's truth. In prayer and fasting, our service to God returns to something we want to do rather than something we have to do.

As you pray and fast today, ask God to show you any areas where you could use a refreshed spiritual focus. Like David, in Psalm 51:10-12, pray that God will cleanse your heart, renew your spirit, and restore the joy of your salvation. Pray with confidence, knowing that He wants to fill you with His life and peace.

ADDITIONAL READING:

PSALM 51:

HAVE MERCY ON ME, O GOD, ACCORDING TO YOUR UNFAILING LOVE; ACCORDING TO YOUR GREAT COMPASSION BLOT OUT MY TRANSGRESSIONS.

2 WASH AWAY ALL MY INIQUITY AND CLEANSE ME FROM MY SIN.

3 FOR I KNOW MY TRANSGRESSIONS, AND MY SIN IS ALWAYS BEFORE ME.

4 AGAINST YOU, YOU ONLY, HAVE I SINNED AND DONE WHAT IS EVIL IN YOUR SIGHT; SO YOU ARE RIGHT IN YOUR VERDICT AND JUSTIFIED WHEN YOU JUDGE.

5 SURELY I WAS SINFUL AT BIRTH, SINFUL FROM THE TIME MY MOTHER CONCEIVED ME.

6 YET YOU DESIRED FAITHFULNESS EVEN IN THE WOMB; YOU TAUGHT ME WISDOM IN THAT SECRET PLACE.

7 CLEANSE ME WITH HYSSOP, AND I WILL BE CLEAN; WASH ME, AND I WILL BE WHITER THAN SNOW.

8 LET ME HEAR JOY AND GLADNESS; LET THE BONES YOU HAVE CRUSHED REJOICE.

9 HIDE YOUR FACE FROM MY SINS AND BLOT OUT ALL MY INIQUITY.

10 CREATE IN ME A PURE HEART, O GOD, AND RENEW A STEADFAST SPIRIT WITHIN ME.

11 DO NOT CAST ME FROM YOUR PRESENCE OR TAKE YOUR HOLY SPIRIT FROM ME.

12 RESTORE TO ME THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION AND GRANT ME A WILLING SPIRIT, TO SUSTAIN ME.

13 THEN I WILL TEACH TRANSGRESSORS YOUR WAYS, SO THAT SINNERS WILL TURN BACK TO YOU.

14 DELIVER ME FROM THE GUILT OF BLOODSHED, O GOD, YOU WHO ARE GOD MY SAVIOUR, AND MY TONGUE WILL SING OF YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

15 OPEN MY LIPS, LORD, AND MY MOUTH WILL DECLARE YOUR PRAISE.

16 YOU DO NOT DELIGHT IN SACRIFICE, OR I WOULD BRING IT; YOU DO NOT TAKE PLEASURE IN BURNT OFFERINGS.

17 MY SACRIFICE, O GOD, IS A BROKEN SPIRIT; A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART YOU, GOD, WILL NOT DESPISE.

18 MAY IT PLEASE YOU TO PROSPER ZION, TO BUILD UP THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.

19 THEN YOU WILL DELIGHT IN THE SACRIFICES OF THE RIGHTEOUS, IN BURNT OFFERINGS OFFERED WHOLE; THEN BULLS WILL BE OFFERED ON YOUR ALTAR.

PSALM 139

1 YOU HAVE SEARCHED ME, LORD, AND YOU KNOW ME.

2 YOU KNOW WHEN I SIT AND WHEN I RISE; YOU PERCEIVE MY THOUGHTS FROM AFAR.

3 YOU DISCERN MY GOING OUT AND MY LYING DOWN; YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH ALL MY WAYS.

4 BEFORE A WORD IS ON MY TONGUE YOU, LORD, KNOW IT COMPLETELY.

5 YOU HEM ME IN BEHIND AND BEFORE, AND YOU LAY YOUR HAND UPON ME.

6 SUCH KNOWLEDGE IS TOO WONDERFUL FOR ME, TOO LOFTY FOR ME TO ATTAIN.

7 WHERE CAN I GO FROM YOUR SPIRIT? WHERE CAN I FLEE FROM YOUR PRESENCE?

8 IF I GO UP TO THE HEAVENS, YOU ARE THERE; IF I MAKE MY BED IN THE DEPTHS, YOU ARE THERE.

9 IF I RISE ON THE WINGS OF THE DAWN, IF I SETTLE ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE SEA,

10 EVEN THERE YOUR HAND WILL GUIDE ME, YOUR RIGHT HAND WILL HOLD ME FAST.

11 IF I SAY, "SURELY THE DARKNESS WILL HIDE ME AND THE LIGHT BECOME NIGHT AROUND ME,"

12 EVEN THE DARKNESS WILL NOT BE DARK TO YOU; THE NIGHT WILL SHINE LIKE THE DAY,

FOR DARKNESS IS AS LIGHT TO YOU.

13 FOR YOU CREATED MY INMOST BEING; YOU KNIT ME TOGETHER IN MY MOTHER'S WOMB.

14 I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE; YOUR WORKS ARE WONDERFUL, I KNOW THAT FULL WELL.

15 MY FRAME WAS NOT HIDDEN FROM YOU WHEN I WAS MADE IN THE SECRET PLACE,

WHEN I WAS WOVEN TOGETHER IN THE DEPTHS OF THE EARTH.

16 YOUR EYES SAW MY UNFORMED BODY; ALL THE DAYS ORDAINED FOR ME WERE WRITTEN IN YOUR BOOK BEFORE ONE OF THEM CAME TO BE.

17 HOW PRECIOUS TO ME ARE YOUR THOUGHTS, GOD! HOW VAST IS THE SUM OF THEM!

18 WERE I TO COUNT THEM, THEY WOULD OUTNUMBER THE GRAINS OF SAND — WHEN I AWAKE, I AM STILL WITH YOU.

19 IF ONLY YOU, GOD, WOULD SLAY THE WICKED! AWAY FROM ME, YOU WHO ARE BLOODTHIRSTY!

20 THEY SPEAK OF YOU WITH EVIL INTENT; YOUR ADVERSARIES MISUSE YOUR NAME.

21 DO I NOT HATE THOSE WHO HATE YOU, LORD, AND ABHOR THOSE WHO ARE IN REBELLION AGAINST YOU?

22 I HAVE NOTHING BUT HATRED FOR THEM; I COUNT THEM MY ENEMIES.

23 SEARCH ME, GOD, AND KNOW MY HEART; TEST ME AND KNOW MY ANXIOUS THOUGHTS.

24 SEE IF THERE IS ANY OFFENSIVE WAY IN ME, AND LEAD ME IN THE WAY EVERLASTING.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9: " FINALLY, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS NOBLE, WHATEVER IS RIGHT, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS ADMIRABLE—IF ANYTHING IS EXCELLENT OR PRAISEWORTHY—THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS.

WHATEVER YOU HAVE LEARNED OR RECEIVED OR HEARD FROM ME, OR SEEN IN ME—PUT IT INTO PRACTICE. AND THE GOD OF PEACE WILL BE WITH YOU."

PRAYER:

Lord, at times I grow tired and lukewarm in my love and service for You. Forgive me for allowing the distractions of the world to take my focus off of You. Please renew the joy of my salvation and give me a fresh passion for You. I want to love You more than life. Thank You that You never grow weary and that Your passion for me is always secure.

LUKE 4:1-2, 14-15: JESUS, FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, RETURNED FROM THE JORDAN AND WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT IN THE DESERT, WHERE FOR FORTY DAYS HE WAS TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL. HE ATE NOTHING DURING THOSE DAYS, AND AT THE END OF THEM HE WAS HUNGRY...JESUS RETURNED TO GALILEE IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT, AND NEWS ABOUT HIM SPREAD THROUGH THE WHOLE COUNTRYSIDE. HE TAUGHT IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES, AND EVERYONE PRAISED HIM.

Prayer and fasting are helpful to receiving a clear vision of God's specific path for our lives. Many times following a season of prayer and fasting we can have a more defined understanding of the part that we play in the body of Christ and a greater sense of our particular spiritual giftings. (1 Corinthians 12)

This chapter in the Gospel of Luke describes the circumstances surrounding the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Notice that He went into the desert "full of the Holy Spirit." However, He returned to Galilee, "in the power of the Holy Spirit." Being full of the Spirit is knowing God and his character; walking in the power of the Spirit is when we know that we have the God-given strength and authority in our lives to walk out His will.

The power of the Spirit is essential for us to accomplish the assignment God has for our lives. God could be leading you to fast so that you can receive His specific instructions for your life. He will empower you, not just to know Him, but to walk in His power to accomplish what He has called you to do.

- ◇ Are there areas of your life that need more clarity?
- ◇ Are you walking in the power of the Spirit and living in God's purpose for your life? Write down those things God is speaking to you.
- ◇ As you continue your fast, pray that God continually reveals His purpose and gives you ever increasing clarity and strength to walk it out.

