

Devotion for February 20-21

**Evening Devotion:** To be read on Thursday night February 20

Sabbath: Read Genesis 1-2:3

This word Sabbath is probably a strange word for most of us. For some, it may mean a nap and a day off. For others, the Sabbath is a relic from the Old Testament that in today's world is no longer practical, or relevant. Think about our society. Would we be characterized as anxious, stressed out, hurried, overworked, and overwhelmed? Would you consider our society as mentally, relationally, physically and spiritually happy and content? Now, what about Christians? Are we any different than the world around us? In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus says that we ARE TO BE different from the world. He clearly says that we are to be shining lights and salt to the world around us. But He also warns about salt losing its saltiness. To be very honest, there have been many times that my life is in-distinguishable from the world around me. I get too stressed, worried, busy, too anxious, and caught up in the busyness of life. Wouldn't it have been nice if God had given us a tool to help us cope and not be overwhelmed by the world? Look back to Genesis 2:1-3. The Lord has just created the whole universe in six days. Afterwards we are told that on the seventh day "He Rested" he didn't rest because he was tired he stopped on the seventh because He was finished. In fact the word Sabbath means "to stop" or "to cease and desist". In the very beginning of creation, God made the Sabbath. Sabbath is a part of the rhythm of creation. It is in the DNA of us all.

So, what does Sabbath have to do with fasting? In many ways they can be considered similar. They are both arguably the most disregarded spiritual disciplines. They have to be both planned and intentional. And, they both have an element of "Stop" in them. For the Sabbath, it's to put a stop in our week and focus on Christ. For fasting, we stop a day from eating. Over the next 24 hours, we will get out of our normal routine. We will "stop" eating meals and start seeking our Lord.

**Reflection:** How does "stopping" help you walk with God? What will you do tomorrow in your moments of "stopping" when you choose not to eat? What or who is the Lord leading you to pray for?

**Morning Devotion:** To be read on Friday morning February 21

Read Exodus 20:1-21

In Exodus 20 we have the account of the Israelites receiving the Ten Commandments. In verses 8-11 we read about the Commandment to "Remember the Sabbath Day". These verses are 28% of the Ten Commandments. The first three talk about the people's relationship with God. The last six talk about the people's relationship with each other. Right in the middle, is commandment 4. This verse is a hinge of our relationship to God and to others. God creates the Sabbath so that on one day we can: focus, worship, rely, and re-center on the Lord. Because for

the rest of the week, God will place us in a world that needs salt and light. Look back at verse 10. The Sabbath is “to the Lord”. It is a day where He is the focus.

Today we are fasting. And, just like the Sabbath, it is a time “To the Lord”. We are to take this time to seek, pray, and think about the Lord. Fasting is really FEASTING. Instead of eating physical food we are stopping and feasting on Jesus who says He is the Bread of Life. So today, when your stomach growls, or you feel weak, or you get hangry, these are all reminders to make this fast “To the Lord”. It’s a reminder that fasting is FEASTING.

**Reflection:** What specific things can you do today to make this day of fasting a day “To the Lord”? If someone notices you fasting, how do you explain that to them?

**Mid-Day Devotion** : To be read Friday at lunch.

Read Mark 2:23-27

Jesus never cancels the practice of the Sabbath Day. However, He does reprimand and correct the Jewish religious leader’s mis-use and abuse of the Sabbath. By the time of Jesus, the Sabbath had become a legalistic and self righteous mockery of God’s intent for the day. It had turned into an impossible rule keeping day which, if practiced correctly, would make you holy, righteous, and justified before God. This was never God’s intent for the day. Jesus, who in Mark 12:8 calls Himself “Lord of the Sabbath”, re-focuses the Sabbath back to God. Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30 calls for us to rest in Him. He is our Sabbath Rest. Jesus is the focus of the Sabbath. He is our righteousness.

Likewise, fasting is not a self righteous, God manipulating, look at how spiritual I am, act of religion. It is a time where we intentionally stop eating and turn to the Lord. It is a time when we humbly come to our Lord. As you finish the day, ask the Lord to help you finish strong. Confess your need and dependence on Him for all of life.

**Reflection:** How can you use this experience of fasting to help you center Christ in your life? What does a humble and Christ centered life look like in the world God has placed you?