

TRANSFORMED

FORTY-DAY

JOURNEY TO
BECOMING MORE LIKE

JESUS



I am so excited about this 40-Day Journey of Transformation that you have chosen to take with us. I really do believe it could be life-changing for you! That's my prayer.

This is the first time we have undertaken a journey like this together. The foundation for this transformation is spiritual discipline. We want to walk you through biblically what some of these principles are and how they can impact your life.

I asked several of our staff to join me in writing this and they prayerfully poured themselves into this project - sharing their hearts and experiences. Their distinct personalities will come out, so not only are they helping to lead you, I hope you can gain a glimpse into who they are as well.

I know there are probably other devotionals out there, none of us are really professional writers, but these are topics God has challenged us to challenge you in. These were written with you in mind! This is one journey that we as a body called Castle Hills Church can walk together in. I'm praying for transformation in many lives!

So please, take this seriously. Make a commitment now to participate!

Praying for all of you ... May the journey begin!

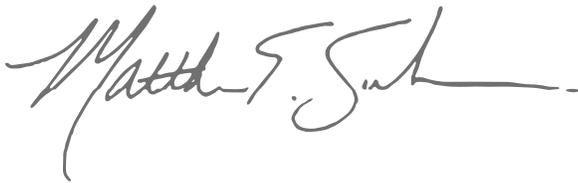
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Surber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6
Introduction	Begin OCTOBER 30		All Church Prayer Gathering NOVEMBER 1			
DAY 7	DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11	DAY 12	DAY 13
					Fast from Breakfast & Lunch	
DAY 14	DAY 15	DAY 16	DAY 17	DAY 18	DAY 19	DAY 20
	Fast from Tech			Fast from Food		
DAY 21	DAY 22	DAY 23	DAY 24	DAY 25	DAY 26	DAY 27
		Fast from Tech	Fast from Tech			
DAY 28	DAY 29	DAY 30	DAY 31	DAY 32	DAY 33	DAY 34
			All Church Prayer/ Worship Gathering NOVEMBER 29			
DAY 35	DAY 36	DAY 37	DAY 38	DAY 39	DAY 40	
	Fast from Tech	Fast from Tech	Fast from Tech & Food	Fast from Food	End Fast from Food DECEMBER 7	

SEEING HIM CLEARLY

MATT SURBER - LEAD PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 1

Have you ever taken a blurry picture? Usually in our rush to “catch the moment”, we don’t give or have enough time to really focus. We take the shot and the picture turns out blurry. Most of the time we are disappointed that we missed the moment and if you are like me, you just delete the photo. Missed opportunity.

Clarity is important. We want to see things clearly.

Sometimes in our lives, we move so fast and are so busy that we miss the moments with God. For many of us, He is simply a blur. This keeps us from truly knowing Him, hearing His voice, following His leading. We can’t see Him clearly.

This doesn’t have to be the case!

God has created us in such a way that we can truly know Him. While this is true, many of us wonder HOW?

This is why we are going on this journey together. My prayer for you is that you would experience and know God and allow Him to transform your life! Over the next 40 days, I’m asking you to make this a priority. To make not just an effort, but a commitment before God. We are going to look at different practices, different ways that you can see God more clearly, maybe even seeing Him for the first time!

Each day will include a bible verse that we encourage you to contemplate and really think and pray on. There will be a short devotional, life application questions and a guided prayer.

My hope and prayer is that after the 40-Days of Transformation journey, that this won’t just be the title, but it will be the reality of what God did in your life! Let’s get started.

BIBLE STUDY

READ PSALM 63 (WWW.BIBLEGATEWAY.COM)

1. What are the words that David uses to describe seeking after God?
2. What have been the biggest hindrances for you spending time with God?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. When are you going to spend time doing this devotional journey?
Be specific – make it an appointment each day.
2. What are you hoping and praying you get out of this 40-Days of Transformation?

“... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

Hebrews 12:1b-2

CLOSING PRAYER

At the end of each devotional we have added a guided prayer. These prayers give you a starting place to come before God. Then try to continue to pray for 5 or more minutes.

“God, help me to focus on you over the next 40 days. Open my eyes that I may see you.”



WHY WE WERE CREATED

MATT SURBER - LEAD PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 2

Everything is created for a purpose. For example, if you try to drive a piano to work, you won't get far. The piano is designed to make music. If you try to cook chicken on your computer, you can expect to get raw chicken and probably get sick! If you try to call someone on your mop ... you get the point. Anything anyone has created has an intended purpose. It's only when its being used for that purpose that it makes sense and actually works.

We are no different! God created you with a specific purpose in mind, mainly for us to know and worship Him.

"For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him."
Colossians 1:16

This verse and the verse in 1 Peter are just a few that tell us that we are God's special possession and that we were created for Him. Don't miss this: The God of the universe cares about you! He made you, He knows you, He loves you! And here is the best part, He wants you to know Him!

It stands to reason that unless we are functioning within our intended, created purpose, something in our lives will be missing. Sort of like trying to take a bath in a volcano. That's simply not the purpose of a volcano!

Until our relationship with Jesus becomes a real part of our daily lives, we will miss what it means to really live! God created us with the ability to think, reason and be relational. He designed us so that we could talk to Him, love Him and worship Him. Our relationship with Him is the best gift we can ever receive. And through that relationship, we will fulfill the greatest purpose in our lives.

Live the life you were created to live in Jesus!

BIBLE STUDY

We can have a relationship with God because Jesus made the way through His atoning sacrifice on the cross. To help you see what Jesus did for you and explain the process, walk through the following scriptures and write down what each verse means to you.

1. ROMANS 3:10-12, 23
2. ROMANS 6:23
3. ROMANS 5:8
4. ROMANS 10:9-10, 13
5. ROMANS 5:1, 8:1, 8:38-39

PERSONAL APPLICATION

If you don't think you have ever asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins and be your Lord and Savior, why wait another minute? If this applies to you, pray this prayer ...

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." *1 Peter 1:19*

CLOSING PRAYER

If you prayed this prayer, e-mail me so I can celebrate with you! E-mail me as well if you have questions:
Pastor@castlehills.church

"Dear Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, that I have fallen short of your perfect standards of Holiness, so I ask for your forgiveness. I believe that you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and I choose you - I ask you to come into my life. I want to follow you and trust you as my Lord and Savior. In your name, Amen."

THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONNECTING TO GOD

MATT SURBER - LEAD PASTOR

As Jesus was speaking these words, He knew His time on the earth was coming to an end. He also knew His disciples would be scared and confused. And rightfully so! They would wonder how they would continue without their leader, what would become of them or whether they would be the next to die.

So Jesus promised His disciples that they would not be alone and that He would send another to guide and direct them.

Do you think the disciples were disappointed with that? After all they were with Jesus! They couldn't understand what Jesus meant until they met the person Jesus was talking about. In Acts 2, we read about the day of Pentecost. On this day, the disciples met the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity (I know that is confusing), filled them. The disciples knew in that moment that God was not living in them and their spirits came alive! From that moment, a new power was birthed in the church - God dwelling in His people.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul (an Apostle of Jesus) writes, "Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" In other words, every follower of Jesus who has been saved (see last devotional) has the Holy Spirit living inside of them. Every Christian has access to God through the Holy Spirit - He lives in us!

But often we don't know He dwells in us because we don't hear Him, feel Him, or sense Him. That's not how the Christian life should be! We should live in such a way that the Holy Spirit noticeably influences us and guides our faith. Through the Holy Spirit we can become more like Jesus! He wants to be active in our lives!

Pretty Amazing!

For this to happen, we have to pro-actively seek Him. We must desire to hear from and be connected to God. As you use this devotional, open your bible and spend time in prayer. Make space in your life to connect with God. The more time you spend with Him, the more you will hear the Holy Spirit in your life!

BIBLE STUDY

READ ROMANS 8:1-17

1. When you feel the struggle between the flesh (what the old you wants to do) and the Spirit, do you consider the spiritual significance of that?
2. How can you be more intentional in trying to hear God within that struggle?
3. List a few things that the Apostle Paul explains to us and what the Holy Spirit means for our lives.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Take a few moments and write down the thoughts and ideas that you think God is saying to you through the Holy Spirit.

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 3

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." John 14:25-26

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, I recognize that I need to hear your voice in my life. Help me to understand how you are challenging me and speaking to me. Help me to be open to your working in my life. Help me God, to give the Holy Spirit all of me and for me to be open to His voice in my life. Amen."

DRIFTING OFF COURSE

MATT SURBER - LEAD PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 4

Begin your time with two minutes of silence and stillness before God. This will help you clear your head of all the distractions of your day and center your thoughts on the Lord.

“We must pay the most careful attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” *Hebrews 2:1*

The writer of Hebrews tells us something very significant about what it means to follow Jesus. According to this passage, being a Christian means being watchful and attentive to the truth of God. If we fail to be mindful of what we have heard, we will inevitably “drift away”.

This phrase “drift away” literally means to be “carried past a thing” and to “miss it completely.” Picture yourself in a raft headed downstream in a river, but without paddles. Without paddles, it’s impossible to guide the raft. Without paddles, it’s impossible to avoid rocks, trees or other dangerous objects. Without paddles, you cannot stop, slow down or change direction. Without paddles, I am not getting into this raft (I’m just saying!). Being on a raft without paddles means I have absolutely no control, but will end up wherever the current takes me.

Creating spiritual discipline in our walk with God is like using paddles while on a raft. Our lives are being pulled by currents that move, both within us and around us. Our hearts are, by nature, prone to drift away from the Lord (Jeremiah 17:9) and the things of the world open pull us away from doing the will of God in our lives (1 John 2:15-17). Unless we are awake, alert and mindful of what God has told us, it will be impossible to follow Jesus. Without a thoughtful, intentional and vigilant plan for following Jesus, the currents that surround us will inevitably “carry us past” the life that God has for us, we will “miss it completely.”

Consider the following words from Eugene Peterson in *The Pastor*:

“I love being an American. I love this place in which I have been placed—its language, its history, its energy. But I don’t love ‘the American way,’ its culture and values. I don’t love the rampant consumerism that treats God as a product to be marketed. I don’t love the dehumanizing ways that turn men, women and children into impersonal roles and causes and statistics. I don’t love the competitive spirit that treats others as rivals and even as enemies. The cultural conditions in which I am immersed require, at least for me, a kind of fierce vigilance to guard my vocation from those cultural pollutants so dangerously toxic to persons who want to follow Jesus in the way that he is Jesus. I wanted my life, both my personal and working life, to be shaped by God and the scriptures and prayer.”



BIBLE STUDY

READ THE FOLLOWING SCRIPTURES:

JEREMIAH 17

PSALM 51

1 JOHN 2:15-17.

1. Reflect on the nature of the human heart. What do the writers teach about the natural condition and inclination of our hearts?
2. How do the “things of the world” pull you away from following God?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How has your own heart pulled you away from God?
2. Describe how external factors in your work/culture/environment have tugged you away from God?
3. What are some ways you can be “fiercely vigilant” in steering your own heart toward God?
4. What are some ways you can be “fiercely vigilant” in following God in your work / culture / environment?

CLOSING PRAYER

“Father God, it is my desire that you be the primary force of my life. Direct me, lead me, pull me closer to you. And as the Psalmist prays, so do I: “Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” (Psalm 25:5)

NOT WHAT WE DO, BUT WHO WE ARE BECOMING

MATT SURBER · LEAD PASTOR

When I was around 6 years old, my father signed me up for T-ball. T-ball is basically baseball, but you hit the ball on a stand rather than having it pitched. And yet, despite the ball being on a stand, we all still missed it sometimes! Imagine if the coach started yelling at me when I missed the ball or made a mistake on the field. What if he mocked me because I still needed a tee to hit the ball and he didn't? I'd probably feel ashamed, but if my father heard this coach, he would be furious with him, right? Clearly I was just a child and new to the game. If that coach were holding me to an unrealistic standard based on his experience and not mine, it wouldn't be fair.

Thankfully that wasn't my experience with T-ball, but I've seen this mindset in the church. Whether intentionally or not, many Christians hold new believers and even themselves to an unrealistic standard. As I wrote in one of the other devotionals, we are saved by grace through faith, not because we practice the disciplines, pray or read our Bible regularly. We won't lose our salvation if we miss a devotional day. We should extend grace to ourselves and to others when it comes to our spiritual development.

As veteran Christians, we can mistakenly presume that younger believers must not be trying hard enough because they aren't "more like us" (whatever that means). If only they prayed more, read Scripture, tithed, listened to KLUV, fasted, attended life group and church more often or practiced the other disciplines as consistently as we did, they would be on our level.