ADDITIONAL READING:

PSALMS 37:3-7: TRUST IN THE LORD AND DO GOOD; DWELL IN THE LAND AND ENJOY SAFE PASTURE. TAKE DELIGHT IN THE LORD, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART. COMMIT YOUR WAY TO THE LORD; TRUST IN HIM AND HE WILL DO THIS: HE WILL MAKE YOUR RIGHTEOUS REWARD SHINE LIKE THE DAWN, YOUR VINDICATION LIKE THE NOONDAY SUN. BE STILL BEFORE THE LORD AND WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIM; DO NOT FRET WHEN PEOPLE SUCCEED IN THEIR WAYS, WHEN THEY CARRY OUT THEIR WICKED SCHEMES.

ISAIAH 48:17-18: THIS IS WHAT THE LORD SAYS— YOUR REDEEMER, THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL: I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHO TEACHES YOU WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU, WHO DIRECTS YOU IN THE WAY YOU SHOULD GO. IF ONLY YOU HAD PAID ATTENTION TO MY COMMANDS, YOUR PEACE WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE A RIVER, YOUR WELL-BEING LIKE THE WAVES OF THE SEA.

ROMANS 1:1-2: THEREFORE, I URGE YOU, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY, TO OFFER YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND PLEASING TO GOD—THIS IS YOUR TRUE AND PROPER WORSHIP. DO NOT CONFORM TO THE PATTERN OF THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND. THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TEST AND APPROVE WHAT GODS WILL IS—HIS GOOD, PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL.

PRAYER:

Holy Spirit, thank You that Your power lives within me. I want to live more in Your power, so I ask that You come into my soul and fill me again. I do not want any sin in my life to block You, so I ask You cleanse my heart. I know You have a purpose for my life, but I don't always know what that is. I ask for a clear calling and discernment as I desire to live out the assignment You have given me. Thank You that when You call me to something, You also completely equip me. I pray that You alone will work through me and that others will see You in me. Thank You for choosing me and giving me a purpose. May my life shine brightly for You!

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 (MSG): DON'T FRET OR WORRY. INSTEAD OF WORRYING, PRAY. LET PETITIONS AND PRAISES SHAPE YOUR WORRIES INTO PRAYERS, LETTING GOD KNOW YOUR CONCERNS. BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, A SENSE OF GOD'S WHOLENESS, EVERYTHING COMING TOGETHER FOR GOOD, WILL COME AND SETTLE YOU DOWN. IT'S WONDERFUL WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRIST DISPLACES WORRY AT THE CENTRE OF YOUR LIFE.

Worry seems to be an inescapable fact of modern life. No doubt there is plenty to worry about: our future, the economy, global warming, war, disease... the list could go on forever! Sometimes it might seem that worry has even replaced Jesus as the focal point of our lives. Jesus Himself admonished us several times not to worry. And the great apostle, Paul, tell us in the passage above that there is an antidote to worry...prayer.

When we worry about something, we are spending energy on it, wondering what might happen, rehearsing the "if only's" and "what if's" in our mind. Why not take that same energy and refocus it on prayer instead? When we worry, we are simply talking to ourselves about our fears, but when we pray, we are taking those fears to God. We can't control the future, but in the words of Anne Graham Lotz, God is already there! He knows exactly what is going to happen and He promises to be with us every step of the journey.

As we continue this season of prayer and fasting, let's make an effort to convert our worry into prayer. As Paul says in the verse above, "let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers," and you will find that the peace of God will guard your heart.

- ◇ Are there things that you consistently worry about?
- ◇ As you go through your day today, recapture each worried thought and send it up to God as a prayer. See how dramatically your outlook improves when the peace of God is activated through prayer!

ADDITIONAL READING:

PROVERBS 3:1-6: MY SON, DO NOT FORGET MY TEACHING, BUT KEEP MY COMMANDS IN YOUR HEART, FOR THEY WILL PROLONG YOUR LIFE MANY YEARS, AND BRING YOU PEACE AND PROSPERITY. LET LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS NEVER LEAVE YOU; BIND THEM AROUND YOUR NECK, WRITE THEM ON THE TABLET OF YOUR HEART. THEN YOU WILL WIN FAVOUR AND A GOOD NAME IN THE SIGHT OF GOD AND MAN. TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING; IN ALL YOUR WAYS SUBMIT TO HIM, AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT.

JEREMIAH 29:11-13: "FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU," DECLARES THE LORD, "PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE. THEN YOU WILL CALL ON ME AND COME AND PRAY TO ME, AND I WILL LISTEN TO YOU. YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME WHEN YOU SEEK ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART."

ISAIAH 41:10-13: SO DO NOT FEAR, FOR I AM WITH YOU; DO NOT BE DISMAYED, FOR I AM YOUR GOD. I WILL STRENGTHEN YOU AND HELP YOU; I WILL UPHOLD YOU WITH MY RIGHTEOUS RIGHT HAND.

PRAYER:

Lord, You know how often my mind goes to worry and not to trusting You. May my thoughts be quicker to turn into prayers to You, my Almighty God, because You know the plans You have for me, and they are plans to prosper me and not to harm me. Thank You for Your peace that surpasses all understanding as I place my confidence in You and believe You are at work in my life.

I KINGS 18:36 (KJV): AND IT CAME TO PASS, AT THE TIME OF THE OFFERING OF THE EVENING SACRIFICE, THAT ELIJAH THE PROPHET CAME NEAR AND SAID, "LORD GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND ISRAEL, LET IT BE KNOWN THIS DAY THAT YOU ARE GOD IN ISRAEL AND I AM YOUR SERVANT..."

The sacrifice referenced above was a declaration that Elijah was a servant of the Most High God. Elijah belonged to God, and he represented God to the people. However, Elijah's boldness was not a result of who he was; it was the result of knowing God!

As children of God under the new covenant of Jesus, we don't have to be timid or fearful when coming to God in prayer. We can approach God boldly. The Amplified Bible puts it like this:

Let us then fearlessly and confidently and boldly draw near to the throne of grace (the throne of God's unmerited favour to us sinners), that we may receive mercy [for our failures] and find grace to help in good time for every need [appropriate help and well-timed help, coming just when we need it]. Hebrews 4:16

It's hard to imagine taking a fearless, confident, bold attitude when coming before God in prayer. Yet this is exactly what we are admonished to do! God has already settled the issue of our access to Him, but we can be assured, our access is not because of our own righteousness. It's because of what Jesus did on the cross. We can come to the throne in such outrageous boldness because Jesus was outrageously righteous! When we pray, we come to God in the authority of Jesus' name, and we can be confident that we will find grace, mercy and perfectly-timed help.

- ◇ Do you approach God with timidity or confidence?
- ◇ Seek God boldly today knowing you are fully forgiven and Jesus has made you righteous. When you approach God in prayer, seek a fresh revelation of who He is in your life.

ADDITIONAL READING:

MATTHEW 9:18-26: WHILE HE WAS SAYING THIS, A SYNAGOGUE LEADER CAME AND KNELT BEFORE HIM AND SAID, "MY DAUGHTER HAS JUST DIED. BUT COME AND PUT YOUR HAND ON HER, AND SHE WILL LIVE." JESUS GOT UP AND WENT WITH HIM, AND SO DID HIS DISCIPLES. JUST THEN A WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN SUBJECT TO BLEEDING FOR TWELVE YEARS CAME UP BEHIND HIM AND TOUCHED THE EDGE OF HIS CLOAK. SHE SAID TO HERSELF, "IF I ONLY TOUCH HIS CLOAK, I WILL BE HEALED." JESUS TURNED AND SAW HER. "TAKE HEART, DAUGHTER," HE SAID, "YOUR FAITH HAS HEALED YOU." AND THE WOMAN WAS HEALED AT THAT MOMENT. WHEN JESUS ENTERED THE SYNAGOGUE LEADER'S HOUSE AND SAW THE NOISY CROWD AND PEOPLE PLAYING PIPES, HE SAID, "GO AWAY. THE GIRL IS NOT DEAD BUT ASLEEP." BUT THEY LAUGHED AT HIM. AFTER THE CROWD HAD BEEN PUT OUTSIDE, HE WENT IN AND TOOK THE GIRL BY THE HAND, AND SHE GOT UP. NEWS OF THIS SPREAD THROUGH ALL THAT REGION.

EPHESIANS 3:16-21: I PRAY THAT OUT OF HIS GLORIOUS RICHES HE MAY STRENGTHEN YOU WITH POWER THROUGH HIS SPIRIT IN YOUR INNER BEING, SO THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH. AND I PRAY THAT YOU, BEING ROOTED AND ESTABLISHED IN LOVE, MAY HAVE POWER, TOGETHER WITH ALL THE LORD'S HOLY PEOPLE, TO GRASP HOW WIDE AND LONG AND HIGH AND DEEP IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST, AND TO KNOW THIS LOVE THAT SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE — THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED TO THE MEASURE OF ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD. 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, TO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT ALL GENERATIONS, FOR EVER AND EVER! AMEN.

PRAYER:

Father, I thank You that I can approach You boldly and with confidence because I am righteous through Christ. Lord, please give me a boldness in asking from You. Nothing is too difficult for You, and I pray for a renewed revelation of who You are today. You hold all things in Your hands and have a perfect plan for my life. Thank You. I love You.

MATTHEW 6:10 (KJV): "THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN."

We have all heard the phrase, "just like heaven on earth." When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, in Matthew 6:9-13, He provided some insight into what "heaven on earth" might look like. In reality, heaven is a place where God's will reigns supreme. If we want to have a taste of heaven on earth, then our prayer should be like Jesus': "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done..." The purest motivation for our prayers is that God will be glorified and that His will would reign supreme in our lives, just like it does in heaven.

