

Devotion for February January 30 & 31 – Written by Pastor Joe Horan

Evening Devotion: to read after dinner on Thursday as you start your fast

Read Matthew 3:13-4:2

In Matthew 3, Jesus has experienced a powerful moment during his baptism. A moment when the veil between heaven and earth was pulled back. A moment when the Holy Spirit takes physical form. A moment when the Father speaks directly to His Son words of pride and love. It should not escape our notice that immediately after this moment of public praise and power, Jesus is led into a season of solitude and FASTING...

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” (Matthew 4:1-2 ESV)

Jesus fasted. Let that sink in for a moment. When we question what reasons exist for fasting, the fact that the perfect Son of God, who we follow, did so should be reason enough. And yet, why did our Savior choose to deny himself food? What was his motive? We know from the text that Jesus has experienced a very public expression of praise from his heavenly Father. Now he is being led into the wilderness for a very private experience and test. After forty days of fasting and prayer, Satan, the adversary of all who would serve God, comes and attempts to disqualify him from the cross and to derail God's plan of salvation. It is clear from the timing that the devil aims his attack for a moment when Jesus is physically weak and hungry. But here's the beautiful irony: Satan comes to Jesus when he knows he has been fasting; but Jesus has been fasting because he knows that Satan is coming.

Fasting, for Jesus, was not an empty religious ritual, but a powerful weapon to lay hold of as he walked upon this earth. The self-denial that left him physically weak was a means of being spiritually strong. His time spent suppressing the desires of the flesh and drawing near to the presence of his Father prepared him to pursue the course that was set before him. As we follow in his footsteps, may we view fasting as a means of denying the physical that we might focus on the spiritual, seeking the face of our heavenly Father and gaining strength to walk the path he has set before us.

Reflection:

How do you hope this experience of fasting will help you grow in your walk with God?

Morning Devotion: to read Friday morning when you wake up

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-3

After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, Israel is encamped on the east side of the Jordan river with the Promised Land waiting on them. As they wait and anticipate, Moses recounts the law, the commandment, the words that God had given to them at Sinai 40 years earlier. In the middle of this remedial session on God's commandments, Moses reflects on their wilderness experience. He reminds them that God used the sojourn to test their hearts and to teach them lessons they needed to know. Foremost among those lessons is this from verse three:

“And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Deuteronomy 8:3 ESV)

In the midst of the passage we read last night, Satan tried to tempt Jesus to satisfy his hunger by turning stones into loaves of bread. In response, Jesus uses the Scripture above to help fight and defeat Satan's temptation. By quoting these very words from Deuteronomy, Jesus reminds us that the hunger we experience as we fast is not something we should seek to avoid or escape; rather, it is meant to lead us to feast on the Word of God.

Today and every Friday during this season as you strive to fast, be assured that the temptation will come to either forsake your fast altogether or to indulge your appetite in some other way. Now, you probably won't try to turn stones into bread, but you will be tempted to eat from the other tables that the world sets before you. You might find yourself enticed to take the edge off your appetite through entertainment or through mindless scrolling on your phone; or perhaps you will be tempted to dull your hunger by shopping, or playing video games, or binge-watching a new show, or by simply grabbing a nap. The options are endless, but the bottom line is that you will be tempted to turn anywhere but God's Word. So resolve this morning that when your stomach starts growling you will not turn to what the world sets before you, but that instead, you will run to the life giving Word of God.

Reflection:

*What "table" do you think you will be most tempted to turn to during your fast?
Stop and pray that God would help you instead to pick up his Word and feed your soul.*

Mid-Day Devotion: to read Friday at lunchtime

*"Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshipped the Lord their God."
(Nehemiah 9:1-3 ESV)*

If you read through the passages in the Bible that speak of fasting, you will see that this practice is almost always accompanied by prayer; especially prayers of personal confession. This makes sense when you stop to think about it. We often find that as we humble ourselves before God and denying our flesh, God helps us to clearly see the sin that still resides in our hearts. He might show us pockets of pride or give us glimpses of self-centeredness that we were blind to before. He may reveal sins that we've hidden from others or that have been a part of our heritage for generations. Prayer, then, is a means of expressing what God exposes through fasting. As we intentionally lift our eyes from our earthly appetites to focus on God and to draw near to Him, prayer helps us (in the words of Hebrews 12:1) to "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely" so that we might "run with endurance the race that is set before us."