Was this Jesus' attitude? Not at all! In Matthew 11:25 Jesus thanks his Father for keeping the secrets of the Kingdom hidden "from the wise and learned and revealing them to the little children". Did you catch that? Jesus called those disciples who had been following him for years "little children". Jesus understood that spiritual growth takes time, even years spent with him. Paul recognized that many of the churches he wrote to were expecting meteoric spiritual growth based on their own effort. He rhetorically asks the Galatians church, "Having been saved by God's Spirit (and not your own works), are you now being perfected by your own works?" (3:3). Paul is essentially saying, "You didn't get you saved through your own effort, so when did you start thinking it was solely through your own effort that you'd become more like your Savior?" Basically, unrealistic expectations of growth and achievement, like with that T-ball coach, are straight up unbiblical.

Here's what I want you to take away from this: If you're new to the faith or to the disciplines, practice them knowing that your salvation does not depend on them. They are a way for you to connect with the God who has saved you. That's all. Pay attention to how long it takes you to grow so that you will have patience with others when you disciple them. If you've been in the faith for awhile, be a coach that graciously teaches and leads people into a deeper relationship with Christ through the spiritual disciplines.

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 5

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you, will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." *Philippians 1:6*

All those who have put their faith in Christ are on a journey of becoming more like Him. However, it is wrong for us to impose our experiences and our standards on others especially those just starting out. God has a path for all of us to travel. Sometimes we gain ground quickly. Other times the terrain is more difficult and it takes more time. Let us be honest: We didn't start out where we are now. It took time and God's Spirit to get us where we are. And anyway, we are not the standard people should aim for—Jesus is.

May this humbling realization lead us to a deeper gratitude for God's grace that yields in us greater patience for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

BIBLE STUDY

READ MATTHEW 23:1-6

1. List the reasons Jesus is upset with the scribes and Pharisees in verse 4.
2. How can Jesus say in verse 3 that the Pharisees know the right things to do, but don't do them? Weren't the Pharisees praying (v. 5) and studying God's Word (v. 6-7)?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Do you know someone who can help you grow in your practice of a discipline? Ask them if they would be willing to check up on you from time to time and help you along the way.
2. Is there a discipline that you feel you would be able to help someone develop? If so, ask that person if they would be interested in your help.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Heavenly Father, I thank you for your patience and your grace. I want to be more like your Son and trust that if I pursue you with the disciplines in this book, you will perfect the work you started and my life. As I grow more like Jesus, help me to show others the grace and patience he showed his disciples. For your name and your glory. Amen."

WHAT IS PRAYER

GREG LIGON · MINISTRIES PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 6

Connection. Conversation. Honesty. Vulnerability. Accountability.
Correction. Repentance. Forgiveness. Celebration. Gratitude.
Transformation. Direction. Mission. Worship.

Prayer is essentially conversation with God. The purpose of prayer is a growing relationship with God and our personal transformation to become like Christ. Prayer is the intersection of our flawed thoughts and emotions and God's flawless character, wisdom and guidance.

Notice in verse 6 that Paul tells us the antidote to anxiety is prayer. He says that during your time of prayer, conversation, and communion with God, one of the things you should talk about are those items that are weighing on you and creating stress and anxiety in your life. We see in verse 7 that our anxiety is exchanged for His peace, our honesty and sincerity is exchanged for His protection of our hearts and minds.

Ben Stuart, Pastor of Passion City Church, Washington D.C. shared that he begins each day in prayer by writing the words, "How do I feel?" at the top of his journal and then proceeds to write out his emotions raw and unfiltered in a time of prayer and communion with God. Through prayer, he presents his requests to God and invites God to disentangle his heart and make right his thinking, and correct his emotions before he approaches his day.

God exchanges anxiety for peace ... and something more happens ... transformation. As God corrects our thinking, shapes our perspective and brings truth to our lives, we are changed toward His image. Richard Foster, author of Celebration of Discipline, writes, "To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer ..."

As you commit to this season of prayer, share your unfiltered thoughts and emotions with him and invite Him to challenge you and change your heart to be more like His.

BIBLE STUDY

READ JONAH 2

1. How does Jonah share his heart and emotions with God?
2. In what way does he proclaim his trust in God in the midst of trial?

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." *Philippians 4:6-7*

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How can you regularly share your unfiltered concerns with God asking His perspective?
2. How can you express your faith in God even as you share your concerns with him?

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, I invite you to shape my heart and mind as I share them openly with you in prayer."



DEVOTED TO PRAYER

GREG LIGON · MINISTRIES PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 7

In 1988, I met a girl I wanted to get to know better. I asked her out on a date and we started spending time together. At first we talked a few times a week. As our relationship grew we began to talk every day ... most of the time multiple times a day. When we were apart we would go to great lengths to stay in touch via long distance phone calls or yes good old-fashioned letters in the mail.

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” *Mark 1:35*

The same is true for our relationship with God. The more time we spend together the more we get to know God. It is because of our love for Jesus that we desire to communicate with Him. As we talk with Him regularly, we strengthen our relationship by investing time and energy.

In Mark chapter 1 we read how Jesus had a full day of ministry extending late into the evening as verse 32 reads “after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.” After the conclusion of that day comes verse 35: “While it was still dark” Jesus set aside time for a private one-on-one conversation with God. He “went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” Jesus made prayer a priority. The disciples noticed him praying daily, consistently, fervently. Eventually they asked him, “Lord, would you teach us to pray?”

Regular, repeated times of prayer are critical to becoming like Jesus over time. It takes commitment and effort but it is worth it. There is a compound effect that prayer has on our lives and our spirit in the same way as a regular workout does on our bodies.

In 2014, a friend invited me to go through the P90X workout program with him. P90X is an intense 90-day workout program designed to transform people’s bodies and improve their health. It was tough. I was tired. But then I started to notice something ... I was changing. I started to feel stronger and look different.

Consider this 40-Days of Prayer our P40X. 40 days to spiritual transformation. Becoming like Jesus one day at a time, one thought at a time, one attitude at a time. Becoming like Jesus is a process. Trust the process. The change will come over time as we engage in honest prayer with Jesus and he points us to areas we need to change, grow, or adjust.

Use these 40 days to follow Jesus’ example and find a private time and place to spend in prayer with God.

BIBLE STUDY

READ DANIEL 6

1. In what way did Daniel risk or sacrifice to commit to praying to God?
2. How did Daniel demonstrate his faith in God through prayer?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. What sacrifice would it take for you to pray regularly?
2. What can you do today to establish a regular pattern of prayer in your life?

CLOSING PRAYER

“God, help me come to you consistently that I may know you more and live increasingly like you.”



POWER OF PRAYER

GREG LIGON · MINISTRIES PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 8

It was March 1983, Basking Ridge, New Jersey. It was my 13th birthday party. Our family moved there months earlier after living in Texas my whole life. I was new to school and still trying to make friends. I invited most all of my classmates not sure if many would come. There was one problem. It was supposed to rain all night and several of the activities were outside. Would anyone come? Especially with the rain?

I was the new kid and I was worried. My mom, who has always been a pillar of faith and godliness, said, "let's pray about it" and we did. She prayed that the rain would not come to our house and affect our party. Did it rain? Yes. It rained everywhere in our city and our neighborhood, except around our house. We had parents and kids telling us that it was raining just a few houses down and how surprised they were it was not raining at the party.

Is there power in prayer? Yes! God is all powerful and when we pray we invite his power into our situation, into our circumstance. The God who parted the Red Sea at the prayer of Moses and who brought fire at the prayer of Elijah responded and showed his power that night at our simple prayer. He can do this and more for you.

Jesus said "ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you". Does this mean that I can ask God for anything at all and he can do it for me? Yes. Absolutely. God has all the power, authority and resources to accomplish anything you ask of Him.

It is not that simple. If it was, God would be reduced to a vending machine or amazon.com. Let's look back at the first part of the verse "If you remain in Me and My words remain in you". Here he communicates that there are some conditions regarding our request. We must "remain in Him" or stay in close intimate fellowship with Him. We also must spend time soaking in God's word so that "His words remain in us". Prayer is about our relationship. The more we know God and His Word, the more we will see God's power in our lives and in our world.

John clarifies further in 1 John 5 saying "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. "

How do we know His will? Through understanding His word and investing in our relationship with Him. Let it encourage us to have "confidence in approaching God" regularly, daily, moment by moment.

So pray big. Pray bold. Ask God for anything. Invite His power into your situation. He wants you to ask. Seek His will above your own as you pray. Let's ask Him for what we need and invite God's power into our lives and our circumstances. Whether it is a birthday party or a breast cancer, whether it is a financial challenge or a friend who needs to know Jesus, God wants you to come to him with confidence trusting in His power and His will.

BIBLE STUDY

READ JAMES 5:13-16

1. In what circumstance does James encourage us to pray?
2. List 2-3 people you could feel comfortable living out verse 16 by "confessing your sins to one another and praying for each other".

"If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

John 15:7

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. What one miracle do you need to see right now in your life?
Pray boldly asking.
2. Spend time thanking God for His power and His love.

CLOSING PRAYER

"God help me grasp your greatness enough to pray big things-trusting your strength and not my own, trusting in your perspective, not mine."

CORPORATE PRAYER

GREG LIGON · MINISTRIES PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 9

The early church endured daily persecution and scrutiny. The apostle James had been executed by the government and now Peter is in prison. The church began to pray passionately asking God to protect Peter, rescue him, or release him. There is power in prayer individually, but Scripture specifically states there is unique power and provision when we pray together with other believers.

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” Acts 12: 5

The early church was praying for Peter. They were gathered together praying, asking God to show His power in their situation. They were asking God to intervene even though Peter was in prison with guards all around him inside a prison with high security. The church prayed and God sent an angel to free Peter from prison miraculously. Read the entire account in Acts 12 and marvel at God’s power as a result of a praying church.

Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 18:19, “If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my father in heaven. Jesus spoke repeatedly to the disciples on prayer and most of Jesus instruction and encouragement was about people praying together with others. What would that look like today?

Praying together with your family.

Praying together with your life group.

Praying together as a church.

Through praying together, we collectively invite God to work on all our hearts at once as we seek His will and present our requests to Him. There is a matchless and powerful unity of heart and spirit that comes through praying together.

A few years ago, our family experienced a tough season of job transition that was filled with emotion, stress, and even fear. What if we did not find a job? What if we had to move far away? Where would the kids go to school?

I will never forget the four of us gathering on the back porch of our house and praying together. We prayed for direction, for each other and for God to provide. Our hearts were hurting and our emotions were hard to control. When we prayed together, however, the sense of peace and unity that God brought each of us was remarkable. God did provide answers months later, and now, we corporately continue to thank God for his provision during that season.

As a church, we are praying together this season that God would transform us individually and corporately into His image for His glory.

BIBLE STUDY

READ ACTS 12:1-19

1. How did God respond to the prayers of the church in this story?
2. Why were the prayers of the church described as earnest? When have you prayed the same way?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. What request do you need to join with your family, friends, or life group to pray about?
2. What time this week can you gather to pray with other believers and pray together.

CLOSING PRAYER

“God, change us as a church into your likeness this season. May we together be transformed to reflect you in our words, thoughts and actions. ”

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

GREG LIGON · MINISTRIES PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 10

Prayer is not a task but a way to stay connected to God. Prayer is not confined to our church, our home, or our personal time alone with God. Prayer is intended to be our approach to everyday life with God.

Are we called to spend dedicated, set aside time praying? Of course. But it does not end there. Why? God's presence is not confined there. God's presence is with you every moment and every place you go every day. His Holy Spirit is there to provide guidance, insight, and truth to every situation.

As you consider Paul's instructions to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances", he is essentially saying: Live every day joyfully, walk in an attitude of prayer moment by moment thanking God as you approach every situation or circumstance.

Remember the goal of prayer is your growing relationship with Jesus and your transformation into His likeness. It is about inviting God into your everyday mundane and messy life and asking for His help, His wisdom, His instruction.

You wake up in the morning and already your mind is racing with the things you have to do that day. Before your feet hit the floor, you are already worried and feel a sense of discouragement. What if you remembered that the God who created the whole universe was with you and cares about the details of your life? What if you asked for His help to accomplish your daily objectives? What if you wake up each day and simply pray, "God help me become more like you today" before your feet hit this ground? This could begin your day in conversation with God and re-orient your mind and heart toward Him.

You have an important and potentially difficult meeting with a friend, a coworker, or one of your kids. As you think about the meeting, ask God for His perspective, His insight, His wisdom. While you are meeting, be open to God's prompting and pray as needed for patience, wisdom and peace.

It was nighttime in Houston and I was driving home on the Beltway. It was raining. Then, it was RAINING! It was the kind of rain where you can barely see past the front of your car. Our men's Bible study had been reading John 14 where Jesus says, "My peace I leave with you. My peace I give you ... do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid." As the rain became harder and harder, I remember seeing flashing taillights, straining to make out cars around me and becoming afraid. I began praying, "My peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. Thank you Jesus for your peace." The rain continued but I was reminded of God's presence with me and I experienced peace.

God is with us every moment, simply turn your thoughts into prayers and invite God into your day.