On a more personal level, we can pray that His will be unhindered in our own lives. Rather than imposing His will upon us, God gives us the choice to surrender to it with trust and gladness. As we yield to the Lordship of Christ over every area of our lives, we come into agreement with Him. We experience alignment with heaven and position ourselves to taste a little bit of heaven here on earth. His will then becomes what we desire and the thing we most seek after. We enter into the incredible adventure of participating in God's plan to move His kingdom forward on the earth. This is where we find the most fulfilling and joyous life, but it all starts with one personal "yes, Lord" on our part.

- ◇ What does God's will "on earth as it is in heaven" look like in your life?
- ◇ Do the desires of your heart line up with the will of God?
- ◇ As we seek God together, let's pray as Jesus taught us, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."

ADDITIONAL READING:

ISAIAH 58:1-12

1 FOR DAY AFTER DAY THEY SEEK ME OUT; THEY SEEM EAGER TO KNOW MY WAYS, AS IF THEY WERE A NATION THAT DOES WHAT IS RIGHT AND HAS NOT FORSAKEN THE COMMANDS OF ITS GOD.

2 THEY ASK ME FOR JUST DECISIONS AND SEEM EAGER FOR GOD TO COME NEAR THEM.

3 'WHY HAVE WE FASTED,' THEY SAY, 'AND YOU HAVE

NOT SEEN IT? WHY HAVE WE HUMBLING OURSELVES, AND YOU HAVE NOT NOTICED?' "YET ON THE DAY OF YOUR FASTING, YOU DO AS YOU PLEASE AND EXPLOIT ALL YOUR WORKERS.

4 YOUR FASTING ENDS IN QUARRELING AND STRIFE, AND IN STRIKING EACH OTHER WITH WICKED FISTS. YOU CANNOT FAST AS YOU DO TODAY AND EXPECT YOUR VOICE TO BE HEARD ON HIGH.

5 IS THIS THE KIND OF FAST I HAVE CHOSEN, ONLY A DAY FOR PEOPLE TO HUMBLE THEMSELVES? IS IT ONLY FOR BOWING ONE'S HEAD LIKE A REED AND FOR LYING IN SACKCLOTH AND ASHES? IS THAT WHAT YOU CALL A FAST, A DAY ACCEPTABLE TO THE LORD?

6 "IS NOT THIS THE KIND OF FASTING I HAVE CHOSEN: TO LOOSE THE CHAINS OF INJUSTICE AND UNTIE THE CORDS OF THE YOKE, TO SET THE OPPRESSED FREE AND BREAK EVERY YOKE?

7 IS IT NOT TO SHARE YOUR FOOD WITH THE HUNGRY AND TO PROVIDE THE POOR WANDERER WITH SHELTER— WHEN YOU SEE THE NAKED, TO CLOTHE THEM, AND NOT TO TURN AWAY FROM YOUR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD?

8 THEN YOUR LIGHT WILL BREAK FORTH LIKE THE DAWN, AND YOUR HEALING WILL QUICKLY APPEAR; THEN YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL GO BEFORE YOU, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD WILL BE YOUR REAR GUARD.

9 THEN YOU WILL CALL, AND THE LORD WILL ANSWER; YOU WILL CRY FOR HELP, AND HE WILL SAY: HERE AM I. "IF YOU DO AWAY WITH THE YOKE OF OPPRESSION, WITH THE POINTING FINGER AND MALICIOUS TALK,

10 AND IF YOU SPEND YOURSELVES IN BEHALF OF THE HUNGRY AND SATISFY THE NEEDS OF THE OPPRESSED, THEN YOUR LIGHT WILL RISE IN THE DARKNESS, AND YOUR NIGHT WILL BECOME LIKE THE NOONDAY.

11 THE LORD WILL GUIDE YOU ALWAYS; HE WILL SATISFY YOUR NEEDS IN A SUN-SCORCHED LAND AND WILL STRENGTHEN YOUR FRAME. YOU WILL BE LIKE A WELL-WATERED GARDEN, LIKE A SPRING WHOSE WATERS NEVER FAIL.

12 YOUR PEOPLE WILL REBUILD THE ANCIENT RUINS AND WILL RAISE UP THE AGE-OLD FOUNDATIONS; YOU WILL BE CALLED REPAIRER OF BROKEN WALLS, RESTORER OF STREETS WITH DWELLINGS.

JAMES 1:27: RELIGION THAT GOD OUR FATHER ACCEPTS AS PURE AND FAULTLESS IS THIS: TO LOOK AFTER ORPHANS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR DISTRESS AND TO KEEP ONESELF FROM BEING POLLUTED BY THE WORLD.

PRAYER:

Father, Your word is very clear about what Your will is. You desire for us to reach out to the lonely, oppressed, marginalised and lost. You have great compassion on them and desire us to be Your hands and feet. Please help my will to line up with Yours. Please enable me to care about others being lost more than I care about the comforts or problems in my life. May Your kingdom come, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And may I be willing to bring Your kingdom to earth by the way I treat others around me. Please open my eyes to who You want me to bless today.

For the final week of the prayer and fast we will be focusing on the sacrifice Christ has made for us through the cross and the victory we have through His resurrection.

PSALM 51 (NLT):

HAVE MERCY ON ME, O GOD, BECAUSE OF YOUR UNFAILING LOVE. BECAUSE OF YOUR GREAT COMPASSION, BLOT OUT THE STAIN OF MY SINS. WASH ME CLEAN FROM MY GUILT. PURIFY ME FROM MY SIN. FOR I RECOGNISE MY SHAMEFUL DEEDS; THEY HAUNT ME DAY AND NIGHT. AGAINST YOU, AND YOU ALONE, HAVE I SINNED; I HAVE DONE WHAT IS EVIL IN YOUR SIGHT. YOU WILL BE PROVED RIGHT IN WHAT YOU SAY, AND YOUR JUDGMENT AGAINST ME IS JUST. FOR I WAS BORN A SINNER; YES, FROM THE MOMENT MY MOTHER CONCEIVED ME. BUT YOU DESIRE HONESTY FROM THE HEART, SO YOU CAN TEACH ME TO BE WISE IN MY INMOST BEING.

PURIFY ME FROM MY SINS, AND I WILL BE CLEAN; WASH ME, AND I WILL BE WHITER THAN SNOW. OH, GIVE ME BACK MY JOY AGAIN; YOU HAVE BROKEN ME, NOW LET ME REJOICE. DON'T KEEP LOOKING AT MY SINS. REMOVE THE STAIN OF MY GUILT. CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD. RENEW A RIGHT SPIRIT WITHIN ME. DO NOT BANISH ME FROM YOUR PRESENCE, AND DON'T TAKE YOUR HOLY SPIRIT FROM ME. RESTORE TO ME AGAIN THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION, AND MAKE ME WILLING

TO OBEY YOU. THEN I WILL TEACH YOUR WAYS TO SINNERS, AND THEY WILL RETURN TO YOU. FORGIVE ME FOR SHEDDING BLOOD, O GOD WHO SAVES; THEN I WILL JOYFULLY SING OF YOUR FORGIVENESS. UNSEAL MY LIPS, O LORD, THAT I MAY PRAISE YOU. YOU WOULD NOT BE PLEASED WITH SACRIFICES, OR I WOULD BRING THEM. IF I BROUGHT YOU A BURNT OFFERING, YOU WOULD NOT ACCEPT IT. THE SACRIFICE YOU WANT IS A BROKEN SPIRIT. A BROKEN AND REPENTANT HEART, O GOD, YOU WILL NOT DESPISE. LOOK WITH FAVOR ON ZION AND HELP HER; REBUILD THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM. THEN YOU WILL BE PLEASED WITH WORTHY SACRIFICES AND WITH OUR WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS; AND BULLS WILL AGAIN BE SACRIFICED ON YOUR ALTAR.

Consider the things that come between you and God, and starting with the words below, hold them up to God as a confession. Confession causes us to face our nature, and can be a frightful thing, but it is also a bridge to God. Sincere confession is always followed by God's drawing near in forgiveness. As you read, don't be limited by what is written here. Add your own words as you are moved to.

Holy and merciful Father: We confess to You that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word and deed; by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven. We have been deaf to Your call to serve, as Christ served us. We have grieved Your Holy Spirit.

Father, I confess to You my great pride, impatience, self indulgence, prejudice, contempt, cruelty and dishonesty. I confess my exploitation of others, envy of those more fortunate, lust for worldly goods and comforts, negligence in prayer and worship, and my failure to stand firm and be a witness to Your reality. Father, by way of the cross and passion of Your Son our Lord, teach me the joy of resurrection.

As the scripture says, "If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1.9). Now is the time to search our hearts and to be fully known by God. As we focus on the cross and resurrection, we need to be honest with God, hiding nothing. Remember as well that there is no darkness too deep for God: His own Son suffered death on a cross under a greater burden than any have known before or after Him – He descended deeper into the darkness. There is no depth to which we may sink, where He has not been, or where we will be out of reach of the mercy of God.