As you draw near to God and he grants you a greater awareness of sin in your life, remember that the Spirit's aim in uncovering sin is to lead you to conviction, not condemnation. These sins are meant to be confessed and laid at the cross, where Jesus paid for them in full, so that we can be cleansed of that which dims our view of God or dulls our affections for him.

Reflection: 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Set aside some time to talk with God, asking him

to search your heart and reveal areas where there is a need for confession. Then ask God to help you not only admit those sins, but to turn away from them in true repentance.

Devotions for February 6 & 7 - Written by Arey Hill

Evening devotion: to read after dinner on Thursday as you start

fasting

Read: 2 Chronicles 20:1-19

You may be more familiar with Jehoshaphat's great-great-great grandfather, David, known as "a man after God's own heart" and writer of many Psalms and worship songs we sing, than you are with Jehoshaphat, but he is a notable man in the genealogy of Jesus whose "heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord," according to 2 Chronicles 17:6. Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, receives news that the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Meunites are waging war against him and the people of Judah and Jerusalem and notice his first response — to inquire of the Lord and to declare a fast. He then stands in the assembly at the Temple and beholds how powerful and worthy of worship God is and proclaims his trust in God by reminding himself of God's faithfulness to him in the past. After the Spirit of the Lord speaks through Jahaziel, Jehoshaphat bows his face to the ground and worships the Lord with all of Judah and Jerusalem. Our response to Jesus when we worship Him should be similar to Jehoshaphat's — to behold Him, to trust Him, and to bow down before Him. Jehoshaphat was a man who "set his heart on seeking God," according to 2 Chronicles 19:3. As we fast together, may we set our hearts on seeking God and may we behold Him, trust Him, and bow down before Him in worship.

Reflection: When I receive bad news of any kind, is my first response to inquire of the Lord is my desire still to bow down and worship Him?

Morning devotion: to read Friday morning when you wake up

Read: 2 Chronicles 20:20-30

What happens here is incredible! Jehoshaphat appoints singers to go out at the head of the army and worship the Lord, and the opposing army begins fighting against themselves. The people of Judah and Jerusalem hold the victory over their enemies because they praised the Lord. When I read this part of the story, I'm reminded of a song we sing, Battle Belongs by Phil Wickham, that says, "when I fight, I fight on my knees with my hands lifted high, O God, battle belongs to you!" Worship truly was a weapon for Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah and Jerusalem and the battle truly belonged to God. They praised God and gave thanks to Him, despite the real threat of their enemies, and God won the battle for them. Psalms 8:2 says, "Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold

against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.” Psalms 149:6 says, “May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands.” I can recall so many times in my life when worship has drawn me closer to God and has been a weapon against the enemy. I remember experiencing the loss of my mother at age 16 and worshipping God in the grief, and He brought comfort to my soul. I’ve contended for friends and family members who don’t know Jesus by worshipping God with them on my heart. I experienced powerful conviction during my time in college when the worship band at the church I visited sang the words, “Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.” I remember worshipping God through many sleepless nights with a newborn and as a new mom with postpartum anxiety and feeling His nearness. I’ve witnessed God turn women in a county jail from barking and cursing to singing and wanting to know Jesus because we sang worship songs with them in the jail cell when we visited them. I’ve witnessed residents at the nursing home who are unable to communicate begin singing when they hear a familiar hymn. Worship is powerful because we are worshipping a powerful God! God has created us to worship Him and when we turn our eyes to Him in worship, we see that He is bigger than any battle we face. Remember, the people of Judah and Jerusalem who worshipped God and saw victory together on the battlefield are the same people who fasted and sought God together at the Temple. There is power when God’s children come together to worship Him and seek Him together through fasting, as we are doing now. The enemy will never stand a chance!

Reflection: What battles in my life do I need to trust God with and allow Him to turn my worry into worship? Is there someone I know facing a battle that I can intercede on their behalf?

Mid-day prayer: to read Friday at lunchtime (Written by Jeff Miller)

Dear God, you are a refuge for me. You are my place of safety. Still, turning to you is not always my first reaction when I’m faced with a challenge or a sorrow. I want it to be different. You’ve given me an example in Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah. I have every reason to react as they did because you, the maker of heaven and earth are my help. Compared to you, the most threatening person is insignificant. You are present and exercise your will in all of heaven and in the deepest recesses of the sea; I am always seen and always cared for by you. So I turn to you now. I commit to turning to you daily at each provocation. I will worship you and confess your great power to save. I will walk with my eyes set on you instead of the trouble that is coming my way.

