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Saf

PRAYER IS OUR SAUCE



2022

**PRAYER
JOURNAL**

22



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“Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure.”

- D.L. Moody

“In the morning, prayer is the key that opens to us the treasures of God’s mercies and blessings; in the evening, it is the key that shuts us up under His protection and safeguard.”

- Billy Graham

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We please God most, not by frantically trying to make ourselves good, but by throwing ourselves into His arms.

- A.W. Tozer

No man is greater than his prayer life.

- Leonard Ravenhill

LETTER FROM THE STAFF

Dear SAF Family,

One of our deepest desires as a church is that we would be people who are empowered by the Holy Spirit, centered on the Gospel, and who are sent on mission. That we would be the church. We also realize that “being the church” cannot be a reality for us unless we become people who realize their dependence on God, and therefore actively and regularly seek Him with the totality of our lives. This is why each year, at the beginning of the year, we partner together as a church family to pray and fast.

And while we know there is a clear expectation in the Scriptures to practice these things, what we also must understand is that becoming a person who seeks God through prayer and fasting requires more than just understanding that we must seek Him in these ways. That in order for us to follow Him, particularly through prayer and fasting, we need to desire and look forward to meeting God through prayer and fasting as well.

We are convinced more than ever that most people don't enjoy being with the Lord because they have never been taught how. That's where we believe this season and journal can help. This booklet was designed to help bring routine, structure, and, we hope, joy into your time with God. And we're certain that if you commit yourself to these next 21 days with us, that you will be refreshed, restored, and reminded of the goodness of our God, whether this is your first time praying and fasting regularly, or if you have been a person who has been devoted to these disciplines your whole life.

As you open up this journal, you will find some strategies and techniques for how to approach biblical fasting and becoming a person of prayer. Along with that, you will see daily prayer topics, accompanying Scripture, a guided prayer, and some suggested reflection prompts for each of the next 21 days. We also want to suggest that you find someone to partner with you during this season. We've found that oftentimes we need that reminder, that push, that encouragement to get us through.

So find support, and be a support to someone. Finally, know that as a staff, we are praying with you and for you. Mostly, that you will experience the beauty of daily conversation with the Lord, that you will find nourishment from your time with Him, and you will experience the goodness of His presence. Pray first, pray often, pray with boldness, and prayer with great faith! And let's see what God will do! Praying faith-filled prayers over you!

With Love,
The SAF Staff

FUNDAMENTALS OF PRAYER

CREATING A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER

Prayer is most effective when it isn't something we do every now and then, but when it's a lifestyle we cultivate. To understand how to have a lifestyle of prayer, we can look at the example Jesus gave during His life on earth.

MARK 1:35

“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.”

HAVE A CERTAIN TIME

Jesus got up early in the morning to spend time with His Heavenly Father. Make a daily appointment with God — whether it's first thing in the morning, at lunch, or in the evening — and faithfully keep it.

HAVE A CERTAIN PLACE

Jesus had a specific place He went to pray. Having a designated place to pray helps us remove distractions and frees us to worship and pray out loud.

HAVE A CERTAIN PLAN

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He gave them a prayer outline. We recommend what we like to call the Thirsty 30. Essentially, it is 10 minutes of worship, 10 minutes of prayer, and 10 minutes of reading your Bible everyday as a starting point to practicing prayer. As we pray every day, our plans for our prayer time can vary, but it helps when we have a plan for connecting regularly with God.

SAMPLE PRAYER TOPICS

We know that we should pray about the things that are important to our lives but many times don't know how to go about praying for those things.

Below are some common topics and sample prayers to help you get started.

FINANCES

Lord, I come before you with thanksgiving in my heart and your praises on my lips. I know that you are my shepherd and I shall not want for anything, (Psalm 23:1) that includes any financial needs. I need wisdom when it comes to handling my money. I pray Lord God, that You would give me a financial strategy to live debt free and financially owe no man or woman anything, except to love them (Romans 13:8). Help me to correct any financial mistakes that I have made. I repent for being a careless steward of Your finances and give

control of the financial area of my life back to You. Help me to show You that I can be trusted with more finances and that I will use them to bring glory and honor to You. I thank You for Your wisdom and ask for finances not just to meet my own physical needs, but the needs of others as well. I ask you for opportunities to sow into other people's lives and to sow what I have. Although it may only be a little bit at first I know that it will continue to grow as you multiply my harvest and then, in turn, resow what I have harvested. Lord, I know that you are the sole provider of all I have, but I also understand that I am the steward of those resources and it is my responsibility to manage what you have given me to the best of my ability. I promise to be diligent and not be lazy with what you have given me because that is how wealth is built (Proverbs 10:4). Help me to keep my eyes on You, and help me to focus more on our relationship than anything else. In the mighty name of Jesus, I pray and declare these things, Amen.