SUGGESTION:

For fasting from various media, continue the practices from last week and add to them if you can. Cut back on, or eliminate, TV, the radio, the internet, the computer, etc. And finally, whenever you have free time because you have given something up, be sure to give the time to God.

- ◇ Have you acknowledged your sinfulness to our Most Holy God?
- ◇ Have you repented and turned from your ways?
- ◇ Please spend time asking God to reveal the sins you need to confess. Name the sins and take ownership of them. After listening for His Spirit to reveal your sins repent and turn from those sins.
- ◇ After you are finished, please close with this prayer.

PRAYER:

Father, I often find myself buried under the weight of my own dark thoughts, and so fearful of these thoughts that I cannot even face them. But Lord, You promise that because of what Jesus did, I am not to be punished according to my sin. With this promise and the hope of freedom, God help me to face my own heart: shine Your light inside of me. I want to be known by You. Help me to let You in.

Our godliness can often be measured by the line between our pride and humility. Scripture tells us that God has placed a spirit of "fierce desires" in us. Pride can ignite these God-given desires into an occasion for doing wrong. Humility, on the other hand, makes room for God, who tempers and directs our desires, and guides us to lasting fulfillment.

Scripture tells us that Jesus humbled Himself and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (a more humiliating event could not have been imagined). So we practice humility as a way to follow Jesus, and to cast off all our ineffective, prideful attempts at self-promotion, self-salvation and self-satisfaction.

When we remember that Jesus' death is our only hope, and that all our efforts to save ourselves are at best short-term solutions and doomed to fail, we weep for our condition. But we also need to remember that humiliation and remorse, both appropriate responses to God, are temporary. Through Christ's resurrection, the humble are lifted up, and those who mourn are comforted with an everlasting comfort.

JAMES 4:1-10:

WHAT CAUSES FIGHTS AND QUARRELS AMONG YOU? DON'T THEY COME FROM YOUR DESIRES THAT BATTLE WITHIN YOU? YOU DESIRE BUT DO NOT HAVE, SO YOU KILL. YOU COVET BUT YOU CANNOT GET WHAT YOU WANT, SO YOU QUARREL AND FIGHT. YOU DO NOT HAVE BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK GOD. WHEN YOU ASK, YOU DO NOT RECEIVE, BECAUSE YOU ASK WITH WRONG MOTIVES, THAT YOU MAY SPEND WHAT YOU GET ON YOUR PLEASURES.

YOU ADULTEROUS PEOPLE, DON'T YOU KNOW THAT FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD MEANS ENMITY AGAINST GOD? THEREFORE, ANYONE WHO CHOOSES TO BE A FRIEND OF THE WORLD BECOMES AN ENEMY OF GOD. OR DO YOU THINK SCRIPTURE SAYS WITHOUT REASON THAT HE JEALOUSLY LONGS FOR THE SPIRIT HE HAS CAUSED TO DWELL IN US? BUT HE GIVES US MORE GRACE. THAT IS WHY SCRIPTURE SAYS:

"GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD BUT SHOWS FAVOUR TO THE HUMBLE."

SUBMIT YOURSELVES, THEN, TO GOD. RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. COME NEAR TO GOD AND HE WILL COME NEAR TO YOU. WASH YOUR HANDS, YOU SINNERS, AND PURIFY YOUR HEARTS, YOU DOUBLE-MINDED. GRIEVE, MOURN AND WAIL. CHANGE YOUR LAUGHTER TO MOURNING AND YOUR JOY TO GLOOM.

HUMBLE YOURSELVES BEFORE THE LORD, AND HE WILL LIFT YOU UP.

JOHN 16.19-22 (NRSV):

(JESUS SPEAKS TO HIS DISCIPLES BEFORE HIS DEATH)
"VERY TRULY, I TELL YOU, YOU WILL WEEP AND MOURN... YOU WILL HAVE PAIN, BUT YOUR PAIN WILL TURN INTO JOY. WHEN A WOMAN IS IN LABOR, SHE HAS PAIN, BECAUSE HER HOUR HAS COME. BUT WHEN HER CHILD IS BORN, SHE NO LONGER REMEMBERS THE ANGUISH BECAUSE OF THE JOY OF HAVING BROUGHT A HUMAN BEING INTO THE WORLD. SO YOU HAVE PAIN NOW; BUT I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN, AND YOUR HEARTS WILL REJOICE, AND NO ONE WILL TAKE YOUR JOY FROM YOU.

PSALM 23 (NLT): A PSALM OF DAVID.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I HAVE EVERYTHING I NEED. HE LETS ME REST IN GREEN MEADOWS; HE LEADS ME BESIDE PEACEFUL STREAMS. HE RENEWS MY STRENGTH. HE GUIDES ME ALONG RIGHT PATHS, BRINGING HONOR TO HIS NAME. EVEN WHEN I WALK THROUGH THE DARK VALLEY OF DEATH, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID, FOR YOU ARE CLOSE BESIDE ME. YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF PROTECT AND COMFORT ME. YOU PREPARE A FEAST FOR ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES. YOU WELCOME ME AS A GUEST, ANOINTING MY HEAD WITH OIL.

MY CUP OVERFLOWS WITH BLESSINGS. SURELY YOUR GOODNESS AND UNFAILING LOVE WILL PURSUE ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, AND I WILL LIVE IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER.

- ◇ In what area of your life or in what relationship do you need to ask God to grant you humility?
- ◇ Is there someone you need to humbly approach and ask for forgiveness?
- ◇ Is there an area you need to surrender to God and no longer seek your will, but to trust in Him for His will to be done?

PRAYER:

God grant me the ability to see myself as You see me. Yet protect me from what I find in my own heart, for surely it is more awful than I can bear. Forgive me, and carry my burden of grief when I see my failings. And God, don't let me take credit for the good things You have given me. In Your mercy help me to see the pride in my own heart. Heal and renew my spirit; refine the passion of my heart; and help me to walk in humility.

The day Jesus entered Jerusalem before His death and resurrection is known as Palm Sunday. This marks the beginning of the week of Christ's passion. The word 'passion' comes from a Latin word which means 'suffering'. The suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross has always been referred to as The Passion. There is even a movie by that name. In modern times, we have come to apply the word passion to mean any kind of strong feeling, or commitment, even though it more truthfully describes a suffering for something worthwhile.

In many ways we have lost this sense of the word, in part perhaps, because there is so little of this kind of passion left in the western world. We ascribe the word passion to how we feel about sports teams, music, or our political views. Would you be willing to suffer for those things?

How different is the passion of Jesus: directed by God and willingly accepted. Jesus actively chose His path and the sufferings that followed. In Jesus we see not only the full depth of God's passion for us and the suffering that was a necessary part of it, but also the full depth of one perfect human's passion for God (in Jesus): obedience that led to death.

How do we respond to God's call to follow Him? Are we passionate? Or passive? To walk with Jesus, who said, "take up your cross and follow me," we must accept God's direction and choose to follow the path laid out for us. This is a path of certain passion (suffering), but also certain hope because of the victory we have through Christ's resurrection.

MATTHEW 10.24-32, 38-39 (TEV):

(JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES)

"NO PUPIL IS GREATER THAN HIS TEACHER; NO SLAVE IS GREATER THAN HIS MASTER. SO A PUPIL SHOULD BE SATISFIED TO BECOME LIKE HIS TEACHER, AND A SLAVE LIKE HIS MASTER. IF THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY IS CALLED **BEELZEBUL**, THE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY WILL BE CALLED EVEN WORSE NAMES! SO DO NOT BE AFRAID OF PEOPLE. WHATEVER IS NOW COVERED UP WILL BE UNCOVERED, AND EVERY SECRET WILL BE MADE KNOWN. WHAT I AM TELLING YOU IN THE DARK YOU MUST REPEAT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT, AND WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD IN PRIVATE YOU MUST ANNOUNCE FROM THE ROOFTOPS. DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THOSE WHO KILL THE BODY BUT CANNOT KILL THE SOUL; RATHER BE AFRAID OF **GOD**, WHO CAN DESTROY BOTH BODY AND SOUL IN HELL. FOR ONLY A PENNY YOU CAN BUY TWO SPARROWS, YET NOT ONE SPARROW FALLS TO THE GROUND WITHOUT YOUR **FATHER'S** CONSENT. AS FOR YOU, EVEN THE HAIRS OF YOUR HEAD HAVE ALL BEEN COUNTED. SO DO NOT BE AFRAID; YOU ARE WORTH MUCH MORE THAN MANY SPARROWS! THOSE WHO DECLARE PUBLICLY THAT THEY BELONG TO ME, I WILL DO THE SAME FOR THEM BEFORE MY **FATHER** IN HEAVEN. "THOSE WHO DO NOT TAKE UP THEIR CROSS AND FOLLOW IN MY STEPS ARE NOT FIT TO BE MY DISCIPLES. THOSE WHO TRY TO GAIN THEIR OWN LIFE WILL LOSE IT; BUT THOSE WHO LOSE THEIR LIFE FOR MY SAKE WILL GAIN IT."

PSALM 130 (NLT):

A SONG FOR THE ASCENT TO JERUSALEM

FROM THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR, O **LORD**, I CALL FOR YOUR HELP. HEAR MY CRY, O **LORD**. PAY ATTENTION TO MY PRAYER. **LORD**, IF YOU KEPT A RECORD OF OUR SINS, WHO, O **LORD**, COULD EVER SURVIVE? BUT YOU OFFER FORGIVENESS, THAT WE MIGHT LEARN TO FEAR YOU.