Father, I bring before you the challenges I am now facing. I present them to you. I ask you to look on them and hear my cry for help. Defeat your enemies in my life. Let their efforts come to nothing. Moreover, reveal to me where I’m contributing to the problems in my life and show me how to change so I am more like your child, just as you desire.

Mighty God, I bring before you the people whom I love and the challenges they are facing. I lay them before you now. Lord, giants tower over my loved ones. Please defeat the enemy's schemes at work against them. Grant them grace to clearly sense your very real presence and love. Let them find the way of escape that you provide for them. Let them glory in the confidence of the ultimate victory we will enjoy when you establish your kingdom on earth.

Savior, I revel in the depths of your riches and wisdom and knowledge. I savor the vastness of your thoughts. I celebrate that I am from you, I am adopted by you, and deeply desire to worship you by living my life for you. Let it be so. Amen

Devotion for February 13 & 14 – Written by Pastor Grant Arinder

**“The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”
Gen. 2:18**

When God created human beings, He created them to live in **community**. The most basic, and fundamental of our communities is called a family. As creatures, God made us in such a way that we are interdependent - as John Donne has so famously said, “No man is an island...”. A family is the necessary ingredient in the birth and appropriate growth of any human being.

But our physical family, is not the only family that God gave us. He gave us a spiritual family as well. The New Testament teaches that the church is the body of Christ, and although that body has many different parts, they are all connected together in community. It is actually the connection of the parts that give the individual parts any meaning. A mouth has no meaning without a head, like a hand has no meaning without an arm. No part of the body is important in and of itself. It is only meaningful and useful when it is connected to the other parts. So it is with our spiritual community, the family of God.

I have shared this with you because I wanted to remind you of what the Bible teaches about our natural families and our spiritual families. It is clear from the word of God, that God, Himself, is a social being, and He made us in His image. He made us for fellowship with Him, and with each other. The author of the book of Hebrews even warns us about neglecting our time with one another (See Hebrews 10:25).

With those biblical admonitions behind us, I would rather turn the conversation away from “what we should do” to a more enjoyable “What we get to do.” It’s actually very simple friends (I hope you caught that word friends, nothing in this world is more valuable than a friend), life is better when we share it with others.

I tell people regularly, that I think I am one of the richest persons in the entire world, and that is because I truly believe I have the best Christian friends that a person could ever dream of having. I cannot even begin to imagine my life without these people I live in community with. My life would be an empty shell of an existence without these folks. It is more than a cliché that when we live in deep, meaningful, relationships, that these relationships truly multiply our joys, and often help shoulder our sorrows.

While all of this is true, it does not necessarily make living in community simple and easy. Choosing to faithfully, intentionally, and effectively live in community, on any level, is challenging. Why? Well, because **I am me, AND you are you**. Enough said, right.

The cool thing here is that it is actually the difficult process of living in community that becomes the necessary instructor for our lives. In living in community, we learn almost everything that we need to learn to be all that God wants us to be.

We Learn:

Patience
Forgiveness
Forbearance
Trust
Integrity
Faithfulness
Sharing
Submitting
Independence and Interdependence
And a whole whole lot more stuff.

In closing, I was thinking about what the church came to call the Lord's Supper - we call it **Communion**, and it is something we only do in **Community**. The Lord's body and blood shared together in worship of Him bind us together in covenant. Spend some time thanking the Lord for the people you share life with, and pray about some ways you can continue to invest in those relationships.

Better Together,
Pastor Grant

"If one falls down, his friend can help him up, but pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up" - Eccl. 4:10

Devotion for February 20 & 21 – Written by Perry Pugh

Evening Devotion: to read after dinner on Thursday as you start your fast.

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, hurried, overworked, and overwhelmed? What 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 read Friday morning when you wake up.

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?*

Devotion for February 27 & 28 – Written by Cammie Hoyt

Pastor Grant's devotion from 2 weeks ago reminded us how God designed us to be in community with one another from the very beginning. His intent was not for us to live this life isolated from one another, trying to do it all on our own, which I often need a reminder of. This week, we'll focus again on community and look at some other aspects of it.

Evening Devotion: Read Galatians 6:1-6.

In verse 2, Paul writes "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." The fourth word of this verse is what I want to focus on tonight. By definition, a burden is "a load, typically a heavy one." Paul is literally telling us to share someone's heavy load, thus fulfilling the law of Christ. As Christians, it is often easy for us to share joys and excitement with one another, but we often neglect sharing our burdens. Whether it's because of fear or confusion or a multitude of other feelings towards the burden, it has become easier for us to make excuses not to share what's troubling us than bringing it to light to those in our community. Instead, we tend to bottle it up inside. When I think of the times, however, I have shared a burden of mine with someone else, I think of how God has used those people in my community, to comfort, encourage, share advice, and uplift me. God did not design for us to walk this life alone, and it is evident He did not design for us to carry our burdens alone either.