MARRIAGE

Father, thank you for the spouse you have blessed me with. Help me to be forgiving and tolerant towards my husband/wife. Teach me to love and serve my spouse unconditionally. May my spouse and I fulfill your plan for our lives. Lord help us to seek you first before any other thing and teach us to depend on your power through every difficult moment we face together. Lord help us not to break each other down by saying hurtful things to one another. Rather help us to always build each other up. I pray that my spouse and I would not yield to any temptation that may come our way. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the power of the evil one. We thank you for your peace, your love, your guidance and unity in our marriage and ask that you would keep and bless us in Jesus name! Amen!

FAMILY

Father, thank you for my family. I know that you placed them around me and me around them so that we would protect and love each other, and so we could be a picture of what it is like to be in your family to the world. I ask that you would give me the ability to always be humble and kind when I am with them (Ephesians 4:2) I place my family in your hands and I know that nothing can take them from you (John 10:29). Thank you again, Father, for the joy they provide in my life and I declare that every evil thing that would come against them is right now instantly powerless and must leave. I declare as a member of their family that they are covered by the protection of the Lord. In the mighty name of Jesus, I pray and declare these things. Amen.

GUIDANCE

Father God, I come before to ask for your wisdom and guidance in my life. My desire is for you to make your will for my life clear and to lead me in your truth and to teach me to hear your voice no matter what else is going on (Psalm 24:4-5). I know you gave us your word so we would know where to go and if I ask for wisdom you will give it to me immediately and without limit (James 1:5-6, Psalm 119:105). So, Lord, this is my prayer, that you would teach me the way I should

go and give me the grace to use this guidance so I never stray far from you (Psalm 32:8-9). Thank you for your guidance and highlighting the best direction for me. In the mighty name of Jesus, I pray and declare these things, Amen.

PRAYING FOR A LOVED ONE WHO DOESN'T KNOW CHRIST

Father, I come before You in prayer and in faith, believing. Your Word says You desire all men to be saved and come into the knowledge of the truth, so I bring before You this day. I break the power of Satan from his assignments and activities in _____'s life in the Name of Jesus. I ask that You send people to share the good news of the gospel in such a way that he/she will listen and understand it. As the truth is ministered, I believe _____ will open his/her eyes to the gospel, come out of the snare of the devil and make Jesus Lord. Father, I ask that You fill _____ with the knowledge of Your will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. As I intercede in his/her behalf, I believe that the power of the Holy Spirit is activated, and from this moment on, I will praise and thank You for _____'s salvation. I am confident that You are alert and active, watching over Your Word to perform it. It will not return to You void. It will accomplish that which You sent it to do. Therefore, my confession of faith is: 'God has begun a good work in _____'s life and He will perform it and bring it to full completion until the day of Jesus Christ, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

TRANSFORMATION (PERSONAL CHANGE)

Father God, I know that I need to change. Reveal to me my inner self. Show me the root of my problems. I know that if you have my heart, you can change my habits so I ask you to help me open up every part of my heart to you. Free me, heal me and cleanse me from every sin, hurt and pain. Lord I confess today that I will not be conformed, pressured and bullied into following the patterns of this world's way of seeing, thinking and doing things. I will be transformed by the renewing of my mind! Thank you that I am seeing, thinking, believing and behaving according to your perfect will and purpose for my life! Give me strength to take every thought captive and to scrutinize every idea that comes across my mind! I will cast down and throw away any thought that does not line up with the principles and concepts that you have outlined in your Word! I know that transformation will not happen overnight. Give me the patience and strength to wait upon You, as You continue this process within me over time. Lord I thank you that progression, not perfection, is your desire for me so today and everyday, I choose to move forward and become like you, in Jesus name, Amen.