I AM COUNTING ON THE **LORD**; YES, I AM COUNTING ON HIM. I HAVE PUT MY HOPE IN HIS WORD. I LONG FOR THE **LORD** MORE THAN WATCHMEN WAIT FOR THE MORNING, YES, MORE THAN WATCHMEN WAIT FOR THE MORNING. O **ISRAEL**, HOPE IN THE **LORD**; FOR WITH THE **LORD** THERE IS UNFAILING LOVE AND AN OVERFLOWING SUPPLY OF SALVATION. HE HIMSELF WILL FREE **ISRAEL** FROM EVERY KIND OF SIN.

- ◇ How are you passionate in your love for the Lord?
- ◇ In what areas do you actively choose God's ways and desire to live for Him?
- ◇ Or, do you passively follow Him?
- ◇ In what ways do others look at your life and see your passion and consuming love for Jesus?
- ◇ Ask God to enable you to passionately love and follow Him.

PRAYER:

Lord, thank You for Your passionate love for me that You would die for me. And thank You for Your passionate love for the Father, that You would obey Him, even to death. Lord, I am so often harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd—how can I find my way unless You help me? Have mercy on me. Lead me Lord. Come, and give me the strength I need to follow You in doing the Father's will. Bless the time I give to You this week. Pour Your blessing over me. Give me a passionate love equal to Yours.

When we think of Jesus' death on the cross we also remember all those who were together with Him in the last days. Imagine being in the disciples' shoes during what was certainly the darkest period of their lives. Through the Scriptures we see Jesus' followers as they fall asleep, betray Him, deny, flee, despair and generally fail to "get it." Imagine what it would have been like for them to watch their friend, mentor, King, their Saviour, be arrested, whipped, humiliated, stripped naked, crowned with thorns and hammered to a wooden cross. The week before Christ's death is often referred to as Holy Week and it's reasonable to ask, "If this is Holy Week, what would an unholy week look like?"

The horror of holy week is a stumbling block to the Jews, even for Jesus' own followers. They stumbled on the fact that this "King" was killed by the Romans when He was supposed to be conquering them!

Instead of taking the throne, He was nailed to a tree, and forever cursed by it, they thought. But Jesus' way was not their way. He knew that by dying, the Jews could not only be saved from the perceived tyranny of any military power, but from a far worse tyranny, that of sin and evil. Jesus chose the path of suffering and death so that they—and we—could be free forever from the punishment due to us because of the evil in our hearts. He took our place on the cross. If we are able to "get" this truth, then suffering and death are no threat to us, whether at the hands of a Roman soldier, or in the hand of a just God. We don't need to fear death because of what Jesus did.

Because of Jesus' suffering, we also have an advocate when we suffer. No matter what we are going through, no matter how tough or terrorizing, one thing is sure: Jesus understands. He has endured far worse, for our sake. When we are tempted to look up out of the dark holes we find ourselves in, to search the heavens and call out to God—we may wonder, "Where is God and why won't he rescue me?" Consider for a moment that Jesus doesn't gaze down at you from some great throne in Heaven. No. He is

beneath you, waiting for you to let go and fall back into His arms. Jesus has experienced the limit of suffering and He is able to meet you where you are.

There is no depth of despair to which we can ever descend that is lower than Jesus went when He died under the weight of a world full of evil. But no matter how low we have been, don't doubt that if we are found in Jesus when He ascends on Easter day, then we will rise with Him, and will have no reason to fear death again.

ISAIAH 52.13-53.12 (NLT):

(THIS PASSAGE FORETELLS THE PASSION OF JESUS BY MORE THAN SIX HUNDRED YEARS.)

SEE, MY SERVANT WILL PROSPER; HE WILL BE HIGHLY EXALTED. MANY WERE AMAZED WHEN THEY SAW HIM — BEATEN AND BLOODIED, SO DISFIGURED ONE WOULD SCARCELY KNOW HE WAS A PERSON.

AND HE WILL AGAIN STARTLE MANY NATIONS. KINGS WILL STAND SPEECHLESS IN HIS PRESENCE. FOR THEY WILL SEE WHAT THEY HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY BEEN TOLD ABOUT; THEY WILL UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY HAD NOT HEARD ABOUT.

WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR MESSAGE? TO WHOM WILL THE LORD REVEAL HIS SAVING POWER? MY SERVANT GREW UP IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE LIKE A TENDER GREEN SHOOT, SPROUTING FROM A ROOT IN DRY AND STERILE GROUND. THERE WAS NOTHING BEAUTIFUL OR MAJESTIC ABOUT HIS APPEARANCE, NOTHING TO ATTRACT US TO HIM. HE WAS DESPISED AND REJECTED — A MAN OF SORROWS, ACQUAINTED WITH BITTEREST GRIEF. WE TURNED OUR BACKS ON HIM AND LOOKED THE OTHER WAY WHEN HE WENT BY. HE WAS DESPISED, AND WE DID NOT CARE. YET IT WAS OUR WEAKNESSES HE CARRIED; IT WAS OUR SORROWS THAT WEIGHED HIM DOWN. AND WE THOUGHT HIS TROUBLES WERE A PUNISHMENT FROM GOD FOR HIS OWN SINS! BUT HE WAS WOUNDED AND CRUSHED FOR OUR SINS. HE WAS BEATEN THAT WE MIGHT HAVE PEACE. HE WAS WHIPPED, AND WE WERE HEALED!

ALL OF US HAVE STRAYED AWAY LIKE SHEEP. WE HAVE LEFT GOD'S PATHS TO FOLLOW OUR OWN. YET THE LORD LAID ON HIM THE GUILT AND SINS OF US ALL. HE WAS OPPRESSED AND TREATED HARSHLY, YET

HE NEVER SAID A WORD. HE WAS LED AS A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER. AND AS A SHEEP IS SILENT BEFORE THE SHEARERS, HE DID NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. FROM PRISON AND TRIAL THEY LED HIM AWAY TO HIS DEATH. BUT WHO AMONG THE PEOPLE REALIZED THAT HE WAS DYING FOR THEIR SINS — THAT HE WAS SUFFERING THEIR PUNISHMENT? HE HAD DONE NO WRONG, AND HE NEVER DECEIVED ANYONE. BUT HE WAS BURIED LIKE A CRIMINAL; HE WAS PUT IN A RICH MAN'S GRAVE.

BUT IT WAS THE LORD'S GOOD PLAN TO CRUSH HIM AND FILL HIM WITH GRIEF. YET WHEN HIS LIFE IS MADE AN OFFERING FOR SIN, HE WILL HAVE A MULTITUDE OF CHILDREN, MANY HEIRS. HE WILL ENJOY A LONG LIFE, AND THE LORD'S PLAN WILL PROSPER IN HIS HANDS. WHEN HE SEES ALL THAT IS ACCOMPLISHED BY HIS ANGUISH, HE WILL BE SATISFIED. AND BECAUSE OF WHAT HE HAS EXPERIENCED, MY RIGHTEOUS SERVANT WILL MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR MANY TO BE COUNTED RIGHTEOUS, FOR HE WILL BEAR ALL THEIR SINS. I WILL GIVE HIM THE HONOURS OF ONE WHO IS MIGHTY AND GREAT, BECAUSE HE EXPOSED HIMSELF TO DEATH. HE WAS COUNTED AMONG THOSE WHO WERE SINNERS. HE BORE THE SINS OF MANY AND INTERCEDED FOR SINNERS.

1 PETER 1:3-9:

PRAISE BE TO THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST! IN HIS GREAT MERCY HE HAS GIVEN US NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD, AND INTO AN INHERITANCE THAT CAN NEVER PERISH, SPOIL OR FADE. THIS INHERITANCE IS KEPT IN HEAVEN FOR YOU, WHO THROUGH FAITH ARE SHIELDED BY GOD'S POWER UNTIL THE COMING OF THE SALVATION THAT IS READY TO BE REVEALED IN THE LAST TIME. IN ALL THIS YOU GREATLY REJOICE, THOUGH NOW FOR A LITTLE WHILE YOU MAY HAVE HAD TO SUFFER GRIEF IN ALL KINDS OF TRIALS. THESE HAVE COME SO THAT THE PROVEN GENUINENESS OF YOUR FAITH—OF GREATER WORTH THAN GOLD, WHICH PERISHES EVEN THOUGH REFINED BY FIRE—MAY RESULT IN PRAISE, GLORY AND HONOUR WHEN JESUS CHRIST IS REVEALED. THOUGH YOU HAVE NOT SEEN HIM, YOU LOVE HIM; AND EVEN THOUGH YOU DO NOT SEE HIM NOW, YOU BELIEVE IN HIM AND ARE FILLED WITH AN INEXPRESSIBLE AND GLORIOUS JOY, FOR YOU ARE RECEIVING THE END RESULT OF YOUR FAITH, THE SALVATION OF YOUR SOULS.