Reflection: What is burdening you right now? Have you shared that burden with people in your community? Pray that the Lord would help you lean on the community around you to share your burdens.

Morning Devotion: Read Romans 12:3-8

In this passage from Romans, we see this depiction of a community as a body. I love the image of belonging we get from verse 5; "so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." In a world where there are so many desperately search for belonging, we find confirmation here that we do in fact belong in the body of Christ. Can you confidently say that you have a community where you belong? I pray your answer is yes, but if not, it's never too late to start pursuing one! Through Bridgeway, you can find belonging in a life group, on a serve team, or at MDWK just to name a few ways. Ultimately, I pray that you

would be reminded that you do belong as a child of God, and He wants you to experience that belonging surrounded by fellow believers.

Reflection: How can the Lord help you to see yourself as a member that belongs to all others in His body? Pray that the Lord would help you actively pursue community if you are in search of it or that you would give Him praise for the community that He has you in right now.

Mid-Day Devotion: Read Philippians 2:1-11

Paul calls us in verses 3 and 4 to “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.” He goes on to say that we should have the same mindset as Christ in our relationships with each other. When I think about my community, it is often easy for me to forget this part. Instead of looking for ways that I can be selfless, elevating others interests above my own, I can have the mindset of “what can my community do for me?” The world we live in today also errs on that side, telling us to do what is best for ourselves regardless of how it might affect those around us. Instead, how much stronger, and more Christlike would our communities and relationships look if we were constantly seeking ways to put others’ needs above our own? When we can humble ourselves and remember that we are far from deserving of the grace of God, yet He so freely give it, it becomes easier for me to put aside my selfish ambition and desires and instead focus on ways I can serve those in my community.

Reflection: Am I valuing others above myself or am I letting my own interests get in the way of doing that? Pray that the Lord would help you to clearly see ways that you can improve in your selflessness.

Closing Prayer written by Elder Rodger Shivers

Father, Your word commands us not only to love, but to bear one another’s burdens. We acknowledge our own shortcomings, dear GOD, and ask Your forgiveness. We lift up our brothers and sisters in CHRIST, we pray for YOU to show Your presence, Your grace, and mercy, only YOU know all of our burdens. I acknowledge You alone are the one true GOD, and it’s in JESUS name I pray. AMEN.

Devotion for March 6 & 7 – Written by Truman Loupe

For this week, we’re going to do an overview of Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement by breaking it into a few pieces. This sacrifice was the most important for the Israelites, for it only happened once a year, and its main function was to provide cleansing and atonement for **all** of the sins that all the Israelites committed, whether willingly or ignorantly, over the prior year. Understanding the Day of Atonement well helps us to understand what Christ did on the cross.

Thursday evening: *Read Leviticus 16:1-14*

The main thing to notice from the first 14 verses is that prior to the full ritual, Aaron the High Priest has to first make atonement for himself. This is because Aaron is also a human with

potential uncleanness, even though he was the high priest. Preserving cleanliness and holiness in and around the temple was crucial for Israelite worship, for God is holy and he must be approached as holy (Leviticus 19:2).

The writer of Hebrews makes an important note that under the new covenant, this is no longer the case. Christ is perfect, pure, and blameless, and does not need to make sacrifices for himself and others day after day (Heb 7:26-27).

Reflection Point

- Why is this important? For Israel, **attention to detail** was crucial, for every part of everyday life had a potential to cause uncleanness, and the sacrifices had a specific execution plan in order to declare someone clean. How incredible is it that we don't have to go through that? Christ's death was sufficient once-and-for-all.

Prayer Point

- Because of the incredible grace of Jesus' death, it is **so easy** for us to take this for granted. While the Israelites were reminded at every turn their sin and brokenness, we just meander about our day forgetting the depth of what God has done. As you fast, focus throughout your day giving thanks to Jesus for this once-and-for-all death he died. Even if you don't feel it, focus your mind on him anyway, not taking for granted the grace he has shown us.

Friday morning: Read Leviticus 16:15-28

The spot to highlight in this section is verse 20-22 - the scapegoat. After the high priest has made atonement for himself and cleansed the temple, he moves to the scapegoat. Aaron places his hands on the head of the live goat, confesses all of the sins of the people, and then sends the goat away into the wilderness, never to be seen again.