Ask God moment by moment to help you filter your thoughts and align them with Jesus and His will. May everything I do bring glory to you ... and when I fail, show me that too so I can change, grow and become more like you.

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." | Thessalonians 5:16-18

BIBLE STUDY

READ JOHN 15:1-8

1. What does the image of the vine and branches have to do with prayer?
2. How does the passage encourage continual prayer and communication with God?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How can you carry a clear sense of God's presence and desire to talk with you through the day?
2. Invite God to help you hear His voice throughout the day.

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, help me be more aware of your presence and talk with you throughout the day, inviting your perspective and correction in all I do."

WHO WROTE THE BIBLE

KATE DOWNING - ASSOCIATE STUDENT MINISTER

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 11

Several years ago, an insurance company produced a commercial poking fun of the fact that you cannot believe everything you read on the internet. The tag line was, "They can't put anything on the internet that isn't true." The commercial is funny because that statement is obviously erroneous. We cannot believe everything we read on the internet. And, the recent influx of "fake news" being published on social media gives us all the more reason to be aware of what we are reading and who wrote it.

"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:21

Have you ever wondered who wrote the Bible? Whether you've verbalized your questions about the authorship of the Bible or not, they are important questions. We should know what we are reading and where it came from. The truth is, living a transformed life cannot happen apart from studying and applying the Bible to our lives.

Over the next few days we will dive into what it means to study and apply the Bible, but first we must understand where it came from.

The Bible is a compilation of sixty-six books broken up into the Old and New Testament. Forty writers over the course of 1,500 years penned the words of Scripture. The incredible thing about the Bible is that though it's a compilation of so many books written by so many human writers over so many years, it tells one complete story. We see the theme of redemption sewn like a binding thread throughout each of the books of the Bible.

The reason this binding theme is seen so beautifully and consistently woven throughout the pages of the Bible is due to the Author Himself. Forty different human writers penned the words of Scripture, but God authored it through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Inspiration means that God revealed to the writers of Scripture what it is He wanted them to record while allowing them to do so through their own personal writing style. The inspiration of the very words these men penned gives us the assurance that the teachings of the Bible are trustworthy, reliable, and useful for the transformation of our lives.

This should give us a whole new perspective on the importance and necessity of God's Word in our lives; because it is just that-God's Words! When we sit down to read the Bible, we have the privilege of studying the very words of God written down that we might be transformed by what we learn through them.

BIBLE STUDY

READ 2 PETER 1:16-21

(Note that the reference to "prophecy" in these verses is another word for Scripture or the Word of God.)

1. What is Scripture compared to in verse 19? How is the Bible like a light that illuminates our path?
2. What two statements does Peter make about what prophecy (Scripture) is not (vs. 20-21)?
3. How does Peter explain that Scripture was written (vs. 21)?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Knowing that the Bible is the actual Word of God, what kind of attitude should you have when reading it?
2. How does knowing or being reminded that the Bible is the Word of God written down for us that it might be a light for our path change the way you respond to the commands given in it?

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, thank you for the Bible. Thank you for loving me enough to give me your Words to study. Please help me to approach the Bible with reverence and excitement. Give me a passion for knowing and diligence for studying your Word daily."

OUR DAILY BREAD

KATE DOWNING - ASSOCIATE STUDENT MINISTER

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 12

Have you ever been *hangry*? It is a mixture of hungry and angry and happens when you become so hungry that you lose your cool. It's a condition that plagues many around mealtime and seems to be especially prevalent in small children at exactly the time when food is not available.

It's incredible how much hunger can affect our attitude and actions. Hunger is an innate drive to fulfill our body's need for nutrients. When it is not fulfilled, we become physically and mentally affected.

Spiritual hunger works in the same way. When our need for spiritual nourishment goes unfulfilled, we become spiritually *hangry*. Because we have not received the encouragement, correction, and direction that comes from spending time in God's Word, we are unprepared to stand against the temptation of sin. We become short-tempered and impatient with our loved ones. And, we fail to live the transformed life God calls us to.

Our spiritual need for nourishment can only be fulfilled in daily spending time reading and studying the Bible. The word "bread" is often used in the Bible as a reference to our necessary supply of food (Matthew 6:11). Without our necessary supply of food our bodies become weak, our attitudes become unpleasant, and eventually we face death. This is why the verse we just read in Matthew 4:4 is so significant. Jesus is declaring that just as we daily need food for survival, we daily need spiritual nourishment from God's Word.

It takes discipline and intentionality to spend time in God's Word each and every day. But, it is worth it! The Bible is our daily bread, our spiritual nourishment that transforms our attitude, actions, and words. Do you hunger after God's Word?

BIBLE STUDY

READ PSALM 119:57-64.

1. What is the first thing the writer of this passage declares about the Lord (vs. 57)?
2. There are eight different words used to reference God's Word (ex. promise, testimony, precepts). Re-read the verses and write down these words.
3. Why do you think the writer of this passage references God's Word so many times? What kind of value did he place on the importance of reading and knowing the Word?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How has your attitude and ability to stand against sin been affected when you spend time in God's Word?
2. What will you do to practice the discipline of spending time in God's Word even after this 40 day devotional ends?
3. Each time you feel hungry today, ask God to help you hunger after His Word.

"... It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:4

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, thank you for the Bible! Thank you for speaking to me through it! Please give me a hunger for reading and studying your Word. Help me to long for it like I long for food."

INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

KATE DOWNING - ASSOCIATE STUDENT MINISTER

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 13

Many of us own or know someone who owns a Swiss Army Knife. It's an ingenious tool that serves a variety of purposes. It is an incredibly useful tool when used, and nothing more than a paper weight when left unopened. In order for the knife to be useful, it must be opened and put into action.

Like a Swiss Army Knife, God's Word is useful and powerful in many ways. In every situation of our lives, it offers us the wisdom, direction, and encouragement we need. It equips us for "every good work" as the verse we just read tells us. But, we must first put it into use!

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul is teaching Timothy about the importance and power of Scripture. He is reminding Timothy that God inspired (breathed out) the Bible. Like we discussed the other day, inspiration means that God revealed to the writers of Scripture what it is He wanted them to record while allowing them to do so through their own personal writing style. This insured that what was recorded was God's perfect, trustworthy Word.

In these verses, Paul tells Timothy that God's Word is useful and effective to fulfill his God given calling. The same is true for us! God's Word is powerful in that it prepares us to live the transformed life God calls us to! Specifically, it is powerful in readying us to ...

- Teach - helping others understand the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Reprove - firmly yet graciously calling out sin in other's lives in order to bring them to repentance
- Correct - firmly yet graciously calling out error in other's lives in order to bring them to a proper understanding of a life lived to honor God
- Train in Righteousness - guiding others to daily live lives of transformation through faith in Christ

God's Word is powerful and able to ready us for incredible things. However, we can render it as useless as an unopened Swiss Army Knife if we never put it into action. Does your Bible sit collecting dust between Sundays or are you actively studying and allowing God's inspired Word to be powerful in your life?

BIBLE STUDY

READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-4:5.

1. Why is it significant that the Bible is inspired by God?
2. What is the "good work" that Paul instructs Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 4:2? What prepared him for this (3:16-17)?

"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."

2 Timothy 3:16-17

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. The word "preach" in 2 Timothy 4:2 means "to make known." God calls you to make known (share) His Word. How does He equip you to do so through the Bible?
2. How have you left God's Word unused? Confess that before the Lord.
3. How can you begin to allow the Bible to be useful in your life today?

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, thank you for your Word! Thank you for giving me all I need through the Bible to live a transformed life! Please help me to use your Word in my life today. Help me to be faithful to teach, reprove, correct, and train in righteousness even today!"

BIBLE READING VS. BIBLE STUDY

KATE DOWNING - ASSOCIATE STUDENT MINISTER

When I was a teenager, I decided the best way to “fit in” was to know as much as I could about sports. However, I was not really committed to actually watching sports, so my hopes for fitting in seemed pretty bleak. Then one day, I discovered a little thing called Sports Center. It was like the Spark Notes of sports! I would watch the show, memorize everything discussed, and repeat what I memorized in conversations with my friends. I thought I had a great system going on until one day I decided to sit down and actually watch a game. I had no idea how much more enjoyable it would be to watch the game instead of simply watching people talk about the game. Sports Center was great, but it was nothing compared to experiencing the game itself!

Over the last few days, we have looked at the incredible way the Bible came to be written. We’ve talked about its usefulness in our lives and the importance of spending time in it. Today, we will focus on the importance of not just reading but studying Scripture.

Often, when we sit down to spend time with God, we flip open our Bibles, read a few verses, and call it a day. We check off “read your Bible” from our to-do list and move on. But, in doing so, we walk away from the inspired (God breathed) Word of God unaffected and untransformed. We don’t allow the Holy Spirit the opportunity to speak to, convict, and encourage us. Simply reading the Bible is not wrong, but it is not enough.

If you’ve ever been asked to review a business proposal at work or to make a presentation on a piece of literature at school, you know there is a difference between reading and studying. Reading is like watching Sports Center but never actually watching the game. You get a general idea of what happened, but you only see a few highlights. Studying is like watching every minute of the game. You know what happened because you experienced it. You saw the play and the instant replay. If you want to know the game, you have to watch it!

The same is true when it comes to knowing the Word of God. If you want to know it, I mean really know it, you have to study it! It’s not enough to settle for simply reading it. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul is instructing Timothy to know God’s Word so well that He can explain it clearly and use it wisely. The only way to know the Bible well enough to do this is to study it! It is through studying Scripture that we allow the Holy Spirit the time and opportunity to speak to us, to teach us how to become more like Christ, and to therefore transform us!

Studying the Bible means taking time to read and re-read passages, to understand the context, to paraphrase and summarize what is being said, and to pray over it. We’ll talk more about this in the next few days.

BIBLE STUDY

READ PROVERBS 2:1-5

ONCE OUT LOUD AND THEN AGAIN SILENTLY

1. What does it mean to “treasure up” God’s commandments within you?
2. These verses make up one big if-then statement. Re-write the conditions of this if-then statement in your own words.
3. How is studying Scripture like searching for a hidden treasure?

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 14

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

2 Timothy 2:15

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. When you spend time in God’s Word, do you read it in order to complete the task or study it in order to know God more?
2. Do you need to set aside more time and/or find resources to help you study Scripture instead of settling for just reading it? What will your next steps be in accomplishing this?

CLOSING PRAYER

“God, Your Word is incredible! Thank you for it and the opportunity to not only read it but study it. Please help me to be diligent and patient as I study Your Word. Please speak clearly to me through my study of Your Word today.”

WHY WE MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

KATE DOWNING - ASSOCIATE STUDENT MINISTER

Several years ago, I signed up to run a marathon. I had been a runner in high school and college and though I hadn't run consistently in several years at that point, I assumed that I would pick it back up quickly. For months, I had every intention to start training but never seemed to find the time. It felt like the marathon snuck up on me, and suddenly I had a week to train. I went from not running at all to trying to run a marathon in a week. You can guess how well that went. I ended up dropping out of the race. I was not equipped to run the distance required. I wasn't prepared.

Each of us are called to run the race set out before us by the Lord (Hebrews 12:1-2). This race is called the transformed life. When we come to know Christ as our Savior, we are given new life in Christ and an incredible race to run. However, if we attempt to run this race apart from filling our minds with the truth of God's Word, we will be just as unsuccessful at living a transformed life as I was at running a marathon I hadn't trained for.

How do we prepare for this race? How do we equip ourselves to live a transformed life? We memorize Scripture! We've discussed how important and powerful the inspired Word of God is, and yesterday, we talked about studying Scripture. A big part of studying the Bible and "rightly handling" (2 Timothy 2:15) it is memorizing it. Memorizing Scripture helps us to resist the temptation to sin (Psalm 119:11), to encourage and share the Gospel with others (Romans 10:17), and to obey all that God calls us to do (Deuteronomy 30:14).

Whether you think you are "good" at memorizing things or not, you have been called to equip yourself to stand against temptation, to share the Gospel, and to obey God. The incredible thing is that God never calls us to things we cannot handle through His strength. So really, there is no excuse!

There are many methods for memorizing Scripture, but the key to them all is repetition and patience. And, don't forget to be creative! Do whatever it takes to memorize Scripture so that you might be equipped to live the transformed life.

BIBLE STUDY

READ MATTHEW 4:1-11

1. What happened to Jesus just before this passage?
2. How long had it been since Jesus had eaten when he began to be tempted? What does this tell us about his strength to resist temptation?
3. How does Jesus begin each of His three responses to temptation? He is God and would have had every right to say anything He wanted; yet, He responded by quoting Scripture. What does this teach us about the importance of memorizing Scripture?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How do you memorize best (ex. repeating the verse out loud, reading the verse several times, writing the verse over and over)?
2. Start today by using your preferred method of memorization to practice memorizing Psalm 119:11.