- ◇ Do you fully realize the blessings God has given you because of the offering of Christ?
- ◇ Have you claimed the gifts He has given you-- gifts of peace, forgiveness and righteousness?
- ◇ Jesus Christ has made you righteous and accepted in God's eyes. Spend some time thanking Him again for His sacrifice and that your sins are completely forgiven, once and for all. (2 Corinthians 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.")

PRAYER:

Father, teach me Your way this week. Teach me how to leave my selfish, sinful ways at the foot of the cross, and teach me how Jesus my Saviour is willing to bear those sins in His own body and be punished for them. Lord, how can I thank You for this great salvation? I worship You and Your amazing power: Jesus is greater than death, and could not be conquered. When He died, I know that my sins were destroyed: it happened "once for all time." And when You raised Him three days later, You taught us that we too could be raised. I confess my many sins Lord Jesus: I lay them down at the foot of the cross. I turn away from them and ask You to give me a new way of living in the world. Walk with me this week, Father. Teach me Your way.

On the Friday that Jesus died it might seem that the wrath of God has eclipsed the love of God. But it isn't so. Mercy triumphs over Judgment at Easter: love triumphs over wrath.

At the last supper Jesus washed the disciples' feet. He also gave them a new commandment, "Love one another as I have loved You."

But the disciples don't fully comprehend how deeply Jesus has loved them. After all they had been through, it took a king on His knees with a towel around His waist to prove to them the loving, servant heart of God (what if our president, or a king, were to wash the feet of a bunch of fishermen today? What if it were your feet?). But even so, Peter the disciple doesn't understand why Jesus would defile Himself in this way.

If that night Peter finds it hard to accept that Jesus His king would humiliate Himself by washing His followers' feet, he will be even more confounded the next day. For there will be another demonstration of how God loves on Good Friday, when the perfect love of God in Jesus faces the wrath of God against evil, and triumphs in the end. All for the love of us.

JOHN 13.1-15 (NLT):

BEFORE THE PASSOVER CELEBRATION, JESUS KNEW THAT HIS HOUR HAD COME TO LEAVE THIS WORLD AND RETURN TO HIS FATHER. HE NOW SHOWED THE DISCIPLES THE FULL EXTENT OF HIS LOVE. IT WAS TIME FOR SUPPER, AND THE DEVIL HAD ALREADY ENTICED JUDAS, SON OF SIMON ISCARIOT, TO CARRY OUT HIS PLAN TO BETRAY JESUS. JESUS KNEW THAT THE FATHER HAD GIVEN HIM AUTHORITY OVER EVERYTHING AND THAT HE HAD COME FROM GOD AND WOULD RETURN TO GOD. SO HE GOT UP FROM THE TABLE, TOOK OFF HIS ROBE, WRAPPED A TOWEL AROUND HIS WAIST, AND Poured WATER INTO A BASIN. THEN HE BEGAN TO WASH THE DISCIPLES' FEET AND TO WIPE THEM WITH THE TOWEL HE HAD AROUND HIM. WHEN HE CAME TO SIMON PETER, PETER SAID TO HIM, "LORD, WHY ARE YOU GOING TO WASH MY FEET?" JESUS REPLIED, "YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND NOW WHY I AM DOING IT; SOMEDAY YOU WILL." "NO," PETER PROTESTED, "YOU WILL NEVER WASH MY FEET!" JESUS REPLIED, "BUT IF I DON'T WASH YOU, YOU WON'T BELONG TO ME." SIMON PETER EXCLAIMED, "THEN WASH MY HANDS AND HEAD AS WELL, LORD, NOT JUST MY FEET!" JESUS REPLIED, "A PERSON WHO HAS BATHED ALL OVER DOES NOT NEED TO WASH, EXCEPT FOR THE FEET, TO BE ENTIRELY CLEAN. AND YOU ARE CLEAN, BUT THAT ISN'T TRUE OF EVERYONE HERE." FOR JESUS KNEW WHO WOULD BETRAY HIM. THAT IS WHAT HE MEANT WHEN HE SAID, "NOT ALL OF YOU ARE CLEAN." AFTER WASHING THEIR FEET, HE PUT ON HIS ROBE AGAIN AND SAT DOWN AND ASKED, "DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I WAS DOING? YOU CALL ME 'TEACHER' AND 'LORD,' AND YOU ARE RIGHT, BECAUSE IT IS TRUE. AND SINCE I, THE LORD AND TEACHER, HAVE WASHED YOUR FEET, YOU OUGHT TO WASH EACH OTHER'S FEET. I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW. DO AS I HAVE DONE TO YOU. HOW TRUE IT IS THAT A SERVANT IS NOT GREATER THAN THE MASTER. NOR ARE MESSENGERS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE ONE WHO SENDS THEM. YOU KNOW THESE THINGS — NOW DO THEM! THAT IS THE PATH OF BLESSING. PEACE IS MY LAST GIFT TO YOU, MY OWN PEACE I NOW LEAVE WITH YOU; PEACE WHICH THE WORLD CANNOT GIVE, I GIVE TO YOU. I GIVE YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT: LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. PEACE IS MY LAST GIFT TO YOU, MY OWN PEACE I NOW LEAVE WITH YOU; PEACE WHICH THE WORLD CANNOT GIVE, I GIVE TO YOU. BY THIS SHALL THE WORLD KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES: THAT YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER. (BCP)

- ◇ Are you washed in the love of Jesus?
- ◇ Whose feet do you need to wash in humility and love?
- ◇ In what areas of your life and in what relationships do you need His Spirit of love and humility?
- ◇ How can you serve others, especially those you are the closest to? How can you grant another the peace He has freely given us?

PRAYER:

Wash me clean Lord. I want to receive all You have for me. I am blessed and honored when You serve me; I am humbled by Your humility. Help me remember Your healing and cleansing. Don't let me forget my salvation. In darkness help me call on Your name. Jesus. In darkness, be the light of my heart; may I never be afraid. I am longing for Your sunrise, Jesus. In Your mercy, give me the gift of hope. And by Your love, help me to love others. Teach me Your way in the coming days. Help me to understand how You have loved me, and how You love me still.

Darkness falls over the Earth on Good Friday. God's own Son goes to His death to save us from the darkness in our hearts. While He is walking out this terrifying mission, His followers seem to do everything they can to show how little we humans deserve the favour.

GOD IS A GOD OF LIGHT:

He can't tolerate darkness, and darkness cannot survive in His presence. We, who have dark hearts full of sin, should tremble at this fact, but Jesus, who was completely good, took on our sin and stood under the wrath of God.

On the cross, He was destroyed and cut off from His Father. It was to have been our fate. In the midst of humanity's own darkest hour, and in the face of His followers' cowardice, selfishness and laziness, God does not cut us off. In His awesome mercy, He sends His own Son into the darkness so that we might live in the light.

Take some time to meditate on the following scripture passage.

MARK 14.32-15:37(NLT):

"TAKE THIS CUP OF SUFFERING AWAY FROM ME."

AND THEY CAME TO AN OLIVE GROVE CALLED GETHSEMANE, AND JESUS SAID, "SIT HERE WHILE I GO AND PRAY." HE TOOK PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN WITH HIM, AND HE BEGAN TO BE FILLED WITH HORROR AND DEEP DISTRESS. HE TOLD THEM, "MY SOUL IS CRUSHED WITH GRIEF TO THE POINT OF DEATH. STAY HERE AND WATCH WITH ME." HE WENT ON A LITTLE FARTHER AND FELL FACE DOWN ON THE GROUND. HE PRAYED THAT, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, THE AWFUL HOUR AWAITING HIM MIGHT PASS HIM BY. "ABBA, FATHER," HE SAID, "EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU. PLEASE TAKE THIS CUP OF SUFFERING AWAY FROM ME. YET I WANT YOUR WILL, NOT MINE." THEN HE RETURNED AND FOUND THE DISCIPLES ASLEEP. "SIMON!" HE SAID TO PETER. "ARE YOU ASLEEP? COULDN'T YOU STAY AWAKE AND WATCH WITH ME EVEN ONE HOUR? KEEP ALERT AND PRAY OTHERWISE TEMPTATION WILL OVERPOWER YOU. FOR THOUGH THE SPIRIT IS WILLING ENOUGH, THE BODY IS WEAK." THEN JESUS LEFT THEM AGAIN AND PRAYED, REPEATING HIS PLEADINGS. AGAIN HE RETURNED TO THEM AND FOUND THEM SLEEPING,

FOR THEY JUST COULDN'T KEEP THEIR EYES OPEN. AND THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. WHEN HE RETURNED TO THEM THE THIRD TIME, HE SAID, "STILL SLEEPING? STILL RESTING? ENOUGH! THE TIME HAS COME. I, THE SON OF MAN, AM BETRAYED INTO THE HANDS OF SINNERS. UP, LET'S BE GOING. SEE, MY BETRAYER IS HERE!"