PRAYERS TO START YOUR DAY

The Word of God is one of the most valuable tools we have to build a dynamic daily prayer life. It brings power, truth, and encouragement to our prayer time.

Here are a few examples of how you can pray using scriptures:

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 6:33

“But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

PRAYER:

“Your Word tells me that if I seek first Your Kingdom and Your righteousness, You will lead me to a life of blessing, purpose, and freedom. I am Yours today, God, and I give this day to You. Help me to focus on Your priorities first, sharing Your love and making Your Name known. I know that by focusing on You rather than myself, I will receive joy and peace.”

SCRIPTURE: 2 TIMOTHY 1:7

“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”

PRAYER:

“Father, I know You have not given me a spirit of fear or timidity, but one of power, love, and self-discipline. When my mind feels out of control, I pray that You will renew my spirit and let power, love, and self-discipline fill me. Help me to look more like You every day. I declare that anything that is not of You has to leave me in Jesus’ mighty Name. I proclaim that I do not have a spirit of fear, but I have a sound and healthy mind.”

SCRIPTURE: JAMES 4:8

“Come near to God and He will come near to you.”

PRAYER:

“Heavenly Father, You have promised that if I draw near to You, You will draw near to me. I need more of Your presence today, and I am drawing near to You through prayer, worship, and reading Your Word. I open my heart to You and ask You to be near to me and change me to be more like You.”

SCRIPTURE: JAMES 4:10

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

PRAYER:

“God, You have promised that if I humble myself before You, You will lift me up. I recognize today that I cannot succeed on my own, and I need You in every moment. I humble myself before You, and I ask You to work in and through me today. My time, efforts, thoughts, and words are Yours today (name specific parts of your day and give them to God). Use me for Your purposes, Lord. I trust that You will be with me and lift me up.”

PERSONAL PRAYER FOCUS

God has put us on the earth at this specific time for a reason. He says in Acts 17:26 that He determined when and where we would live. Knowing this, we can look at those around us at this specific time in history, and take personal responsibility to pray.

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Pray for those in authority and those under your authority. Pray for those in your family and your circle of influence [anyone you're connected to]. You may even want to write down the names of specific people and pray for them in this season.

- Your Government
- Your Family
- Your Friends
- Your Boss // Co-Workers
- Your Church Leaders
- Your Church Family
- Those who don't know Christ // The Marginalized [Our City, Nation, and World]

GUIDE TO FASTING

The secret sauce of SAF is prayer and fasting and it is one of the most powerful weapons God has given us for our daily lives! We believe that prayer and fasting is one of the major keys to living successfully as a believer. As we pray and fast for the will of God to be done, we can expect to reap the benefits and promises that our obedience to His word produces. Such as doors opening, miraculous provision, favor, healing and supernatural breakthrough.

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is intentionally abstaining from food (not fluids) for spiritual purposes; it is humbling your soul (Psalm 35:13, Matthew 23:12). Fasting brings you into a deeper, more intimate and powerful relationship with the Lord.

Fasting is an act of humility before God to seek His divine intervention in the events of our physical world, it brings revelation by the Holy Spirit of our true spiritual condition, leading to brokenness, repentance, and change, and allows the Holy Spirit to work in a powerful way. Fasting transforms prayer into a richer, more personal experience and draws you closer to God. (James 4:8)

PURPOSE FOR FASTING

1. TO SEEK ANSWERS FROM GOD

Ezra 8:21 & 23 NLT

“21 And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. 23 So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer”

2. TO PRAY ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

Ezekiel 22:30 NLT

“30 I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn't have to destroy the land, but I found no one.”

3. TO BREAKTHROUGH IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Isaiah 58:6-8 NLT

“6 No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. 7 Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. 8 “Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the lord will protect you from behind.”

HOW TO FAST

1. DISCREETLY (Matthew 6:17-18 NLT)

“17 But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. 18 Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.”

2. WITH FAITH (Hebrews 11:6 NLT)

“6 And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.”

TYPES OF FASTS

COMPLETE FAST

In this type of fast, you drink only liquids, typically water with light juices as an option.