Reflection Point

- The application here is pretty simple - the sins of the people were taken away. But here's where we want to go. Imagine yourself sitting there, seeing your sins being "transferred" onto a lamb, and then literally be released, **out of sight forever!** You would think, this would have to make you **feel** something inside. Jesus is and always will be a greater sacrifice, but imagine yourself actually **seeing** your sins leave you. I mean, what a powerful and emotional experience!

Prayer Point

- I encourage you to just sit and think about this moment. Picture your sins leaving into the wilderness. Picture Jesus hanging on the cross. **Your** sins are leaving with the scapegoat. **Your** sins are why Jesus is hanging there. Let that visual sink in and spark gratitude in your heart.

Friday at lunch: Read Leviticus 16:29-34

Another aspect of the Old Testament sacrificial system that is **completely** lost on us is the idea of setting time aside for the purpose of making oneself holy, particularly before entering the presence of God. Under the new covenant, we can always come to Jesus as we are, and that is a **good** thing! “God doesn’t clean his fish before he catches them” is one of my favorite cliches. However, do we ever consider that if we want to see God work in and through us, that **sometimes** (not all the time!) we need to “consecrate” ourselves first?

Probably the most significant moment of this is right before the fall of Jericho, Joshua tells the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you” (Joshua 3:5).

Reflection Point

- The key verse here is 16:31, “It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance.” When the Day of Atonement came, everyone was to stop what they were doing and put full attention to the cleansing of sins. When you fast, allow this to be your mindset. Try not to just do whatever you can to get through the day as fast as possible, but actually give attention to God.

Prayer Point

- During my fasts so far, I try to dedicate one hour uninterrupted to solitude. I will simply sit on my couch and do nothing except pray and think about God. I encourage you to try!
- As a bonus - if you find yourself continuously going to church and hearing/seeing/feeling absolutely nothing, then maybe you need to consecrate yourself. For the New Testament believer, consecration is less about “not-sinning” and more about preparation. **BEFORE CHURCH** (yes wake up earlier), spend time reading and praying. Focus your mind on God as you enter Bridgeway. I guarantee this will make a difference. And don’t forget this simple fact - why are we even at church? Because Jesus resurrected from the dead. Without that, there would be no church to begin with.

Closing Prayer written by Elder Denny Cole

Lord,

Help me to think of evangelism of not just something that others do, but something I can be actively involved in. I pray that I will recognize and seize the opportunities You place before me and rely on Your strength alone to speak through me the words that will draw someone into an eternal relationship with You.

I thank You in advance for the strength, courage, and obedience to tell others about You, and the willingness to plant the seed.

This I humbly pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen

Devotion for March 13 & 14 – Written by Victoria Houston

Evening Devotion: Read Mark 1:1-8

The book of Mark starts with describing how John was preparing a way for the Lord. It details how he was sharing about Jesus, how he was coming soon, and how he was baptizing people in his name. While studying this passage recently, the Holy Spirit prompted me to think about how I was preparing a way for the Lord in my daily life. Yes, this passage and the ones like them are about Jesus's life here on earth, but I believe they can be used as an encouragement for us to follow in John's mission of preparing a way for Jesus. This time, we are preparing a way for Jesus in the lives and hearts of the people in our city, state, country, and in the world!

Here are some additional passages for further study:

- Matthew 3:1-12
- Matthew 11:7-11
- Isaiah 40:3-4
- Malach 3:1

Through all of these scriptures we see God's consistent call and use of His servants to prepare a way for Jesus. This can look different for all people, but the important thing is that you are being obedient to what God is calling you to do to "prepare the way". Is that going on a mission trip, sharing the Gospel with a coworker, having an international student over for dinner, helping fund missions projects for Bridgeway or around the world? The list can go on and on!

Reflection:

- What are you doing to prepare a way for the Lord in your day to day?
- Pray and ask God to make clear how wants to use you to prepare a way for Jesus.

Morning Devotion: Read John 17:22-23

Missions can sometimes feel like a big task that one can not complete on their own and in some ways we can't. The beauty of God's design is that he wants us to fulfill his mission in community with those around us.