A KISS AND A SWORD

AND IMMEDIATELY, AS HE SAID THIS, JUDAS, ONE OF THE TWELVE DISCIPLES, ARRIVED WITH A MOB THAT WAS ARMED WITH SWORDS AND CLUBS. THEY HAD BEEN SENT OUT BY THE LEADING PRIESTS, THE TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS LAW, AND THE OTHER LEADERS. JUDAS HAD GIVEN THEM A PREARRANGED SIGNAL: "YOU WILL KNOW WHICH ONE TO ARREST WHEN I GO OVER AND GIVE HIM THE KISS OF GREETING. THEN YOU CAN TAKE HIM AWAY UNDER GUARD." AS SOON AS THEY ARRIVED, JUDAS WALKED UP TO JESUS. "TEACHER!" HE EXCLAIMED, AND GAVE HIM THE KISS. THEN THE OTHERS GRABBED JESUS AND ARRESTED HIM. BUT SOMEONE PULLED OUT A SWORD AND SLASHED OFF AN EAR OF THE HIGH PRIEST'S SERVANT. JESUS ASKED THEM, "AM I SOME DANGEROUS CRIMINAL, THAT YOU COME ARMED WITH SWORDS AND CLUBS TO ARREST ME? WHY DIDN'T YOU ARREST ME IN THE TEMPLE? I WAS THERE TEACHING EVERY DAY. BUT THESE THINGS ARE HAPPENING TO FULFILL WHAT THE SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT ME." MEANWHILE, ALL HIS DISCIPLES DESERTED HIM AND RAN AWAY. THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN FOLLOWING ALONG BEHIND, CLOTHED ONLY IN A LINEN NIGHTSHIRT. WHEN THE MOB TRIED TO GRAB HIM, THEY TORE OFF HIS CLOTHES, BUT HE ESCAPED AND RAN AWAY NAKED.

FALSE WITNESSES

JESUS WAS LED TO THE HIGH PRIEST'S HOME WHERE THE LEADING PRIESTS, OTHER LEADERS, AND TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS LAW HAD GATHERED. MEANWHILE, PETER FOLLOWED FAR BEHIND AND THEN SLIPPED INSIDE THE GATES OF THE HIGH PRIEST'S COURTYARD. FOR A WHILE HE SAT WITH THE GUARDS, WARMING HIMSELF BY THE FIRE. INSIDE, THE LEADING PRIESTS AND THE ENTIRE HIGH COUNCIL WERE TRYING TO FIND WITNESSES WHO WOULD TESTIFY AGAINST JESUS, SO THEY COULD PUT HIM TO DEATH. BUT THEIR EFFORTS WERE IN VAIN. MANY FALSE WITNESSES SPOKE AGAINST

HIM, BUT THEY CONTRADICTED EACH OTHER. FINALLY, SOME MEN STOOD UP TO TESTIFY AGAINST HIM WITH THIS LIE: "WE HEARD HIM SAY, 'I WILL DESTROY THIS TEMPLE MADE WITH HUMAN HANDS, AND IN THREE DAYS I WILL BUILD ANOTHER, MADE WITHOUT HUMAN HANDS.'" BUT EVEN THEN THEY DIDN'T GET THEIR STORIES STRAIGHT! THEN THE HIGH PRIEST STOOD UP BEFORE THE OTHERS AND ASKED JESUS, "WELL, AREN'T YOU GOING TO ANSWER THESE CHARGES? WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY FOR YOURSELF?" JESUS MADE NO REPLY. THEN THE HIGH PRIEST ASKED HIM, "ARE YOU THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE BLESSED GOD?" JESUS SAID, "I AM, AND YOU WILL SEE ME, THE SON OF MAN, SITTING AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND IN THE PLACE OF POWER AND COMING BACK ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." THEN THE HIGH PRIEST TORE HIS CLOTHING TO SHOW HIS HORROR AND SAID, "WHY DO WE NEED OTHER WITNESSES? YOU HAVE ALL HEARD HIS BLASPHEMY. WHAT IS YOUR VERDICT?" AND THEY ALL CONDEMNED HIM TO DEATH. THEN SOME OF THEM BEGAN TO SPIT AT HIM, AND THEY BLINDFOLDED HIM AND HIT HIS FACE WITH THEIR FISTS. "WHO HIT YOU THAT TIME, YOU PROPHET?" THEY JEERED. AND EVEN THE GUARDS WERE HITTING HIM AS THEY LED HIM AWAY.

"I DON'T KNOW THIS MAN"

MEANWHILE, PETER WAS BELOW IN THE COURTYARD. ONE OF THE SERVANT GIRLS WHO WORKED FOR THE HIGH PRIEST NOTICED PETER WARMING HIMSELF AT THE FIRE. SHE LOOKED AT HIM CLOSELY AND THEN SAID, "YOU WERE ONE OF THOSE WITH JESUS, THE NAZARENE." PETER DENIED IT. "I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT," HE SAID, AND HE WENT OUT INTO THE ENTRYWAY. JUST THEN, A ROOSTER CROWED. THE SERVANT GIRL SAW HIM STANDING THERE AND BEGAN TELLING THE OTHERS, "THAT MAN IS DEFINITELY ONE OF THEM!" PETER DENIED IT AGAIN. A LITTLE LATER SOME OTHER BYSTANDERS BEGAN SAYING TO PETER, "YOU MUST BE ONE OF THEM BECAUSE YOU ARE FROM GALILEE." PETER SAID, "I SWEAR BY GOD, I DON'T KNOW THIS MAN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT." AND IMMEDIATELY THE ROOSTER CROWED THE SECOND TIME. SUDDENLY, JESUS' WORDS FLASHED THROUGH PETER'S MIND: "BEFORE THE ROOSTER CROWS TWICE, YOU WILL DENY ME THREE TIMES." AND HE BROKE DOWN AND CRIED.

"CRUCIFY HIM!"

VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING THE LEADING PRIESTS, OTHER LEADERS, AND TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS LAW — THE ENTIRE HIGH COUNCIL — MET TO DISCUSS THEIR NEXT STEP. THEY BOUND JESUS AND TOOK HIM TO PILATE, THE ROMAN GOVERNOR. PILATE ASKED JESUS, "ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?" JESUS REPLIED, "YES, IT IS AS YOU SAY." THEN THE LEADING PRIESTS ACCUSED HIM OF MANY CRIMES, AND PILATE ASKED HIM, "AREN'T YOU GOING TO SAY SOMETHING? WHAT ABOUT ALL THESE CHARGES AGAINST YOU?" BUT JESUS SAID NOTHING, MUCH TO PILATE'S SURPRISE. NOW IT WAS THE GOVERNOR'S CUSTOM TO RELEASE ONE PRISONER EACH YEAR AT PASSOVER TIME — ANYONE THE PEOPLE REQUESTED.

ONE OF THE PRISONERS AT THAT TIME WAS BARABBAS, CONVICTED ALONG WITH OTHERS FOR MURDER DURING AN INSURRECTION. THE MOB BEGAN TO CROWD IN TOWARD PILATE, ASKING HIM TO RELEASE A PRISONER AS USUAL. "SHOULD I GIVE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?" PILATE ASKED. (FOR HE REALIZED BY NOW THAT THE LEADING PRIESTS HAD ARRESTED JESUS OUT OF ENVY.) BUT AT THIS POINT THE LEADING PRIESTS STIRRED UP THE MOB TO DEMAND THE RELEASE OF BARABBAS INSTEAD OF JESUS. "BUT IF I RELEASE BARABBAS," PILATE ASKED THEM, "WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH THIS MAN YOU CALL THE KING OF THE JEWS?" THEY SHOUTED BACK, "CRUCIFY HIM!" "WHY?" PILATE DEMANDED. "WHAT CRIME HAS HE COMMITTED?" BUT THE CROWD ONLY ROARED THE LOUDER, "CRUCIFY HIM!"

"HAIL! KING OF THE JEWS!"

SO PILATE, ANXIOUS TO PLEASE THE CROWD, RELEASED BARABBAS TO THEM. HE ORDERED JESUS FLOGGED WITH A LEAD-TIPPED WHIP, THEN TURNED HIM OVER TO THE ROMAN SOLDIERS TO CRUCIFY HIM. THE SOLDIERS TOOK HIM INTO THEIR HEADQUARTERS AND CALLED OUT THE ENTIRE BATTALION. THEY DRESSED HIM IN A PURPLE ROBE AND MADE A CROWN OF LONG, SHARP THORNS AND PUT IT ON HIS HEAD. THEN THEY SALUTED, YELLING, "HAIL! KING OF THE JEWS!" AND THEY BEAT HIM ON THE HEAD WITH A STICK, SPIT ON HIM, AND DROPPED TO THEIR KNEES IN MOCK WORSHIP. WHEN THEY WERE FINALLY TIRED OF MOCKING HIM, THEY TOOK OFF THE PURPLE ROBE AND

PUT HIS OWN CLOTHES ON HIM AGAIN. THEN THEY LED HIM AWAY TO BE CRUCIFIED. A MAN NAMED SIMON, WHO WAS FROM CYRENE, WAS COMING IN FROM THE COUNTRY JUST THEN, AND THEY FORCED HIM TO CARRY JESUS' CROSS. AND THEY BROUGHT JESUS TO A PLACE CALLED GOLGOTHA (WHICH MEANS SKULL HILL). THEY OFFERED HIM WINE DRUGGED WITH MYRRH, BUT HE REFUSED IT. THEN THEY NAILED HIM TO THE CROSS. THEY GAMBLED FOR HIS CLOTHES, THROWING DICE TO DECIDE WHO WOULD GET THEM. IT WAS NINE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING WHEN THE CRUCIFIXION TOOK PLACE. A SIGNBOARD WAS FASTENED TO THE CROSS ABOVE JESUS' HEAD, ANNOUNCING THE CHARGE AGAINST HIM. IT READ: "THE KING OF THE JEWS." TWO CRIMINALS WERE CRUCIFIED WITH HIM, THEIR CROSSES ON EITHER SIDE OF HIS. AND THE PEOPLE PASSING BY SHOUTED ABUSE, SHAKING THEIR HEADS IN MOCKERY. "HA! LOOK AT YOU NOW!" THEY YELLED AT HIM. "YOU CAN DESTROY THE TEMPLE AND REBUILD IT IN THREE DAYS, CAN YOU? WELL THEN, SAVE YOURSELF AND COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS!" THE LEADING PRIESTS AND TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS LAW ALSO MOCKED JESUS. "HE SAVED OTHERS," THEY SCOFFED, "BUT HE CAN'T SAVE HIMSELF! LET THIS MESSIAH, THIS KING OF ISRAEL, COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS SO WE CAN SEE IT AND BELIEVE HIM!" EVEN THE TWO CRIMINALS WHO WERE BEING CRUCIFIED WITH JESUS RIDICULED HIM.