SELECTIVE FAST

This type of fast involves removing certain elements from your diet. One example of a selective fast is the Daniel Fast, during which you remove meat, sweets, and bread from your diet and consume water and juice for fluids and fruits and vegetables for food.

PARTIAL FAST

This fast is sometimes called the “Jewish Fast” and involves abstaining from eating any type of food in the morning and afternoon. This can either correlate to specific times of the day, such as 6:00 am to 3:00 pm, or from sunup to sundown.

SOUL FAST

This fast is a great option if you do not have much experience fasting food, have health issues that prevent you from fasting food, or if you wish to refocus certain areas of your life that are out of balance. For example, you might choose to stop using social media or watching television for the duration of the fast and then carefully bring that element back into your life in healthy doses at the conclusion of the fast.

**If you have chosen to fast food during this season, know that the first two or three days are usually the hardest. As you continue fasting, you are likely to experience a sense of well-being both physically and spiritually. However, should you feel hunger pains, increase your liquid intake. For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be. When your designated time for fasting is finished, it is important to begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Suddenly reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract could have negative consequences. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day. If you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will result in continued good health.*

Scripture References Matthew 6:16-18 Matthew 9:14-15 Luke 18:9-14 Acts 27:33-37 Nehemiah 9:1-3

SOME GUIDANCE AND ENCOURAGEMENT AS YOU FAST

How you begin and conduct your fast will largely determine your success. As with all spiritual disciplines, having a goal and a plan is the best way forward to making your time with the Lord more meaningful and spiritually rewarding.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF YOUR FAST?

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal? For guidance? For

healing? For the resolution of problems? For special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify what He wants you to take away from this time. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

MAKE A COMMITMENT TO YOUR FAST

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast [Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15]. For Him, it was a matter of when, not if, believers would fast. Before you fast, decide the following: how long; what type; how much time per day you will devote to prayer and the Word. Making these commitments ahead of time, write them down and share them with someone you trust. This helps you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

PREPARE YOURSELF SPIRITUALLY

The foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Ask God to help reveal your sins and the ways you fall short of His holiness.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit reminds you of and accept God's forgiveness [1 John 1:9].
- Seek forgiveness from anyone you have offended and forgive anyone who has hurt you [Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4].
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14-15.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master and refuse to obey your worldly nature [Romans 12:1-2].
- Meditate on the attributes of God — His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, grace, compassion, and other qualities [Psalm 48:9-10; 103:1-8, 11-13].
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart [Hebrews 11:6].
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit [Galatians 5:16-17].

A FINAL WORD

Fasting is about sincerely humbling yourself before the Lord. It provides time to repent, pray, seek God's face and meditate on His Word. As you do this, you will experience a heightened awareness of His presence [John 14:21].

In this time together, we believe that the Lord will give you fresh spiritual insights, that your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened, that you will feel mentally, spiritually and physically refreshed. But not only that, we are believing by faith that you will see answers to your prayers and that God will honor your faithfulness.

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PRAYER IS OUR SAUCE



YOUR DAILY PRAYER AND FASTING JOURNEY
BEGINS HERE

*MAY YOUR LIFE BE RADICALLY
TRANSFORMED FROM THIS DAY ON.*

*SHARE YOUR TESTIMONY OF WHAT GOD DOES IN YOUR LIFE
DURING THESE 21 DAYS!*

WWW.SANANGELOFIRST.ORG/PRAYER-REQUEST

DAY 1: THE BREAD OF LIFE

“Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” John 6:32 - 35

DEVOTIONAL

Christmas often entails one of the biggest feasts of the year, and yet the next morning we find ourselves hungry and thirsty and needing more. In John 6, Jesus meets the physical hunger of the crowds by performing the miracle of breaking the five loaves of bread and two fish until everyone had eaten their fill [and more!]. The next day, after realizing what they had experienced, they searched until they found Jesus. Although the crowds were wanting daily provision, Jesus reveals Himself as the bread of life which nourishes an eternal life and never leaves us unsatisfied. Paradoxically, Jesus teaches His followers to pray and ask the Father for “our daily bread.” There is a dependency in this prayer, that we must ask our Father for this gift. There is humility in this prayer, an acknowledgement of our need for daily bread. There is a call to continue to hunger and be satisfied in Jesus.

PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven, we praise your name and seek your kingdom. Humbly we ask for more of Jesus, today and everyday. He is our daily bread, and in Him we live and move and have our being. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing. May Jesus be our complete satisfaction and yet always leave us hungering for more of Him. As you provide our daily bread, may we bless it and share your bread with others, meeting our neighbors’ spiritual and physical needs as you build your Kingdom through our shared meal.

REFLECTION

1. What are you feasting on daily?

2. What aspects of your life reveal the belief that Jesus is enough?

DAY 2: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

DEVOTIONAL

Darkness exists until there is light. When God created the heavens and the earth He started with Light. In our own lives we live in darkness until we experience the light of life. After the encounter with the woman caught in adultery, Jesus reveals Himself to be the “light of the world”. This statement is not addressed to the woman, but rather to “them”. He is telling those that wanted to condemn her that He is the light, and because He is light, all people that follow Him will be redeemed from darkness and brought into light. We can live without the darkness of condemnation that sin brings because of the purifying, redeeming, life-giving light that Jesus is. In the beginning when the earth was without form, God said “Let there be light,” and it illuminated the darkness. When Adam and Eve fell into sin and were separated from God, humanity was in need of another light to illuminate the darkness created by sin. So God sent His only Son to be the “light of the world” that saves us from all darkness.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for being the light of the world. We need your light in order to fully live. Please bring light into the dark places of our lives so that we may walk in righteousness with you. When the darkness of despair and hopelessness try to grasp us, remind us that we have been given the light of life.

REFLECTION

1. “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” What areas of your life have gone from dark to light?

DAY 3: THE SAVIOR

*“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord” Luke 2:11*

DEVOTIONAL

When we find ourselves in distress, we are happy when someone rescues us. In times of hardship, we look for a savior. As sinners, we are all in need of a savior. Christ has come to save His people from sin. Ezekiel 37:23 says, “They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” This looks forward to the day when the people of God would be saved from their sins and rescued from their backslidings into idolatry. God would cleanse them and restore them so that again He would be their God—that they would again serve only Him. Forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of His people. This is the salvation of Jesus, our Savior.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for saving us from our sins. Thank you for saving us in this life from living as a slave to sin. And, thank you for salvation that gives us eternal life. We pray for those around us that have not yet professed you to be their savior. Please open their eyes and soften their hearts to the truth of the Gospel. We praise you for your saving grace and we ask that you continue to deliver us from sin and lead us not into temptation. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

REFLECTION

1. When did you come to faith in Christ as Savior [recall your testimony to faith and thank God for His work in your life]?

2. In what ways has Christ delivered you from sin?

3. In what ways are you still being delivered from sin? How is God currently working in your life?

DAY 4: THE DOOR

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” John 10:9

DEVOTIONAL

These words are Jesus’ words and He is speaking to a crowd. We see here again that Jesus’ teaching divides the crowd. In Matthew 11:15 Jesus says, “He who has ears to hear, let Him hear.” And so he’s not trying to confuse everyone. But why does Jesus continually seem to speak in riddles and metaphor? Throughout Jesus’ ministry we see Him slowly reveal who He is. This is part of the reason. Another is that it was actually quite common for rabbis to teach using metaphor and stories.

You see Jesus is trying to teach rich and deep spiritual truths that are actually better explained by using things that we already understand [a door, sheep, pasture] to explain them. Jesus is literally trying to tell them that He is the only way by which someone can enter and become a part of the people of God. He the Shepherd of His people, offering the “pasture” [the rest and sustenance] that we really need. However if He had said that in a literal [non-figurative] way, they would have stoned Him on the spot.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for the care and the protection that you offer. Thank you for the salvation that you died to bring me. Please help me to remember to run to you first. You are my protector, my savior, and my shepherd.

REFLECTION

1. When you read the Bible, do you sometimes feel like you don’t have ears to hear [it’s hard to understand]? What is your solution?

2. How do we “find pasture” with Jesus? [hint: pasture is referring to rest and spiritual food]

3. If we know that Jesus is our Shepherd [the one who we can look to for help, care, protection, etc.], why do we look for other things, people, places first before we run to Him?