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 15

"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, thank you for the Bible. Thank you for the call you have given me to memorize Scripture. Please help me to take this call seriously. Give me an excitement for memorizing Scripture and the diligence to follow through so that I might not sin against You."

MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE

KATE DOWNING - ASSOCIATE STUDENT MINISTER

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 16

Do you ever wish you could turn your brain off? Do you feel like you have a beehive of thoughts buzzing around in your mind all day long? I feel that way often. I just wish I could take a break from thinking. However, even if I could take a break from thinking, it would not solve the problems or quiet the anxieties that fill my mind.

The truth is, God did not create us to cease thinking. He created us to renew our minds.

So, how do we do this? We meditate on the truth of Scripture. There are numerous verses in the Bible that speak about the importance and results of meditating on Scripture. In the verse we just read, we see the psalmist make a very specific decision to meditate on God's Word. We are called to do the same thing. By doing so, the Holy Spirit calms the thoughts buzzing around in our minds. Through the renewing of our mind by meditating on Scripture, we are able to take our focus off of what weighs us down and refocus on to the One who controls it all.

In Psalm 77:11-12, the psalmist uses three words to refer to meditating on God's Word: remember, ponder, and meditate. These words are significant because they help us understand how to practice this important spiritual discipline. The word "remember" means to recall to mind. It's a conscious effort to bring to mind the things God has done for us in the past. The word "ponder" means to let resound or resonate. When we meditate on God's Word, we allow it to resonate throughout every part of our heart and mind. Lastly, the word "meditate" in this verse means to preach to oneself. It's literally the idea of speaking to yourself the truth of the Scripture you are meditating on.

Meditating on Scripture requires a specific decision to do so and it takes time. It is a process of allowing the truth to resonate through you so that your mind might be quieted and renewed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

BIBLE STUDY

READ ROMANS 12:1-2

1. What does it mean to present your body as a living sacrifice?
2. We renew our mind by meditating on Scripture. What happens to us when we meditate on Scripture according to verse two?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Let's practice meditating on Romans 12:1-2

1. Pray this passage back to the Lord making it personal (ex. God, help me to present my body ...).
2. Re-read the verses several times emphasizing a different key word each time (ex. "Do not be conformed to this world ...", "do not be conformed to this world ...", "do not be conformed to this world ...").
3. Rewrite these verses in your own words.
4. What is it that God is calling you to do through these verses?

"I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds." *Psalm 77:11-12*

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, thank you for Your Word. Thank you for the opportunity to spend time meditating on it today. Please continue to speak to me as I continue to meditate on these verses throughout the day."

THE GIFT OF SOLITUDE

STEVEN SCIFERS - STUDENT PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 17

Solitude is an interesting concept. For the extrovert, it sounds awful. For the introvert, it can seem like an aspiration. But regardless of which way we're bent and how we're wired, God understands that we need moments to be able to step away and re-center our focus.

"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." Mark 1:35

BIBLE STUDY

READ MARK 1:35-39

Jesus understood the busyness of life. You can imagine as his popularity spread of his teaching, healing the sick and casting out demons, going from town to town would turn into enormous events as people came from miles to see him simply to be able to get something from him or hear him teach. Judging from the way God loved and had compassion on people, it's evident he loved people. But if that's the case, why would he take time to be by himself? Because he understood how crucial it is we stay connected and focused on God!

1. What are the details of Jesus' time of stepping away mentioned in verse 35?
2. Why did Jesus say he "went out?"

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Life can be exhausting. You might be thinking, "Well, that's an understatement". Everything seems to call for your attention. Your kids, your spouse, work, finances, home projects, even catching up on your favorite show can sometimes feel like another item on the to-do list. When so much of life is asking us to pour out, how are we to stay filled up? Well, it just so happens that Jesus set the example for us! He modeled what it looks like to prioritize your to-do list and responsibilities by making sure that the very first thing you seek in the course of your day should be God. Step away from the e-mails and noise of life and remember who it is that's deserving of our time and attention. It's amazing how God can place everything in its proper perspective when we recognize the One who is in control.

1. This devotional is a great start to taking advantage of the gift of solitude! What obstacles do you foresee getting in the way of this beneficial time?
2. How can you make sure to clear these hurdles so they're not in your way?
3. What is the objective of these times of solitude?

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CLOSING PRAYER

"God, help me to prioritize my schedule the way I should. To realize that the reason I have a schedule is to glorify you in it. Help me to remember the gift of solitude you've blessed me with and to not neglect it. Also, help me ..."

THE GIFT OF FASTING

STEVEN SCIFERS - STUDENT PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 18

Fasting can sometimes feel like a far-off concept. In short, it is the act of abstaining from something (usually food) in order to draw closer to God. If we've heard of fasting before, we sometimes relate it to something super-spiritual people do, or even weirdos. But what is so amazing about it is that (1) it's something that all of us can do, and (2) that it is a means to align our hearts with God's. As you go through the next few days of devotionals, remember that this is an amazing tool God has given us to help us. It can help with anything from simply humbling ourselves, to help us realign our priorities and perspective, to helping us be more attentive as we listen for answers from God about something we may be asking. Fasting is an enormous blessing!

"Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday." *Isaiah 58:9-10*

BIBLE STUDY

READ ISAIAH 58:3-5, 9-11

The prophet Isaiah, was writing to the people of Judah. God was speaking through Isaiah to say that if they didn't change the way they were living, God's judgment would come upon them. Well, we know how that turned out because a few years later, the nation of Babylon took them over. But here in this chapter, God is addressing the people's motives in their fasting. We can learn from Judah's actions as to how we should fast when we do.

1. Does verse 5 sound like fasting should be a proud, out-loud thing?
2. When fasting realigns our hearts as it should, what does it sound like it will do to us spiritually according to verse 11?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

As we just read, the people of God were fasting, which is a good thing, but they were fasting for the wrong reasons and with the wrong heart. Fasting should be a humbling activity as we acknowledge that we are God's humble creation and that God is our Almighty Father worthy of all our attention, worship and praise.

1. Why is God not just concerned about your actions, but the intentions behind your actions (1 Samuel 16:7)?
2. As you take on the spiritual discipline of fasting, take some time to ask why? What is the goal behind you taking this on?

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CLOSING PRAYER

"God, help me to have the right perspective of you during this fast. That I would see you clearer than I once did and be sure that this time is about glorifying your name and not my own. I pray you would ..."

FASTING WITH PURPOSE

STEVEN SCIFERS - STUDENT PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 19

Like we briefly talked about yesterday, fasting should be done with a purpose. What is it you're trying to get out of this? Just like the old adage goes, 'If you aim for nothing, you'll hit nothing every time.'

BIBLE STUDY

READ 2 SAMUEL 12:14-23

To give background before you read today's passage, this is a story involving King David. David had slept with a woman, Bathsheba, and orchestrated a plan so that her husband, Uriah, would die. While David thought he had gotten away with it, the prophet Nathan called David out on his sin and informed him that God would punish him for it.

David had a purpose in his fasting. As he stated in verse 22, his hope was that God would see David and change his mind regarding the punishment. While we know that sin has consequences, David still sought the Lord in hopes his humble attitude would change God's mind.

1. What did David do in response to hearing of the child's illness in verse 16?
2. What was David's response in verse 20, even though he didn't get the answer he wanted?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

There are all sorts of reasons we can fast. Maybe it's to realign our hearts with God's. Maybe it's to seek an answer to a problem or a decision that needs to be made. Or maybe it's simply to help hear God clearer as you humble yourself and elevate him. Whatever the reason may be, we need to have a purpose when we fast.

1. Why would it important to know what the goal is during a fast?
2. Being specific, what purpose do you have in fasting?

"David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them."

2 Samuel 12:16-17

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CLOSING PRAYER

"God, help me to not lose sight of why it is I'm fasting, but also help me be open to whatever else you may be trying to teach me through this. Thank you for ..."

DO'S AND DON'TS OF FASTING

STEVEN SCIFERS - STUDENT PASTOR

There are a lot of misconceptions about what to do and not to do when fasting. Our devotional from two days ago over Isaiah 58 spoke to this a little. Obviously if we're going to take the time to fast, we should do it with the right heart and attitude. We'll look at some of that today!

BIBLE STUDY

READ MATTHEW 6:16-18

This passage takes place in the middle of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. In it, he discusses crucial principles we should learn and apply for the believer. It's where we get the Beatitudes, that we should be salt and light in terms of fulfilling our purpose, lessons on anger, lust, loving our enemies, the Lord's Prayer, and so much more! Nestled in the midst of it all is this lesson on fasting.

Jesus often ridiculed the religious leaders of the time because their intention behind everything they did often seemed to have the agenda of elevating themselves and making themselves seem more "spiritual" than everyone else. That is not what Jesus wants for us. In this command regarding fasting, he's instructing people to not draw attention to themselves to, in a way, publicly proclaim, 'Look how spiritual I am! I'm fasting!' Instead, it should be a discipline we practice that's between us and God. In fact, there's no reason to let people know you are fasting because it likely has nothing to do with them.

1. What is the "hypocrite's" reward that Jesus references?
2. What does verse 18 mean in your own words?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Remember, the goal of fasting is not to say you did. It's to draw you closer to the Lord, to realign your heart and desires with his, to help yourself focus on his will and to help you listen if you're fasting in search of a word from God. When this is the goal, trying to find loopholes in your fast's instructions become irrelevant. Loopholes are excuses we try to find so we don't have to be completely obedient. Things that we reason to ourselves, like, 'If I can only drink fluids, I'll just puree all my food and then I won't have technically broken my fast.' Let your fast be a sweet time of drawing closer to your Father. Not a begrudging task.

1. What's the difference in perspective when the goal is to genuinely hear from God or draw closer to him, versus a spiritual checklist so we can pat ourselves on the back?
2. Why is abstaining from food an act of humble submission to God?
3. If humbly seeking the Lord is the goal, why should we avoid seeking loopholes to say we did or didn't do something?

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 20

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." *Matthew 6:16-18*

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, thank you for the opportunity I have to be able to draw closer to you through fasting. I pray that you would help keep the reason for my fast in front of me and not let the distraction of pride get in the way. Thank you for ..."

FASTING BEYOND FOOD

STEVEN SCIFERS - STUDENT PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 21

Fasting doesn't just have to be from food. Fasting can take a lot of different looks. While most Biblical accounts of fasting are referencing the abstaining of food, there are some examples of people that fast from other things. Remember, the goal of a fast is to drown out noise and luxuries in order to see and hear God more clearly.

BIBLE STUDY

READ LUKE 18:9-14

This parable takes place in the midst of many other parables. Jesus was trying to help the people understand that he's not after exterior actions as much as he cares about the condition of your heart.

1. What was the Pharisee's reasoning as to why he thought he was better than other men?
2. Why was the tax collector justified and the Pharisee not?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Fasting is not about the action. It's about the intent. Repeatedly throughout Scripture, we see that God exalts the humble and brings low the proud. God's desire for you when you fast is not to have an elevated sense of yourself, but to instead recognize who does deserve to be exalted, and that's God alone. Not everyone is able to fast from food. But again, the goal is not to 'not eat food.' The goal is abstain from something in your life that will cause you to turn to God. The thing to remember is that when you do fast from things other than food, the absence of those things should be felt in such a way that the time you did use to use or do what your abstaining from is now being used to pray and focus on the Lord. Fasting is something we do to dedicate ourselves to the Lord. What you fast from should help in that endeavor.

1. Why is fasting not necessarily about what you fast from, but more about what you do with that time?
2. Every time you fast, it doesn't have to always be from the same thing. But remember, whatever it is should be "felt." Like we said yesterday, the goal is not to find loopholes. There's no point in fasting from something you don't ever do to begin with. What are some things that you can fast from to help your focus be on God?

"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' "

Luke 18:11-13

21

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, help my focus to be on you when I fast. That I would have a humble attitude and recognize how holy and awesome you are. Forgive me for ..."

MADE TO GIVE

DON LONG - EXECUTIVE PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 22

We are rich! Of course, if we are Christians, we have spiritual riches beyond compare - but that's not what I mean - I mean that we are materially rich. We have all heard it, "We live in one of the richest nations on earth." This is true. God has seen fit to bless us in this country, in this generation, with significant wealth. You may say, "but I'm not rich ... ". I disagree. Just look around you and think about what you know about millions of people in the rest of the world - did you eat yesterday? Do you have a place to live? Do you have money, even if it's just a little bit? Do you have clothes to wear? On and on the list goes - jobs, money, cars, houses, hobbies, opportunities we have - we are rich.

Now, what I want us to look at today is WHY. Why are we rich? I don't mean what historically happened to make it this way, I mean why has God blessed us? The answer comes down to why God blesses anyone with anything - and that answer is found in our scripture reading from 2 Corinthians 9. We are blessed to be generous. No, that's not the sole reason - there is definitely a desire on God's part for us to enjoy what He has blessed us with (1 Timothy 6:17), but beyond that, we are rich in order to give.