AND DARKNESS FELL

AT NOON, DARKNESS FELL ACROSS THE WHOLE LAND UNTIL THREE O'CLOCK. THEN, AT THAT TIME JESUS CALLED OUT WITH A LOUD VOICE, "ELOI, ELOI, LEMA SABACHTHANI?" WHICH MEANS, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" SOME OF THE BYSTANDERS MISUNDERSTOOD AND THOUGHT HE WAS CALLING FOR THE PROPHET ELIJAH. ONE OF THEM RAN AND FILLED A SPONGE WITH SOUR WINE, HOLDING IT UP TO HIM ON A STICK SO HE COULD DRINK. "LEAVE HIM ALONE. LET'S SEE WHETHER ELIJAH WILL COME AND TAKE HIM DOWN!" HE SAID. THEN JESUS UTTERED ANOTHER LOUD CRY AND BREATHED HIS LAST. AND THE CURTAIN IN THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM.

Please spend some time praying for the following:

- ◇ Our heavenly Father sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved; that all who believes in Him might be delivered from the power of sin and death, and become heirs with Him of everlasting life.
- ◇ Pray, therefore, for people everywhere according to their needs.
- ◇ Pray for the Church of Christ throughout the world;
 - For its unity in witness and service
 - For all ministers and the people whom they serve
 - For all Christians in this community
 - That God will confirm His Church in faith, increase it in love and preserve it in peace.
- ◇ Pray for all nations and peoples of the earth, and for those in authority among them; for all who serve the common good, that by God's help they may seek justice and truth, and live in peace.
- ◇ Pray for all who suffer and are afflicted in body or in mind;
 - For the hungry and the homeless, the destitute and the oppressed
 - For the sick, the wounded and the crippled
 - For those in loneliness, fear and anguish
 - For those who face temptation, doubt and despair
 - For the sorrowful and bereaved
 - For prisoners and captives, and those in mortal danger
 - That God in His mercy will comfort and relieve them, and grant them the knowledge of His love, and stir up in us the will and patience to minister to their needs.
- ◇ Pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ;
 - For those who have never heard the word of salvation

- For those who have lost their faith
- For those hardened by sin or indifference
- For the contemptuous and the scornful
- For those who are enemies of the cross of Christ and persecutors of his disciples
- For those who in the name of Christ have persecuted others
- That God will open their hearts to the truth, and lead them to faith and obedience.

PRAYER:

O God of unchanging power and eternal light: Look favourably on Your whole church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the working of Your providence, carry out Your plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, things which had grown old are being made new, and that the weak and weary are being made strong. Though sometimes it is hidden to our eyes, these things are being done by the One through whom all things were made, Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Grant us patience, faith, courage and hope worthy of eternity.

The darkness of Good Friday ends with a flame of light on Easter Sunday. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

MATTHEW 28.1-10; 16-20 (TEV):

AFTER THE SABBATH, AS SUNDAY MORNING WAS DAWNING, MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER MARY WENT TO LOOK AT THE TOMB. SUDDENLY THERE WAS A VIOLENT EARTHQUAKE; AN ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, ROLLED THE STONE AWAY, AND SAT ON IT. HIS APPEARANCE WAS LIKE LIGHTNING, AND HIS CLOTHES WERE WHITE AS SNOW. THE GUARDS WERE SO AFRAID THAT THEY TREMBLED AND BECAME LIKE DEAD MEN. THE ANGEL SPOKE TO THE WOMEN. "YOU MUST NOT BE AFRAID," HE SAID. "I KNOW YOU ARE LOOKING FOR JESUS, WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS BEEN RAISED, JUST AS HE SAID. COME HERE AND SEE THE PLACE WHERE HE WAS LYING. GO QUICKLY NOW, AND TELL HIS DISCIPLES, "HE HAS BEEN RAISED FROM DEATH, AND NOW HE IS GOING TO GALILEE AHEAD OF YOU; THERE YOU WILL SEE HIM! REMEMBER WHAT I HAVE TOLD YOU." SO THEY LEFT THE TOMB IN A HURRY, AFRAID AND YET FILLED WITH JOY, AND RAN TO TELL HIS DISCIPLES. SUDDENLY JESUS MET THEM AND SAID, "PEACE BE WITH YOU." THEY CAME UP TO HIM, TOOK HOLD OF HIS FEET, AND WORSHIPED HIM. "DO NOT BE AFRAID," JESUS SAID TO THEM.

... THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES WENT TO THE HILL IN GALILEE WHERE JESUS HAD TOLD THEM TO GO. WHEN THEY SAW HIM, THEY WORSHIPED HIM, EVEN THOUGH SOME OF THEM DOUBTED. JESUS DREW NEAR AND SAID TO THEM, "I HAVE BEEN GIVEN ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. GO, THEN, TO ALL PEOPLES EVERYWHERE AND MAKE THEM MY DISCIPLES: BAPTIZE THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND TEACH THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND I WILL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE."

EZEKIEL 36.24-28 (NRSV):

I WILL TAKE YOU FROM THE NATIONS, AND GATHER YOU FROM ALL THE COUNTRIES, AND BRING YOU INTO YOUR OWN LAND. I WILL SPRINKLE CLEAN WATER UPON YOU, AND YOU SHALL BE CLEAN FROM ALL YOUR UNCLEANNESSES, AND FROM ALL YOUR IDOLS I WILL CLEANSE YOU.

A NEW HEART I WILL GIVE YOU, AND A NEW SPIRIT I WILL PUT WITHIN YOU; AND I WILL REMOVE FROM YOUR BODY THE HEART OF STONE AND GIVE YOU A

HEART OF FLESH. I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU, AND MAKE YOU FOLLOW MY STATUTES AND BE CAREFUL TO OBSERVE MY ORDINANCES. THEN YOU SHALL LIVE IN THE LAND THAT I GAVE TO YOUR ANCESTORS; AND YOU SHALL BE MY PEOPLE, AND I WILL BE YOUR GOD.

PRAYERS FOR THE RESURRECTION:

Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels, and let your trumpets shout salvation for the victory of our mighty King! Rejoice and sing now, all around earth, bright with a glorious splendor, for darkness has been vanquished by our eternal King. Rejoice and be glad now, Oh Church, and in radiant light, resound with the praises of your people.

It is truly right and good, always and everywhere, with our whole heart and mind to praise You, the invisible, almighty, and eternal God, and Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; for He is the true Lamb, who at the feast of the Passover paid for us the debt of Adam's sin, and by His blood delivered Your faithful people.

This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin, and are restored to grace and holiness of life. This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave.

How wonderful and beyond our knowing, O God, is your mercy and loving-kindness to us, that to redeem a slave, You gave a Son.

How holy is this night, when wickedness is put to flight and sin is washed away. It restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to those who mourn. It casts out pride and hatred, and brings peace and concord.

How blessed is this day, when earth and heaven are joined and humankind is reconciled to God! May the light of Jesus shine continually to drive away all darkness. May Christ, the Morning Star who knows no setting, find His light ever burning in our hearts—He who gives His light to all creation, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

- ◇ Has this season of prayer and fasting strengthened your relationship with Christ? How?
- ◇ Please take the time to write a letter to Jesus about your love for Him and any new revelations He has revealed to you. Also include new commitments you are making.
- ◇ How will you live more passionately for Him because of His ultimate sacrifice?
- ◇ Commitments might include acts of regular prayer, service to others, and personal disciplines in spending more time with Him.
- ◇ Put your letter in an envelope with two dates: today's date and six months from now. Place the envelope in your Bible and open it in six months.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank You for walking with and sustaining me during this prayer and fasting journey. You have been faithful, and I thank You for what You have shown me. I ask that you seal the work You have done in my life and help me to continue to walk more closely with You. Open your Word in greater ways to me in the days ahead. Teach me, strengthen my faith and give me persistence and boldness in following Your will for me. Help me to be Your hands and feet in service and blessing to others. You are my risen, ascended, reigning and ruling Lord. I humbly thank You and praise Your name. You are awesome!

TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full, in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of your glory and grace

We have provided a link [below] to a YouTube video of this beautiful song. You may want to take a moment and worship Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMYZICnV2Ys>