DAY 5: THE TRUE VINE

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." John 15:1

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus says that He is the vine and God the Father is the vinedresser. Who are we in this analogy? We are branches. He goes on to say that any branch that abides in him bears much fruit, with a warning that any branch not bearing fruit would be cut off and thrown away to be burned, but the key we are left with is to abide.

Well, if we are supposed to abide to bear fruit, how do we do that? I think for most of us the answer we immediately jump to is read your Bible every day and pray. That's great! However, I did that for years, and I don't think I was really abiding in the True Vine. I was gaining Biblical knowledge and checking off my daily "Jesus" check-list, but my soul wasn't connected to Him in a real way.

Lately, what I have found is that I need daily to sit in silence with nothing else going on and still my mind to focus only on Jesus. Who He is, and who I am in Him. Sometimes I picture him enormous, seated on His throne, and I am a tiny person down at His feet. He comes down from His seat, shrinks down to my size, and hugs me. Nail scars in His hands and all. Sometimes I picture Him leading me. Sometimes we are sitting together on the couch. Sometimes we just quietly embrace while I feel out of sorts and He reminds me that He has paid my debts and I am His. This is how I am abiding.

I remember who Jesus is, and that I am dearly loved by Him. Do I still read my Bible daily and pray? Of course. How else will I know who the real Jesus is? The last thing I want is to have a relationship with a made up Jesus from my imagination. I want the real thing. But, having seen Him and known Him, I want to abide in Him, and let Him produce His fruit in me.

PRAYER

Jesus, let me abide in you more fully. Teach me what that means. I know that apart from you I can do nothing, and I fear being cut off from you as the warning in John 15 states. I welcome the pruning from the Father that leads to more fruit, but just let me stay connected to you. Fill me with your life and with the nourishment that comes from being a branch in you. Amen.

REFLECTION

1. What does it mean to abide in the True Vine for you?

2. How can you schedule your time to make this a priority?

DAY 6: HOLY SERVANT

“...and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

Acts 4:29-30

DEVOTIONAL

If Jesus came as an earthly king set in a high position in Rome, He still would have been lowering Himself. But He didn't come as the leader in Rome. He came as a servant. He says in Mark 10:45, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve...” Jesus lived as a servant.

As followers of Jesus, we should never think that we are too lofty or high to serve. Not only did Jesus wash the disciples' feet but He took time to teach them, no matter how stubborn they were. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, welcomed the children, visited the house of the despised, and raised the dead. Servants don't get caught up in a sense of entitlement, but rather give of themselves in humble service.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for leading us and providing for us this picture and example of service. May we, as we look at Jesus, learn to better serve one another. Show us ways that we can reflect Christ in how we serve you and each other.

REFLECTION

1. What are some ways that you are giving of your time, energy, and resources for the good of others and the glory of God?

2. Does your life reflect the servanthood of Christ?

DAY 7: CHIEF CORNERSTONE

"I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Psalm 118:21-24

DEVOTIONAL

The cornerstone is not just the base of a building, but the guide to how it will form. Smaller stones are placed on it, depending on it for their structure and strength. This is who Jesus is, through taking our place on the cross, even though He is God. But He was rejected by man, in order to achieve our salvation. This rejection seems unstable, but learning that the Lord's purposes are perfect leads us to trust rightly in him. In this trust, we can know that Jesus, just like the cornerstone, is truly able to take on our burden and produce a beautiful, strong building. This is true for us as individuals [1 Peter 2:4-6] and as a community [Eph 2:19-22]. When our trust is in Jesus, we can each take our place to do as He calls us and to come together to be who He has called us to be.

PRAYER

Lord, we thank you that we can stand on your lordship and salvation to live in your will each day and come together to work as a church who loves you and loves others. Reveal the depth of your solid foundation so that we can stand on your truth and in your presence each day, knowing that you have designed it all. Help us to trust you more each day so that we can be confident in who you say you are and how you ask us to live, not by our strength, but in your solid presence. Amen.

REFLECTION

1. Consider why God made it that Jesus would be rejected by man in order to achieve our salvation - how does God view the rejections in your life?