You see, God loves the world so much that "He gave His only Son ... " (John 3:16). God provided the example of what giving looks like by giving the ultimate gift - eternal life through His Son Jesus. As God's creation, and as a creature "made in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27) we are fulfilling a part of our purpose for existence in giving to others. What I'm saying is that God made us to give. It really is that simple - we are made to breathe, to eat, to work, to play, to give ... there is a void left in us if we aren't generous.

God made us to give because it brings glory to Himself. Think about the perfect picture that's shown in the Bible for a moment ... God, the all-powerful creator of the universe, the One who is worthy of all honor and glory and praise, created mankind in His own image and for His own glory. He then gave mankind the capacity to give to other people, who will in turn bring glory to God because of the gifts they have received! Look at the second part of verse 11 above, "... which through us will produce thanksgiving to God." When we are generous, it opens the door for those receiving our gifts to bring glory to God. Verse 12 repeats it again, "... this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God." You see, God made us to give to bring glory to Himself - one way we are to do this is through giving.

There are many other benefits that come from giving and we will look at some of those over the next few days, but first, we need to clearly understand why we are blessed and why we are to give. It is our prayer as a church that each one of us will be transformed more and more into the image of God's Son, Jesus, (Romans 8:29) as we fulfill the purpose He has given us through giving!

"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God."

2 Corinthians 9:11-12

BIBLE STUDY

READ THE FOLLOWING:

PROVERBS 11:24-25

PROVERBS 19:17

LUKE 6:38

ACTS 20:35

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6

1. What common theme do you see in these verses about how God provides for those who are generous?
2. Other than being in control of keeping or giving what is already yours, what is taught in these verses about how much control we have over the amount of riches given to us in this life?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. What specific ways are you giving now? We are blessed with skills, time and money – think about your answer relative to each of these areas.
2. Identify the area of your life (skills, time, money) that you are most inclined to be selfish with and take specific action today to give generously in that area.

CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, thank you for the way you have blessed me in this life. I know that everything I have is from your hand and is given to me for a reason – please guide me and give me the faith to follow you in generously giving what you have blessed me with. I pray that today you will clearly show me a way that I can give generously in an area that I have been withholding from you.”

JOYFUL GIVING

DON LONG - EXECUTIVE PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 23

Have you ever received a gift from a reluctant giver? Maybe there's a time that comes to your mind when you were the reluctant giver. I know I am guilty of having been a reluctant giver. It reminds me of one of those situations we have all seen - a 4 year old child and his younger brother are fighting over a toy - at some point, the older brother gets tired of the argument and delivers a nice left hook to his younger sibling's head to end the ordeal. The parents will many times step in at this point and make the older brother apologize to his younger brother and give him a hug. The "hug" is given, but usually with his head and body turned a little to the side - it's very quick and almost always accompanied by a quiet and robotic-sounding voice that says, "I'm sorry." Definitely a reluctant giver! Now, don't misunderstand, this kind of training for young children is important in order to teach them appropriate behavior - what I'm thinking of are the times I have given something without my "heart" in it. Every time that has happened, I have lost sight of what we studied yesterday - the "why" behind giving. I can be just like that small child who is reluctantly giving a hug and saying, "I'm sorry."

Once we truly appreciate that our giving is to God through another person, it paves the way for being a cheerful giver. As followers of Christ, we understand everything we have is from Him, and everything everyone else has is from Him too. I am giving because it is my gift of love to Christ for what He has done for me. We have the awesome opportunity to be used by Christ as His method to bless someone else. This is what was meant when Jesus describes inviting the saints into the kingdom He is preparing for them and thanks them for giving him food when he was hungry, drink when he was thirsty, welcoming him when he was a stranger, clothing him when he was naked, visiting him when he was sick and in prison - Jesus said, "... as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me". When we understand true giving, it is a gift to God, not to the one receiving it from our hand. This allows me to have true joy in giving.

God has blessed us with so much - not just physical and material blessings, but with spiritual blessings. As Christians, He has granted to us eternal life with Him, He promises to carry all of our burdens, He promises to provide for our needs, He promises to listen to us when we call on Him, He promises to answer our prayers, He promises to guide our steps ... the list goes on and on. He has done so much for us as His children, when we realize that fact, giving like it says in our scripture for today ... cheerfully ... becomes possible.

When we give cheerfully as the Bible teaches, look at what happens in the last verse above. The example given is from farming - if we plant few seeds (live in a way that is not generous to others), our harvest will be small, if we plant many seeds (give generously and cheerfully), God does two things: He gives us more seeds to plant (more gifts to give away), and increases our own benefits to enjoy!

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

BIBLE STUDY

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 9

1. In 2 Corinthians 9:8, what does it say about how many of our needs God is able to take care of?
2. As God has promised to take care of "... all things at all times ..."

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. If God is able to take care of "... all things at all times ..." as it says in 2 Corinthians 9:8, are you living in a way that relies on that fact? Are you planning for the future, or are you worrying about the future?
2. Name one specific area of your life in which you are a reluctant giver. Ask God to help you today to be a cheerful giver in that area.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, thank you for promising to take care of "all things at all times" for me. I admit that I am a reluctant giver when it comes to _____ . Please show me a way today that I can be a cheerful giver in this area of my life, and please give me the strength to be generous. I want to follow your example in how to give to others."

TAKING CARE OF WHAT'S GOD'S

DON LONG - EXECUTIVE PASTOR

Our scripture reading today is from the Old Testament book of Haggai. Haggai was a Jewish prophet through whom God sent a message about rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. The verses we just read are from a time when the Jewish nation was carried away captive into Babylon, but has recently been allowed by the Babylonian king to return to Jerusalem once again. The people had rebuilt nice homes for themselves, but had paid little to no attention to rebuilding the temple.

The Bible teaches that all things come from God (John 3:27), God provides everything we need (1 Timothy 6:17-19), and yesterday we read that God is able to provide "... all things at all times ..." (2 Corinthians 9:8). With these facts in mind, why would God be concerned with the Jews who were returning to Jerusalem spending time building their own homes and not building the temple? Isn't God able to rebuild the temple? The answer is found in the way a different Jewish prophet learned about how God sees things. In 1 Samuel 16:7, God describes it as "... man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart". The people in the time of Haggai had shown their heart through spending all their money and energy on the rebuilding of their own homes, but did not work on the rebuilding of the temple. God is absolutely able to rebuild anything He wants at any time He wants, with, or without us. However, God wants our heart. He wants us to love and worship Him. He wants to be glorified (see verse 8 above) in our actions. God was using a lack of material blessings to draw the Jewish people back to Himself.

This has direct correlation with the world we live in today. God is more than able to bless His church with anything He wants. God built His church (Matthew 16:18) and is more than able to care for her needs. God wants this care for His church to come through us, His people. Are you giving to God's church? Are you spending your time, energy, money, and other resources to build His church? In doing so, you will give glory to God just like it says in verse 8 of our scripture today.

Obviously, taking care of the church is a key way we can take care of what God has given us, but don't forget the other applications: God has blessed us with everything we have (John 3:27) and we do well to take care of those blessings. This principle extends to your body, your possessions, and even your relationships. All things are from God's hand to yours and we should strive to be faithful stewards of the things God has entrusted us with in this life.

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 24

"Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord. You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? Declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors." Haggai 1:3-11

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BIBLE STUDY

READ THE FOLLOWING:

JOHN 3:27

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

1. Is there anything you have that isn't from God?
2. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 again. What does it teach about our own bodies?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Am I taking care of God's church with the things He has given me? How? Be specific and name the ways you are taking care of the church.
2. Am I taking care of my body and my other material things in a way that is pleasing to God? Am I being a good steward of the things God has given to me? Name one way you can improve your care of the things you have from God and make that change this week.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, thank you for each blessing you have given me. Please give me the faith and strength to care for Your church and provide the needs of the church. Please give me the faith and strength to care for my own body and the other possessions you have entrusted to me during this life. I want to be a good steward of the things you have loaned to me to use."

GIVING AS WORSHIP

DON LONG - EXECUTIVE PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 25

God desires our worship. Worship means “to show reverence or adoration, to honor, to glorify”. God desires us to bring these things of our own free will to Him as God. God wants us to love him. In the Old Testament law, God says in Deuteronomy 6:5, You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Jesus again calls this commandment the “most important commandment of all” in Mark 12:29-30, Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

There are many ways to show our love for God but it is all important for God to “have our heart”. To put it in the context of marriage, I can show love for my wife in many ways and do things to serve her, to care for her, to provide for her, but if I do them only out of a sense of duty and not from my heart, am I showing her true love? No! In the same way, God wants our heart to be one of love for Him that is evident in the things we do. You may say, but I just don’t feel that way - I don’t feel “in love” with the things of God. Yes, that many times is true. The good news is that our scripture today gives us the formula for getting our hearts to fall in love with God.

Money holds great sway over humankind. It has always been that way. We easily associate money with happiness, power, ability, freedom, peace, and joy. God knows this. He tells us what to do about it too: take a look at verse 21 above, For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. God tells us how to get our hearts to “fall” for something - invest our treasure toward that thing and our heart will follow.

When we serve God from a heart of love, our service is pleasing and worshipful to Him. Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart? Are you investing in eternal things? Commit today to spend more of your time, treasure, and talents in things that directly impact eternity.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” *Matthew 6:19-24*

25

BIBLE STUDY

READ MATTHEW 6

1. Worry about our needs being met is a common reason for people to not give to the church. What does this chapter teach us about worrying about those things?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Matthew 6:24 says, "You cannot serve God and money." Are there ways you are "serving" money? What do your spending habits say about where your heart is?
2. Which one of these is hardest for you to give away?
Time (your waking hours)

Treasure (money)

Talents (skills and abilities)

Ask God to give you an opportunity to worship Him by giving away just a little more of the hardest area this week.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, thank you for sacrificing yourself for me. You are my example of giving and I want to worship you with my whole heart. Please show me what to change in my life to align my heart with Yours."

GIVING AS DISCIPLINE

DON LONG - EXECUTIVE PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 26

There are two phrases I love and hate at the same time: "Practice makes perfect" and "Repetition is the mother of all learning". I love these because I know they are true. I hate these because they usually enter my conscious thought when I have a long road of practice and/or repetition ahead of me! These two phrases can be applied to giving as well. It is a discipline that has long-term benefits. In order to be disciplined in this or any other area in life, we must practice and repeat.

You see, I have a problem - it's a sin problem. I keep wanting to go back to my old ways and do the things that aren't good and right - the things that aren't of God. My heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). Thankfully, as a child of God, He gives me the strength to overcome sin on a daily basis and always provides a way for me to escape temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). Discipline is required in the Christian life in order to crucify myself daily (Luke 9:23) and follow Christ. One key part of my life that requires discipline is in giving.

As we learned yesterday and can see in the same scripture for today, our heart will follow our treasure, and I have found this is a primary area in my life that requires discipline because my heart keeps wanting to go a different way. Money and possessions are talked about in the Bible several hundred times. It's one of the most common topics in scripture. Why? Because God knows the draw money can have on the human heart. Throughout the Bible, God talks of the tithe in reference to giving money to God.

The word "tithe" originates from words meaning one-tenth and is shown in the Bible prior to (Genesis 14:18-20), and during the time of the Jewish Law (Leviticus 27:30). The tithe is a discipline that, when done correctly, will both be an act of worship toward God, and will assist in getting our heart to fall in love with Him. Tithing, or taking the first 10% of all my income, is an opportunity to submit to God. It tells God (and me) that everything I have is from Him and submitted to Him. God is worshiped when I submit myself to Him completely. This takes discipline as there are many times that I can think of other things to do with this money!

The discipline of the tithe is also the only instance in scripture where God tells His people to "test" Him. In Malachi 3:10, the Bible says, "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." I am not going to say that if you give 10% of your income to the church, you will become rich - God gives money to people as He sees fit. I will say that as you give a tithe of your income to God, He will bless you in ways that you weren't blessed before. Yes, this blessing can be in spiritual ways, but I can also tell you of countless people who began the discipline of the tithe and have been blessed both spiritually and materially.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." *Matthew 6:19-24*

Learning to tithe is not easy. It takes discipline and practice. It takes repetition. Consider the discipline of giving in your own life – are you a regular giver? Is it at least 10%? As I practice giving the first 10% of all my income to God, my heart follows my treasure, God is worshiped, and I receive GREAT blessings in it – you will too.

BIBLE STUDY

READ THE FOLLOWING:

MALACHI 3:8-12

1 CORINTHIANS 9:3-14

1. What do these passages say about taking care of God's house and of taking care of those who proclaim the gospel as their work?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Do you give to the church? Is it regular and based on how much God has given you (a percentage)? Is it the "first fruits" or is it something you wait and see if you have enough left over to give?
2. Learning to give involves re-training your heart to submit to God and to understand that 100% of your money and possessions come from Him. Assess your own perspective on this – do you believe that EVERYTHING you have comes from God? Do you have disciplines in your life that support these beliefs?