In a world where there are so many "truths" and "cultural norms" how do we stand apart to share the one truth and life in Jesus? Through Jesus' prayer for his disciples, present & future, we see him pray over us these verses: *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* Through our Unity with one another as a body of Christ, unbelievers will and can see the difference and we can share that the unity is rooted in Christ Jesus. Similarly in John 13:35, *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* We see Jesus sharing with his Disciples that through the love we have for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, that the world will know who Christ is and who God is.

A quick story as it pertains to missions. One summer I spent a month in Malaysia pouring concrete slabs in remote villages. I emphasize the remote village portion again because the language barrier was even more intensified. Our Malaysian translators didn't even speak the tribal language that the people we were working with spoke. This made it extremely hard to share the Gospel and at times that was very discouraging.

As a team, we were studying John and we committed to living out John 13:35 and praying that through the love we had for one another that the village would see the love Jesus had for them. Fast forward to one of our last nights there, the village threw us a party to say thank you and one of our teams got to share the Gospel with them. Many came to faith that night and it was really incredible to see. I believe that God honored the prayer that they would see Jesus through our love and unity, and that our actions were able to speak louder than our words during a time where our words were limited.

Reflection:

- Do you have Unity and Love for the fellow believers that you walk alongside?
- Pray boldly that God would use that Unity to clearly show the difference between the world and Christians.
- Pray with your community and life group to see how God would use the love and unity you have to further His kingdom and His gospel.

Mid-Day Devotion: Read Romans 10

"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

God's design for missions and for people coming to faith in Him is clear. This passage was one that God clearly used to speak to me the practicality of others coming to faith, "... *And how are they to believe in him they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?*"

We are God's chosen tool to bring and share the gift of salvation to those around us and to the world. This is way more than planned mission trips and fundraisers, but it is the call that God has given all of his followers. As a Church we should be chasing after this call God has given us. Sure, one way to do that is to go on a trip the Church has planned but even more than that we want you to pray that God would convict your heart deeply of the need for messengers and then ask him how and what role he wants you to play in preaching the Good News. How God uses you will be different for everyone, but the call is the same. For many this will mean going on church mission trips, for others it will be donating financially or serving locally, and for a few

of you this may mean serving him fulltime in a ministry or in a missions context. The important thing is that you seek after God and are obedient to what he's leading you to do.

Reflection:

- Pray for God to help you to see the gravity of the lost and the need for messengers to share the Good News.
- Pray and ask God to specifically show you how he wants to use you to fulfill His mission.
- Pray for God to raise up messengers to go out and share the Good News of Jesus.
- Pray for those who are currently serving God by sharing the Good News of Jesus.

Devotion for March 20 & 21 – Written by Terrell Jackson

Evening Devotion: Read 1 Samuel 16:14-23

The book of Samuel focuses on the lives of 3 main characters- the prophet Samuel, and kings Saul and David. In Chapter 16, Saul is king but has begun his downward spiral and unbeknownst to him, Samuel has anointed David to be the future king. In this passage Saul is being tormented by an evil spirit and his attendants suggest that they find someone to come and play the harp to help him feel better.

One of Saul's servants recommends David for this position and gives David a glowing review. "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the Lord is with him." (Vs. 18)

First, we notice in this passage that to have been recommended for this position, David must have been a skilled harpist. He had spent time developing his talent, so that he was ready when an opportunity opened for him to use his talent playing the harp. Then notice that David also had a good reputation, not only with man but also with God. He was brave, handsome and well-spoken. Even though he had already been anointed as king, he was still out in the field tending sheep, which showed that he was humble and responsible wherever he was placed to serve. The Lord was with him, and he was called a man after God's own heart.

Reflection: As you begin your fast this weekend, reflect on the talents and abilities that God has given you. Are you ready to use them for His glory? Are there any talents or areas in your character that you need to work on so that you are prepared for God to use you?

Morning Devotion: Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and Acts 2:42-47

You have probably heard it said that God blesses us so that we can bless others. God doesn't fill our lives with good things just so we can sit on what we have and hoard it for ourselves. Rather we are blessed so that we can minister to others and help them with needs that they have.

In Ephesians 2, Paul reminds us that our salvation is a gift only available through God's grace. We can never do anything to earn it. But he says that we were created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Works which God has already planned in advance for us to do. In Acts 2, we see the early church living this out. They met together to worship and fellowship,

and they sold their possessions and goods and gave to anyone who was in need. The result was that many more people came to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Reflection: God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others. Ask God to open your eyes to places and peoples around you where you can serve and minister to others using your abilities and resources.

Devotion for March 27 & 28 – Written by William Wright

Evening Devotion: Read Luke 4:1-12

As we continue our season of fasting, I find myself realizing more and more the role mealtime has played in my life. Food has become a staple in my daily life. So much so that, if I am not careful, the food I eat can become an idol in my life, and my thoughts about what I will eat next inevitably overload my thoughts as the next meal approaches. The number of days that I go without eating are few and far between. Truthfully, it is rare that I miss a meal at all. And yet, the number of days that I go without reading the Word of God FAR outnumber the moments I go physically hungry. But the truth of the matter is that we are called to seek after God's word for spiritual sustenance. This is an aspect of faith that we often neglect, but it is a truth that is evident throughout the Bible.

At the beginning of this fasting journey, Pastor Joe shared with us a verse from Deuteronomy where it is written:

“And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”
(Deuteronomy 8:3 ESV)

From this verse we are shown the importance of the Word of God for his disciples. This verse is even quoted by Jesus in our passage in Luke 4. Here Jesus is being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Satan continuously comes to challenge Jesus, pushing Jesus to go against what he knew needed to be done. He calls him to turn away from God, to worship him instead. Satan makes him these insincere promises in the hope that he will turn away from the ministry he was about to begin, the ministry that would lead to salvation for all God's people. Amazingly, though, each time that Jesus is faced with a call from Satan, the answer he gives is to quote the scripture back at him. Verses 4, 8, and 12 are a great example for us of the importance in knowing and living in God's word. We have to rely on him as our provider, and he has given us his word to fulfill our spiritual needs. But so often we neglect the spiritual needs of our lives, we neglect pursuing his word in our daily walk. As we turn away from our physical needs, as we fast for 24 hours, I would encourage you to seek after God's word in the hunger. Make his word the food you live on, write his word on your heart today.

Morning Devotion: Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17

In these verses in 2 Timothy, Paul writes from a place he knows well. He speaks in verse 11 of the persecutions and sufferings he had faced. Paul was no stranger to persecution; in fact, he had an intimate knowledge of both sides of the suffering that Christ's followers would face. Before his conversion he was one of the most avid of all the persecutors. He goes on to point out that all followers of Christ will face difficulties because of their faith (Verse 12). The beginning of this passage paints a pretty clear, if not a bit scary, image that a life pursuing Christ will not be void of suffering. But Paul makes the proclamation that the reason he was able to endure had nothing to do with his own strength, and the way that we can find endurance, is in the Word of God. He says in verse 14:

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it"

What Paul tells Timothy here, and what he tells us as well, is that times will get hard. When times get hard, we fall back on the Word of God for our comfort and our deliverance. This is why it is so important to study and know what the Word of God says. He closes this passage with two of my favorite verses in 2 Timothy 16-17, where he says

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Paul’s message to us here is to trust in the inerrancy of God’s word. To recognize his word as the answer to our problems and to fall back on it when we need help. Timothy had a tough job by all accounts. He was Paul’s replacement upon leaving the church at Ephesus, and he had huge shoes to fill. But Paul’s message to Timothy was this: Fall back on God’s word. The word you know, the word he has called you to teach, is perfect. You are not relying on your own skill or your own understanding, but God’s. And the great thing about relying on God’s word is that it is sufficient for our needs.

Devotion for April 3 & 4 – Written by Arey Hill

To read after dinner Thursday night:

1 Samuel 1
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Did you know that Paul lays out God’s will for our life in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18? One of the three things that he says is God’s will for our life is to pray continually! Prayer is communion with God. It’s pouring out our soul before the One who made it, just like Hannah did in 1 Samuel chapter one. Hannah was experiencing grief, and she knew that only God was her hope and could bear her burdens. Not only do we see God remember Hannah and answer her prayers, but we see Hannah’s prayers impact the next generation through her son Samuel, whose name means “God heard.” We can give our grief, our anxiety, our fears, our heartache, our every thought and emotion to God by communing with Him through the avenue of prayer. If your burdens weigh heavy and you don’t know how to pray, look to Hannah’s example in 1 Samuel 1:13, and be reminded that Romans 8:26 tells us, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

Reflection: What does your daily prayer life look like? Are you continually pouring out your soul to God?