CLOSING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, thank you for all that You have given to me. Please teach me how to be a faithful steward of your gifts. Please shine a light on areas in my life that aren't submitted to You and give me the power to change those areas. I know that everything I have comes from You."

PERSONAL WORSHIP

JOEY WITHAM - WORSHIP PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 27

We all have had opportunities in our lives where, if we just saw something through and chased after it, we would see the results. It doesn't matter if we weren't the best or if we failed at times, there was still the result of finishing. When you ask marathon runners what they want to accomplish, their primary goal is simply to finish the race. I give them credit for just showing up.

In Romans 12:1, Paul challenges us saying, "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". Paul's letter tells us that God demands our action as well as our believing and thinking. Faith expresses itself in obedience.

One way we offer ourselves to God is through worship. Worship looks different throughout the day and in different seasons of our lives. There are seasons in my life when I pray more, but there are others when I meditate on God's Word more. I believe that if the position of my heart is one that adores God, seeks Him, and follows His ways, then worship is taking place.

In personal worship, we need to take a step of obedience and show up. We need to meet with God and, when we take time to meet with Him, He reveals himself to us.

So, what is personal worship? How do you go about this on your own? Here are some action steps that will help lead us in chasing after God and finishing the best race ever.

- Schedule a daily appointment. Make it a priority like you do for other important activities. Most of us go throughout our days just trying to keep up. Satan loves for us to be busy. Make meeting with God a daily priority. When you're alone with God, you draw closer to Him and get to know Him in a different way.
- Open your Bible and explore God's Word. Read God's Word and He will reveal Himself to you. Psalm 46:10 tells us to "Be still and know that I am God." This verse is not just about meditation. It is about the meditation of God's kingdom in the heart of faith. "Be still", "let go," "surrender." We surrender to know that God is in control. We "let go" to objectively know the saving power of God in our lives. We give up trusting in ourselves and our own designs to experience the glory of God's all-sufficiency.
- Invite God to transform (change). Romans 12:2 reads, "Do not conform to the patterns 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." The first step is recognizing the rightful authority and power of Christ and allowing God to shine His light into your life. Don't be afraid to be transparent and vulnerable before Him. God knows you better than you know yourself. Include times of prayer, confession and repentance, forgiveness, thanksgiving, praise and worship. Through these acts, God will begin

"Come near to God and He will come near to you." James 4:8

to renew your mind and change your heart.

- Develop a personal passion for God. Passionate spirituality is born out of a consistency. It is a daily walk that reflects the vibrancy and deepening of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Passionate spirituality is not something you "have." Rather, it's a path choose where you are continually learning from and growing closer to the Lord.

Life is a great race and God wants to run it with you. Schedule, Open, Invite and Develop. Remember these steps throughout your week and let God reveal himself to you.

BIBLE STUDY

READ JEREMIAH 29:13

1. What are other things that we seek after other than God?
2. What does it look like to search for God with all your heart?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Do you have a scheduled daily appointment to meet with God? If not, write down steps you can take to make space in your schedule.
2. What keeps you from opening your Bible and being still?
3. In what areas do you need to ask God to transform your heart?

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, help me have a personal passion for you. Help me to worship you because you are ..."

CORPORATE WORSHIP

JOEY WITHAM - WORSHIP PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 28

You may have heard this before, but you were created to worship. The truth is that we were all made to worship. We were created with a unique design in the image of a God who desires to meet with us as His people. One way He wants to meet with us is through corporate worship. Corporate worship is about our relationship with each other (corporate) and our relationship with God (worship). It is the act of gathering with fellow believers for a common purpose. People have a lot of reasons for "skipping church". They go out of town, the kids have an athletic tournament, or maybe they are just too tired.

One of the top reasons why people stop coming to church is "I love God, so why do I even need to go to church"? Being a part of a church is not meant to be a burden, but it is meant to be one of God's gifts to us. God loves the Church and He loves his people. Because we love Jesus, we will love what He loves and we will value what He values. He knows that we need personal worship and corporate worship. We equally need both.

Corporate worship has the unique ability to draw us near to God while also drawing us to each other.

Hebrews 10:24-25 warns us not to neglect meeting together. As the wise theologian Jack Johnson says, "We're always better when we're together". (Please note: Jack Johnson is not actually a theologian). In our culture, we take corporate worship for granted. The fact that we get to meet together every week is not something that is freely accepted around the world. Believers in other countries risk their lives in order to be able to meet with one another.

Why would they do this?

When the Body of Christ comes together, Jesus is present in a unique way. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them". In these moments our hearts are encouraged and Jesus is further glorified. We all have opinions on what songs should be sung or how the service should go, but our willingness to participate in worship should not be dependent on any other factors other than the fact that God is worthy of our praise. A church that is united under the focus of Jesus is a force to be reckoned with and it's a force that can change the world.

BIBLE STUDY

READ ACTS 2:41-47

1. What were the things that the early Church devoted themselves to?
2. What was God's response? (v.47)

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Is church a priority in your life? What are the things that prevent you from making church a priority?
2. What is one way that you can encourage your church this week?

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24-25

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, thank you for your Church. Help me to make Church a priority by ..."

PEOPLE CALLED TO LOVE

MATT SURBER - LEAD PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 29

When Jesus was on this earth, He called us to be people of love. When asked for the greatest commandment he responded, "Love the Lord your God with all you heart, soul and mind". This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love should be present in all relationships - with God, family, friend or foe. It's interesting that Jesus was asked the greatest command, yet He gave a second answer anyway. "Love your neighbor as yourself". Neighbor is an all inclusive term: Jesus wants us to love everybody!

But He didn't just say love your neighbor, He added as yourself. God is calling us here to a selfless, self-sacrificing love for everyone we know. Our love is to be filled with grace.

Let's be real. Some people are hard to love. Some people have legitimately done bad things to us. We have to understand that this type of love that Jesus calls us to only comes from us relying on Him to give us this strength. It comes out of an overflow of God's love for us.

So, love is a command and a choice. Remember that Christ Jesus loved us even when we didn't deserve it (Romans 5:6-8). For actions without love are meaningless but true love will always produce action (1 John 3:17-18).

BIBLE STUDY

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7

1. Meditate on verses 1-3. What is Paul saying about our actions? Do the motivations of our heart matter just as much as the actions themselves? Why or why not?
2. Now read verses 4-7. Look over the list of characteristics and examine your life. List those things that are personal strengths and also weaknesses.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Come up with a game plan from the above list. How can you love others this week in the way described in 1 Corinthians 13. How can you make it a normal part of who you are?

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." 1 Corinthians 13:4-5

29

CLOSING PRAYER

"God give me a pure heart so that I can be motivated to love others by Your love for me. Thank you God for loving me in spite of me!"

PEOPLE CALLED TO LOVE: THE CHURCH

MATT SURBER · LEAD PASTOR

Begin with 2 minutes of silence and stillness before God. Ask Him to help you remove the distractions of your day and focus your thoughts on the Lord.

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 30

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” *John 13:35*

All of us have had to wrestle with major questions, issues, problems and pain in our lives. And despite popular unbiblical teaching to the contrary, becoming a follower of Christ does not exempt us from the difficulties of life. But fortunately for us, when the pain and difficulties of life happen, Jesus assures us that we are not alone. He is with us (Matthew 28:20). He also wants us to be surrounded by people who like us, are sinners confessing our need for a Savior. This gathering of broken people is what we call “The Church”, the family of God.

The Church should be a safe place for those searching for answers in the midst of pain and confusion. It should be a powerful place where the Gospel intersects with “real life” and personal experiences come face to face with hope, love and redemption. As people of God, we should not just experience a change of mind or behavior, but a change of heart so that the Lord can prepare us to offer love and compassion to each other in His name. We as the Church should be known as people of love (John 13:35) who carry one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2) and mourn and rejoice with one another (Romans 12:15).

The early Christians and the Church did not see loving others as an option, but a command ... and the world was changed because of their love!

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read John 13:34-35 and John 15:12, and take note of what Jesus commands here.
2. Read 1 John 4:7-10 and reflect on the biblical definition of love.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How well do you think people in the church love one another?
2. How well do you obey Jesus command to love one another in the church?
3. Write down a few ways that you will show the love of Christ to people at Castle Hills Church.

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CLOSING PRAYER

“Dear God, since you have selflessly loved me, help me and Lead me to show love to one another through the Castle Hills Church.”

PEOPLE CALLED TO LOVE: SERVICE

MATT SURBER · LEAD PASTOR

The word “service” usually conjures up feelings of strenuous activity, long days, putting others’ needs before your own and no real me time. Many of us have been scarred by this perspective of serving and it has caused us to step back and conclude, “serving isn’t for me.”

But whether it feels like service or not, we all serve someone or something. The difference is that when service is driven by love it doesn’t have those negative connotations. For example, I love my family and this love comes easy regardless of the circumstances. Because I’ve been through so much with them – laughing and crying together, good and bad days – serving my family comes naturally. It doesn’t feel like the above view of service.

Psalm 82:3 says, “Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed”. When God transforms our hearts we begin to see the world the way he sees it and we begin to care for the same things he does. The deep compassion God has for the fatherless, the poor and the oppressed becomes a part of us. We uphold the cause of those in need. We pray for and help the addicted. We bring the good news to desolate places. These actions are woven into our fabric as God’s love transforms us into people of love. Suddenly service becomes a way of life rather than a task.

The church is called to be intentional in serving our respective communities. This can be done through food pantries, service projects, volunteering at church, missions trips, building relationships with those who may feel forgotten and in other ways you feel God is leading you.

When you enter into the realm of service, take it one step at a time. It may seem intimidating at first, but seek the hand of God in each task and watch him perform miracles in your midst.

BIBLE STUDY

READ ISAIAH 58:10

1. Am I someone who pours myself out for the hungry and the afflicted?
2. In what ways can I serve so that my light rises in the darkness around me?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Is there anyone that you love to serve, that serving them feels more like love and less like service? Why is that?
2. Are you making space in your life to love God so you can truly serve others?

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 31

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8

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CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, help me to create space to truly know you and love you. Consume me with your never-ending love and allow me to love and serve the world around me.”

PEOPLE CALLED TO LOVE: MISSIONAL LIVING

MATT SURBER · LEAD PASTOR

Over the last three days, we spoke about God's call for us to love people. Love is the defining attribute of God Himself and, therefore, of us as his followers. We should do everything out of love including how we show people that God loves them.

When I was growing up, I was taught about the importance of evangelism. Evangelism is the act of sharing the salvation of Jesus to people who don't know Him. In the church, we were given tools to do this and took courses in apologetics so we could explain how our faith is grounded in reason. Then we were sent out to tell people about Jesus. We went to the beach or to the mall.

We used a spiritual survey as an ice breaker, shared the gospel and, when the conversation ended, went on to the next person.

Occasionally, someone took a step of faith. Even fewer joined the church. To say that all this effort didn't bear much fruit would be an understatement. People don't trust strangers, especially strangers talking about God! Many would rather get financial advice from a homeless person than listen to a well-meaning random Christian tell them about Jesus.

I'm not knocking street evangelism. I think some are called to it and some have been saved by it. But I don't think that's what Jesus meant when He gave the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Our calling is higher than simply sharing our faith with strangers and walking away. The New Testament pattern requires sharing our lives with those estranged from God. Being missional means being truly invested in people's lives so that they see your faith as you live it, in word and deed. It's befriending someone. It's truly caring about someone's joy, pain, dreams, struggles and desires. Jesus befriended sinners. Paul went to foreign towns and lived among those far from God.

We must have real relationships with those who don't know Christ if we want to walk as people of love. We live in a hurting world: People need to experience the love and grace of Jesus and understand that God has a plan for them. They need to know what it really means to follow Jesus. But for that to happen, they need to know you! Not from a distance, but up close. They need to be a part of your life.

We must practice the spiritual disciplines of hospitality and evangelism. To open our lives, homes and time. Then as we share about salvation in Jesus, people will know that He exists in us!

BIBLE STUDY

READ ROMANS 10:11-15

1. Who is Paul expecting to share this news?
2. As you read the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, what do you think it means to "make disciples" and what responsibilities fall on us in this process?

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 32

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." *Romans 10:13*

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. What are the circles in your life that have nothing to do with church?
2. When people look at your life, do you think they see Jesus at work in you?
3. Write the names of three to five people you know who are far from God. Spend time praying for them by name every day.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Heavenly Father, give me a heart for those that are far from You. Help me to be more open so that I can share Your good news (The Gospel) through how I live. God, allow my home to be a place of hospitality, a place people can come and feel your love. Give me the courage to share the story you have written on my heart and the good news I have found in You. Amen."