“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”
Psalms 62:8 NIV

To read when you wake up Friday morning:

Matthew 6:5-15
Luke 1:26-38

Jesus clearly lays out the things we should pray for in Matthew 6. One of the things that really sticks out to me is, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done.” Our prayers aren’t supposed to be us asking God to give us what we want; instead, it’s bringing our requests before Him while

submitting to His authority and asking Him to align our wants with His will. I love Mary's response to the angel when he tells her that her life is about to completely change. As crazy as the news she received from the angel may have sounded, she remembers that her identity is first as a servant of the Lord, and her response reflects her submission to His will for her life. "Be it unto me, according to Your Word," Mary says. What an incredible response AND what incredible plans God had for Mary to bring Jesus into the world to save us! No matter how God chooses to answer the prayers we're praying, we can rest assured that His ways and His thoughts are higher than our own, according to Isaiah 55:8-9, AND that Romans 8:27-28 says, "he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. 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." May we remember as we fast that the Spirit of God intercedes for the people of God in accordance with the will of God and that He is working things out for good!

Reflection: Are we praying like Jesus teaches us to pray — Praising His Name, Seeking His Will, Asking for His Provision, Asking for His Forgiveness and Deliverance, Praying for others and their Salvation?

Devotion for April 11 & 11 – Written by Grant Arinder

To be read Thursday evening:

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exist, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.... Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity"
Hebrews 2:1-11; 14

These are the last few days before we enter Holy Week, a time when we turn our faces toward the cross and begin to reflect upon the supreme sacrifice that Jesus made for us there. I hope that you are spiritually preparing yourself for the most important season on the Christian calendar. Thank you for joining me here for this time of devotion together. Find a quiet place and prepare yourselves to spend a few moments in meditation and prayer. Don't hurry through this, take some deep breaths, maybe close your eyes for a minute or two, and ask the lord to meet with you for a few peaceful moments. In the pace of our lives these days, if there is anything we truly need, it is some moments resting at the feet of Jesus.

My D-Group recently read through the book of Hebrews together. A few things really stood out to me as I read through and journaled during my reading of Hebrews:

1. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 says that the son is, "the exact representation of HIS (God's) being.
2. He is our Great High Priest - superior in every way to earthly priest. (Chapters 4-5).

But I want to share two other things with you; one of these is about Jesus' LIFE and the other is about his DEATH.

The writer of Hebrews wanted us to know that it was imperative, that Jesus not only Die for us, but also to Live like us. For this reason he says we are of the same family; he says that Jesus shared in our humanity. Later (Heb. 4:14-16) the author says we can approach him boldly because we have a Great High Priest who experienced all that we experience and can therefore sympathize with our suffering and our temptations - Because he shared in them... all of them.

Think about that for a while, what sin do you struggle with? The text says that Jesus put on our human clothing and experienced every temptation common to man, so that he could sympathize with us. The writer goes on to say that that fact should free us to approach him confidently and without shame, for he knows the temptation and trails we walk.

What is bothering you; what sin are you battling; what trial are you walking through? The writer of Hebrews says take it to the Great High Priest, who has shared in your humanity and who understands your trials, because he has shared in them.

Reflection: Spend some time taking your trials and temptation to the Lord who is one of us and totally understands our struggles

To be read Friday Morning:

The other thing that struck me in Hebrews, was not the fact that Jesus died for us, but also the manner in which He died. The writer said, "it was fitting that God would make the author of our salvation perfect through suffering.

We have all learned, since we were young children (if we were brought up in church) that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). We all have also learned that the free gift of God is salvation because of the fact that Jesus paid our sin debt. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only son to die for us."

But the author of Hebrews also seems to stress not only the theological transaction that happened in Jesus' death - His holiness for our sin - but also the importance of HOW Jesus died. I've often pondered this question: If Jesus only needed to die for our sin to satisfy the price of sin, could there have not been a more *subtle* manner for him to die?

The Cross, had to be, the most grueling death possible. What was the need or purpose for such a death? Based on the book of Hebrews, and the insistence that Jesus had to be made like his brothers, and that he had to share in our humanity, it was fitting for Jesus to die in this manner for at least two reasons:

1. So that He could be a perfectly sympathetic priest, because he had also faced suffering equal to or greater than any other man would ever experience.
2. That we would never think of Grace as free, but would always remember the very high price that Jesus paid for our sin.

Reflection: Spend some time thinking about the transaction that took place when Jesus paid the price for our sin. Thank Him for dying in your place. thank Him for the forgiveness you can live in because of His sacrifice.

Now, think not only about the theological transaction that took place when Jesus died for you, also spend some time thinking about the manner in which He paid that price. Thank about how incredibly free Grace is actually not. Think about the great suffering that Jesus endured to purchase that Grace for us.

Give thanks for that Grace, and remember that Jesus shared in your suffering, so He understands. Take your sorrows to Him.