LIVING IN GOD'S LOVE

MATT SURBER - LEAD PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 33

When considering the relationship between our works and God's action, we have to begin with this simple truth: God does not need anything from us. By his very nature God is completely self-sufficient. Paul says this in Acts 17:24-25, "The Lord God, since He is maker of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is he served by human hands as though He needed anything, but He Himself gives life and breath and all things to all people."

What Paul means is that we cannot give God anything that doesn't already belong to Him. We offer praise; He gave us our breath with which to praise Him. We give a tithe or offering; He gave us the capacity to earn the money (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). It is the same way with every conceivable resource that we have at our disposal (James 1:17). It's all His.

The logical conclusion is that God does not and cannot owe us. We have no leverage to twist His arm or bend his will to our desires. The spiritual disciplines cannot be used to manipulate God. They cannot be used to earn his love or approval, help us make more money, find a spouse or experience healing.

The real goal of the spiritual disciplines must always be to grow closer to God. Prayer, reading the Bible, worship, simplicity and the other disciplines are intended to be a means of deepening our relationship with God.

In my own life, I have seen that as I strive in these disciplines for the right reasons, God responds. James 4:8 tells us that when we seek after more of God, He draws closer to us. You may not feel it instantly, but it is happening.

Do you see the cycle? As we grow in our love for God, we seek a more significant relationship with Him. His desire compels us to pursue Him through the disciplines. God responds to our use of the disciplines by strengthening our relationship with Him so that we want to pursue Him even more. And on and on it goes. Richard Foster put it this way, "If we ever expect to grow [in our relationship with God], we must pay the price of a consciously chosen course of action" (*Celebration of Discipline*, 8).

If we do our part, God is faithful to do his.

BIBLE STUDY

READ JAMES 4:8

1. If God draws near to us when we draw near to Him, who limits the intimacy in our relationship? Us or him?
2. What are some ways in which a more intimate relationship with God would change the way you think, feel and act?

"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?" *Psalm 42:2*

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. What are some disciplines you may have under utilized in your spiritual walk? How might these disciplines help you to love God more?
2. Examine your heart: Is your primary motive for praying, reading the Bible and coming to church because you feel guilty if you don't, because you want God's blessings (health, wealth, happiness) or because you want to be closer to him?
3. Have you ever felt let down by God because you didn't receive something you wanted even though you lived "a good Christian life?" What does this say about how you view your relationship with God?

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, thank you for the love you've shown me in Christ. I ask that you help me become more grateful for the Gospel and to let that gratitude motivate me to pursue the spiritual disciplines. Lord, help me to always view these disciplines purely as a way to connect with you. I thank you and praise you, in Jesus' name. Amen."

THE GIFT OF SABBATH

MATT SURBER - LEAD PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 34

Begin your time with two minutes of silence and stillness before God. This will help clear your head of all the distractions of your day and center your thoughts on the Lord.

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.”

Deuteronomy 5:12

When it comes to keeping the Sabbath, there is much misunderstanding. For many, keeping the Sabbath means abiding by strict rules and regulations; do not work; do not drive; do not watch TV, etc. For others, this commandment is completely ignored and the “Sabbath” is impossible to distinguish from other days of the week. We allow busyness with work, sports and other activities to prevent us from living in the God-given rhythm of work and rest. In both cases we miss the point of the Sabbath and fail to receive it as the gift God intends.

Sabbath-keeping is not about abstaining from a list of prohibitions and it’s so much more than just taking a day off. As Dorothy Bass observes, “Keeping Sabbath is about being recalled to our knowledge of and gratitude for God’s activity in creating the world, giving liberty to captives, and overcoming the powers of death.” I especially love how Bass draws a connection between keeping Sabbath and expressing gratitude for our freedom. She reminds us that, “in Deuteronomy the commandment to ‘observe the Sabbath day’ is tied to the experience of a people newly released from bondage. Slaves cannot take a day off; free people can.”

Each time we unwrap the gift of the Sabbath we receive our emancipation from slavery. As we detach from our work, we are freed to see God’s work. In setting aside time to pray, we are freed to connect with God. As we move away from all we do for God, we become free to simply be with God.

When you keep the Sabbath, you release yourself to enjoy life and the love of God. And you experience the freedom of doing absolutely nothing, knowing that God still loves you.

BIBLE STUDY

READ LUKE 10:38-42

There is a famous story in the Bible about two women who Jesus knew. When Jesus visited their home, one was busy with preparations while the other sat at His feet.

1. Is the world you live in filled with more Mary’s or Martha’s?
2. In what ways do your daily activities distract you from being with God?
3. How often do you find yourself simply sitting at the feet of Jesus?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

We were created to live in the rhythm of work and rest, not in the non-stop, greed-filled, idolatrous workaholic nature of our fast-paced culture. In order to “keep Sabbath” you will have to swim against the cultural current and create an intentional plan. On Sunday, be intentional about experiencing Sabbath. Find time for quiet, for prayer, and for fun. No work allowed. Disconnect from social media. Be reminded of God’s presence. Experience the gift of resting in God and live one day in the freedom that He has given you.

CLOSING PRAYER

“Lord, help me set aside all that distracts me from You and reclaim the gift of being with you.”

34

LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

MISSI TOLOSA - KIDS MINISTER

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 35

I am a former marching band member and currently a band mom. It seems I inadvertently fall into step with whomever I am walking alongside and my kids are starting to do the same! Those years of having drilled into me that you must always stay in step are still bearing fruit many years later. It's funny how easily even my stride and steps can be influenced-but also humbling to realize how little it takes for someone else to change my behavior.

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Galatians 5:25

Today's verse tells us if we live by the Spirit, we will keep in step with the Spirit. I would love to tell you it's as easy for me to fall into step with the Holy Spirit as it is the person walking next to me but that's often not the case. Living by the Spirit takes surrender and surrender is an intentional choice. Each day, and even situation to situation, we must choose what will guide us—our own desires or the desires of the Spirit. When we are willing to surrender, and ask God to help us act, speak, respond, and live according to the Spirit, then He can grow in us the fruits of the Spirit. Over time, I've found that as I practice obedience to the Spirit in a particular area, choosing obedience in that area the next time becomes a bit easier.

We can try as hard as we can to live in a way that shows the fruits of the Spirit, but love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are supernatural characteristics. Often believers feel that they don't hear from the Holy Spirit. In reality, we don't recognize the prompting of the Spirit in our hearts and minds. When we feel annoyed yet show kindness to someone else, that's the Holy Spirit at work in us. As we intentionally seek to be aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in our life, we cultivate a greater sensitivity to the things of God and fall into step with His will. Ultimately that's what living in the Spirit is all about and leads us to living a transformed life that looks more like Jesus and less like the world.

BIBLE STUDY

READ GALATIANS 5:16-25

1. What is the relationship between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit?
2. What are the fruits of the Spirit?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Is there a fruit of the Spirit you can recognize that the Holy Spirit has given you strength in? Remember this isn't something you've done yourself but a gift of the Spirit's work!
2. In what area do you need to intentionally ask the Spirit to grow and strengthen you today? Maybe this is related to an area of your life that the desire of the flesh seems to be winning.

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, the desires of the flesh are strong but I thank you that your Spirit is stronger. Thank you for growing in me the spiritual fruit _____ and help me today to listen to the guiding of the Spirit that you would grow in me greater _____ ..."

35

LIVING AS A FAMILY

MISSI TOLOSA - KIDS MINISTER

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 36

Family is a tremendous part of our culture. As we approach the holiday season one quick scroll through social media shows photo upon photo of families. Parents and kids, couples and their dogs, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all smile for the camera. And of course, plenty of pictures of the food served. Details of these gatherings are documented on social media. Our families are all different but our families were all created for a purpose.

It is inside the family that the foundation of who each of us would become was fostered or maybe cracked. It is in family life that we learn how to process challenges and triumphs. Our families may look different but each can and should be a place that spiritual truth is taught. Sometimes, however, we allow schedules, school, work commitments, social activities, sports or hobbies to become the dominating factor in our homes. We can't live as a God honoring family when we are never together. We must wrestle with what is good to make sure we are making what is the best priority. In Deuteronomy, the Lord gives specific commands as to when the Israelite people should talk to their families about the Lord. Being together was the first step in impacting the next generation with the Truth of who the Lord is. You can't build a relationship with someone you never spend time with.

In the passage, you will read in Deuteronomy the Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness for forty years and were about to enter the Promised Land. In the passage of Joshua where today's verse is from, the Israelites had taken possession of the Promised Land. They were commanded by God to eliminate the native people who didn't follow the Lord. However, they had gotten complacent and were disobedient. When we look at the story of the Israelite people it's hard to imagine they would need to be reminded to tell their kids what the Lord had done. We may even think it's crazy that they would even think of serving anyone other than the Lord. But, before we are too hard on the Israelites, we should stop and consider how we often forget to make sharing the truth of who the Lord is and what He has done for us priority in our time with family.

As we consider what living as a family that honors the Lord looks like ask Him to help you to see times you can use intentionally to talk to your family about the Lord. Ask Him to help you to be an obedient servant to impact generations in your family with the Gospel. You can be a part of seeing God transform your family to be more like Jesus! Being ready to share starts with spending time with the Lord. Your story to tell is the story of what He is teaching you. Your family dynamic may be challenging or wonderful; either way God is honored in our families when we share what He has done.

BIBLE STUDY

READ DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

1. Who would be impacted by the obedience to the Lord's commandments?
2. What is the commandment that should be kept on the people's hearts? When should this be taught to their families?

"And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." *Joshua 24:15*

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. What are times your family is together?
2. How can you better use those times to impact your family spiritually and relationally? How do you think this could transform your family dynamic?

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, life is busy but that should not keep family from being together and sharing what You have done. Help me to more intentionally use our time to tell of you. Help me to commit to use our time _____, to talk to _____ about you ..."

If you have looked up the verse for today you may be wondering why a devotion on living simply is in a book that's not simple to find! Micah isn't a section of scripture most of us likely go to often. But I would dare to say many of us don't focus on living simply all that often either.

When we do think about living simply our stuff and money are probably what come to mind. Let's declutter, stop doing so much, having so much, maybe even downsize. Like Israel in today's passage, we immediately start making lists of things. Yet, as I look at this passage of scripture I see that the Lord is telling us through the prophet Micah that our heart attitude is the key.

Things aren't bad in and of themselves. They are just things. It's how we use them and allow them to control us that can make life complicated. Clothes and electronics are helpful, but if we max out credit cards to always have more or the best, we create problems for ourselves. The people of Israel were complicating worship of the Lord. The sacrifices they offered to bring aren't bad, but what the Lord desired was their heart. In the same way, decluttering, clearing our schedules, and having less do simplify life, but what brings lasting relief from stress is a focused heart on what the Lord desires from us. Can you imagine how that can transform your life?

If we are focused on how can we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God, our perspective changes. We are transformed and no longer feel obligated to add one more thing to our schedule just because it would make us look good. We don't have to buy all the things to keep up with the changing culture when our focus is on showing kindness instead of meeting comparisons. When we walk humbly and closely with our God we remove the clutter of the voices of the world and can hear clearly God directing our decisions and steps. When we walk closely with the Lord life won't always be easy. In fact, we are guaranteed sometimes it will be hard, but it doesn't have to be overly complicated.

I'm writing this in a season where life is challenging. Yet, somehow when things are hard it forces us to simplify. The reality that there isn't enough Missi to be everywhere, do everything or have it all is abundantly clear. But the Lord gives peace when we do exactly what He has called us to and are okay with that being enough. Today, focus your heart on how you can trust God to guide you to see what His best is for your life and how you can simplify by removing the other things that keep you from doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God.

BIBLE STUDY

READ MICAH 6:1-8

1. What kinds of things does the author list the people saw as possible things to bring before the Lord? Were these things the Lord asked or things they decided on their own?
2. What does the passage say the Lord requires?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How does your current life style line up with doing justice? Loving kindness? Walking humbly with your God?
2. When we consider simplifying life to line up with what God requires it can seem overwhelming. What is one thing you can start putting into practice today to take steps toward a simpler life?

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8

CLOSING PRAYER

"God, there are so many things that pull at my life. They aren't bad or destructive but life gets so complicated. God help me to see your plan for my life and not my own. Help me to put into practice today _____ as I strive to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you ..."

ACCOUNTABLE TO WHOM

DAVE GEORGE - SENIOR ADULT PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 38

We hear a lot today about accountability – or, more correctly, the lack thereof. Whether it is a politician not taking responsibility for an election loss or an individual not wanting to be held accountable for a decision he made if things went wrong. I am reminded of Han Solo in one of the Star Wars movies when things were not going well and he said repeatedly, “It’s not my fault!” But we are accountable for our actions, and even every word that we speak before Almighty God (Matthew 12:36). The Bible says that we are deserving of death because of our rebellion, our sin, against God (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Romans. 3:23). An accounting has to be made for our sin before a holy God; we cannot escape it. So, how does the scripture above come into play?

First of all, God does not simply decide to not “take into account” our sin. His perfect justice would be violated and that cannot happen. The quote above from Romans is actually itself a quote from Psalm 32:2. This was written by King David after he had been confronted by Nathan over his adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah, in a vain attempt to cover it up. David was forgiven by God (vs. 5), but there were consequences of his sin nonetheless. There would be strife in his household continually (2 Samuel. 12:10-12) and the child conceived in adultery would die (2 Samuel 12:14).

Secondly, the forgiveness that David received, and indeed that all the Old Testament saints received, was looking forward to the Messiah who would ultimately pay the price for all the world’s sin with His own death in place of ours, a death offered as a substitutionary gift to any and all who would receive it (John. 3:16). Accountability, therefore, was made for all sin by Jesus’ death on the cross and made available to us as a result.

So, what about accountability today? Whether we admit it or not, God knows when we are responsible for something, up to and including each and every sin we commit. If you are playing some kind of game with yourself – and with God – about being accountable to your boss, your neighbor, your wife, your children, etc., you will lose. God expects us to hold ourselves accountable for our actions – before others and Himself. The really good news is that we CAN be forgiven by God by admitting our failure to Him and seeking His forgiveness through the shed blood of His Son, Jesus (1 John. 1:9). And we can seek forgiveness of others when we go to them and admit our failure to them and ask for their forgiveness, being willing to make restitution when appropriate. Then our conscience can be clean before God, whether the individuals actually forgive us or not.

Yes, we are accountable for our actions – before others, and ultimately, before God. But He has made a way for us to be forgiven and start over again – and again, and again, and again, etc. And that is really good news!

BIBLE STUDY

READ ROMANS 4.

1. How was Abraham justified before God?
2. How does circumcision relate to Abraham being justified before God?

“Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”

Romans 4:8

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How does the Law affect your relationship with God?
2. Are you willing to step out on faith like Abraham did? Why or why not?

CLOSING PRAYER

“Father, I want to trust in you as Abraham did, willing to do whatever You say. Show me how I can trust You more each day.”

PRIORITIZING GOD'S WAY

DAVE GEORGE - SENIOR ADULT PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 39

Today's verse is pretty clear: put God first in your life - period. So, let's say you have determined to do that. Now, what about the rest of the things in your life? How do you prioritize them? I mean, you can still have a lot of people and things tugging at you from time to time. How are you to order them in your life? Let's take a look at that, shall we?

First of all, I do not want to pass over lightly putting God first in your life. It is absolutely essential to ordering the rest of your priorities. Psalm 37:4 says that if you delight yourself in the Lord, then He will give you the desires of your heart. (Okay, so I added the "if" and the "then," but they are definitely implied!) When you put God first, He then begins to change your heart, to conform it with His purposes for your life. In other words, He changes your desires from self-centered to God-centered and then He grants those desires. And that helps a lot with what is the next important thing in your life.

Pastor Matt stressed in a recent sermon about how God is to be our number one priority and, if we are married, our spouse is to be our number two. That will sometimes mean making sacrifices in our personal goals in order to put our spouse in his/her proper place in our lives. But what comes next, or what if we are single? Our priorities beyond one and two can shift from time to time, depending upon God's call in our life. Children, job, church, other family members, etc., can all come into play at some point or other. And there is no pat answer for prioritizing them like there is for number one and two. God's Word does give us instruction on certain aspects of life, and we can be certain that He will never contradict Himself, so it is important for us to know what He has already instructed by faithfully studying His Word. But what about the gray areas that are not clearly spelled out in the Bible? That is where putting God first comes into play once again. He and He alone can show us how to ration our time and other resources the way He wants us to. He and He alone can also give us peace about that ordering of our priorities, even when others are pressuring us to do something different.

I am reminded of a quote from one of my heroes, Davey Crockett: "Be sure you're right, and then go ahead." Sometimes that's what it takes when the world is trying to pull you in a different direction from what God has shown you. I have found that when I am certain about what God wants me to do, and I determine to do it, God gives me a peace about it in spite of the turmoil that may be surrounding me because of that decision. This is what Jesus meant when He said that He has come to give us peace in the midst of the conflicts we will have in this world (John 14:27).

God is not trying to keep His priorities for us a secret. He wants us to know His direction for us; it is our responsibility to listen and obey. Only then will our priorities be God's priorities for our lives. And it doesn't get any better than that!

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." *Matthew 6:33*

BIBLE STUDY

READ JOHN 17

This is Jesus' prayer for us that He prayed just before being arrested and crucified.

1. What seems to stand out to you as the main thrust of this prayer?
2. What seems to be the most important thing that Jesus asks His Father for on behalf of His followers?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Is there anything that you find particularly comforting about this prayer?
2. Is there anything that you find particularly disturbing about this prayer?

CLOSING PRAYER

"Father, thank you that Jesus intercedes for me today, just as He did when He was on the earth. Help me to hear your voice so that I may prioritize my life as You would have me to, just as Jesus prayed for me to do in John 17."

A DISCIPLINED LIFESTYLE

MATT SURBER · LEAD PASTOR

TRANSFORMED: / DAY 40

I thoroughly enjoy running and working out. I love the accountability from my trainer and the effort that goes into it each time. I love when I reach a goal. It's the feeling of finishing something that I set my mind to accomplish. I will spend a few minutes reflecting on the hours of training that got me to this point. And I actually feel a little melancholy because after all the time invested, the moment is now over.

But, I don't stay in this place for too long because I know there's more to come. I still have much more to do—new goals and many more hours of training.

If I stop running and working out, I would quickly become lazy. I would gain weight. I would get sluggish. My cholesterol would increase. My energy would decrease. No, I must keep going.

Friends, take a moment to savor what you have done over the last 40 days. Reflect on what you have learned. Be proud of your consistency, even if you took a few days off here and there. But, don't stop now! The purpose of these 40 days was to give you the tools to live your faith on your own. To develop healthy patterns and habits. I pray that God has birthed a new expectation in your hearts and a new idea of what it means to have a relationship with God. And I hope that now you can't imagine life without it.

On Day 1, I wrote about the need to get a clear view of God and His picture for your life. Now that you see him better, now that He is coming into focus, why revert to a spiritual blur? The clearer God becomes in your life, the more your life will make sense. As we bring God into focus, we see everything with a new clarity—our families, our careers, our relationships. As our view of God becomes more focused, so do our lives. Remember, God's desire is to transform your life by His Spirit working in you and through you. You now have the tools to see this come to fruition!

Don't stop now! Keep going!

BIBLE STUDY

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

1. What does it look like for you to train for this spiritual race?
2. What is the prize that Paul is talking about?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Plan NOW what you will do tomorrow. You may schedule a media fast or take time to look at the Bible reading plan we have included. But whatever you choose, make sure you do it tomorrow. Carry on the momentum!

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” 1 Corinthians 9:24

CLOSING PRAYER

“God, help me to continue pursuing you. Help me to run in such a way as to get the prize. God, I love you. Thank you for all the various avenues I have to get to know you and grow in you. God, I give my life to you. Direct my path. I love you. Amen.”

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100 BIBLE STORYLINE PASSAGES

APPENDIX SHARED FROM GROWING UP BY ROBBY GALLATY

TRANSFORMED: / RESOURCE

Creation - *Genesis 1:1-2:25*

The Fall - *Genesis 3:1-24*

The Flood - *Genesis 6:5-7:24*

God's Covenant with Noah -
Genesis 8:1-9:17

Tower of Babel - *Genesis 11:1-9*

The Call of Abram - *Genesis 12:1-20*

God's Covenant with Abram -
Genesis 15:1-21

Isaac's Birth and "Sacrifice" -
Genesis 21:1-22:19

Jacob and Esau Compete -
Genesis 27:1-28:22

Jacob and Esau Reconcile -
Genesis 32:1-33:20

Joseph Sold Into Slavery -
Genesis 37:1-36

Prison and Promotion -
Genesis 39:1-41:57

Ten Brothers Go to Egypt -
Genesis 42:1-38

The Brothers Return -
Genesis 43:1-44:34

Joseph Reveals His Identity -
Genesis 45:1-46:7

The Birth of Moses -
Exodus 1:1-2:25

The Burning Bush -
Exodus 3:1-4:17

The Ten Plagues -
Exodus 6:28 - 11:10

The Passover and the Exodus -
Exodus 12:1-42

Crossing the Red Sea -
Exodus 13:17-14:31

The Ten Commandments -
Exodus 19:1-20:21

The Golden Calf -
Exodus 32:1-34:35

Joshua Succeeds Moses -
Joshua 1:1-18

Crossing the Jordan -
Joshua 3:1-4:24

The Fall of Jericho -
Joshua 5:13-6:27

Israel's Disobedience -
Judges 2:6-3:6

Deborah Leads Israel -
Judges 4:1-5:31

Gideon Defeats the Midianites -
Judges 6:1-7:25

Samson Defeats the Philistines -
Judges 13:1-16:31

The Story of Ruth - *Ruth 1:1-4:22*

Samuel Listens to God -
1 Samuel 1:1-3:21

King Saul - *1 Samuel 8:1-10:27*

David and Goliath -
1 Samuel 16:1-18:16

David and Saul -
1 Samuel 23:7-24:22

King David - *2 Samuel 5:1-7:29*

David and Bathsheba -
2 Samuel 11:1-12:25

King Solomon - *1 Kings 2:1-3:28*

Solomon's Temple - *1 Kings 8:1-9:9*

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal -
1 Kings 16:29-19:18

The Fall of Jerusalem -
2 Kings 25:1-30

The Lord Is My Shepherd -
Psalms 23:1-6

Have Mercy on Me -
Psalms 51:1-19

Praise the Lord - *Psalms 103:1-22*

Godly Wisdom - *Proverbs 1:1-4:27*

The Proverbs of Solomon -
Proverbs 16:1-18:24

The Suffering Servant -
Isaiah 51:1-53:12

Jeremiah's Call and Message -
Jeremiah 1:1-3:5

Daniel in the Lion's Den -
Daniel 6:1-28

The Story of Jonah -
Jonah 1:1-4:11

The Day of Judgment -
Malachi 1:1-4:6

The Word Became Flesh -
John 1:1-18

Gabriel's Message - *Luke 1:1-80*

The Birth of Jesus - *Luke 2:1-40*

John the Baptist - *Luke 3:1-20*

Baptism and Temptation -
Matthew 3:13-4:17

Sermon on the Mount, Part 1 -
Matthew 5:1-64

Sermon on the Mount, Part 2 -
Matthew 6:5-7:29

The Kingdom of Heaven -
Matthew 13:1-58

The Good Samaritan -
Luke 10:25-37

Lost and Found - *Luke 15:1-32*

Feeding the Five Thousand -
Luke 9:1-36

Walking on Water -
Matthew 14:22-36

Healing a Blind Man - *John 9:1-41*

Healing a Demon-Possessed Man -
Mark 5:1-20

Raising Lazarus from the Dead -
John 11:1-57

The Last Supper - *Luke 22:1-46*

Arrest and Trial - *John 18:1-40*

The Crucifixion - *John 19:1-42*

The Resurrection - *John 20:1-21:25*

The Ascension - *Acts 1:11*

The Day of Pentecost - *Acts 2:1-47*

Growth and Persecution -
Acts 3:1-4:37

The First Martyr - *Acts 6:8-8:8*

Sharing the Word - *Acts 8:26-40*

Good News for All - *Acts 10:1-11:18*

The Road to Damascus - *Acts 9:1-31*

The First Missionary Journey -
Acts 13:1-14:28

The Council at Jerusalem -
Acts 15:1-41

More Missionary Journeys -
Acts 16:1-20:38

The Trip to Rome -
Acts 25:1-28:31

More than Conquerors -
Romans 8:1-39

The Fruit of the Spirit -
Galatians 5:16-6:10

The Armor of God -
Ephesians 6:10-20

Rejoice in the Lord -
Philippians 4:2-9

The Supremacy of Christ -
Colossians 1:1-23

Elders and Deacons -
1 Timothy 3:1-16

The Love of Money -
1 Timothy 6:3-21

Good Soldiers of Christ -
2 Timothy 1:26

All Scripture is God-breathed -
2 Timothy 3:10-4:8

The Coming of the Lord -
1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

The Most Excellent Way -
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

A New Creation in Christ -
2 Corinthians 4:1-6:2

A Living Hope - *1 Peter 1:1-2:12*

Faith and Works - *James 1:1-2:26*

Love One Another -
1 John 3:11-4:21

A Voice and A Vision -
Revelation 1:1-20

Messages to the Churches -
Revelation 2:1-3:22

The Throne of Heaven -
Revelation 4:1-7:17

Hallelujah - *Revelation 19:1-20:15*

The New Jerusalem -
Revelation 21:1-22:21



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