2. What are some things that you can praise God for, knowing that He has made each day, even the dull or disastrous?

DAY 8: BRANCH OF THE LORD

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” Isaiah 11:1

DEVOTIONAL

The “Branch” figuratively speaks of how the Messiah will be a descendant of the line of Jesse. But the imagery it creates gives us an understanding of the redemptive character of the Messiah. In Isaiah 11:1, we are given the image of a stump of a tree - a tree that’s been cut down. A tree in a lowly and lifeless state is what precedes the growth of the Branch described in this verse. This Branch, which arises from a seemingly dead tree, has such an abundance of life that it can’t be bound to the death of the tree. This Branch gives us the hope of new life that can restore fruitfulness from the devastation of sin and rebellion — a new life that doesn’t root out the past but redeems.

Scripture describes this small and weak branch as “righteous” [Jer 23:5], that it will be “beautiful and glorious” [Isaiah 4:2], and that it “shall build the temple of the Lord” [Zec 6:12]. We can picture the progression from a ‘negligible stump’ to a ‘green sprout that arises’ to a ‘beautiful branch that bears fruit.’ The Branch of the Lord stirs up hope in us - reminds us who our hope is and what He will accomplish.

PRAYER

Jesus, we are in awe of your might and goodness. We gladly offer our imperfect lives to You, if just to have a glimpse of the green shoot rising from ruin. Lord, open our eyes to see beyond our current situation to our eternity with You. Teach us also to be branches that bear fruit as we remain in you.

REFLECTION

1. The “stump of Jesse” represents God remembering His promise to prosper David’s line, although it’s through a stump. Oftentimes, God fulfills His promises in unexpected and unlikely ways. Has God fulfilled a promise in your life in ways you didn’t expect or hope? What was the fruit of the promise fulfilled?

2. Instead of the stump being removed, the Messiah arises from the stump. Are there stumps in your life that you want to remove but God wants to redeem through Jesus? How can we surrender the lowly or the unsightly parts of our lives in hopes for God to redeem with new life and fruit?

3. How can we imitate the Messiah’s redemptive character and grow life in seemingly dead and dark places? What are some of these lifeless places, situations or relationships in your life?

DAY 9: IMMANUEL

“...She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God with us.’” Isaiah 7:14

DEVOTIONAL

God’s intent from the creation of the world was to be in relationship with us. From the fall of man, God has set to redeem His creation. He made a covenant with Abraham that began His redemptive process. Part of that covenant was that God would be their God [Genesis 17:8]. Later He reaffirmed this covenant to Moses [Exodus 6:7]. Throughout the Old Testament we see God continuing to draw near to His people, to those who earnestly seek Him [Jeremiah 29:13]. God showed His nearness as a cloud, a fire, a wind, a gentle whisper and so many other ways. Yet people still missed him or felt He was distant or unreachable. And so, He became flesh, fully relatable, touchable, tempted in every way as we were yet fully divine, sinless and pure. He lived among us, showed us how to live a life that pleases the Father, died the death we should have died to reconcile us to God, then He ascended and left His Spirit here with us so that God would continue to be with us.

PRAYER

Dear Ever Present Father Immanuel, Thank you for Jesus who truly was and is God with us. Thank you for a love so great that you humbled yourself and became a man so that we could be made right with you. Thank you for your Holy Spirit that continues to be “God with us”. Thank you that as we walk through this life’s ups and downs you are with us and we are not alone. Thank you that you are our very present help in time of need, our joy and our salvation. Help us today to keep our eyes, minds, and hearts set on you so that we might know the joy of Immanuel, God with us.

REFLECTION

1. Have you taken time to consider the many ways small and great that you see God’s presence with you today, in this past week, this past month, and year?

DAY 10: OUR HOPE

“...Christ Jesus our hope.” 1 Timothy 1:1

DEVOTIONAL

The disciples and crowds following Jesus were brimming with hope at His triumphant entry into Jerusalem~ God's kingdom was being established before their eyes! A few days later, all hope had vanished as the King they anticipated lay dead in a tomb. How now could God's kingdom come? But three days later the tomb was empty and hope was alive ~ living, breathing, talking, and laughing in the risen Jesus. Triumphant over death and evil, Jesus' living presence with us is hope that never disappoints us. Hope no longer shifts based on circumstances or expectations, but is Jesus himself. Faithful, true, unchanging, all powerful, full of grace and steadfast love, Jesus is our living hope.

PRAYER

Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life. Since we have been raised with you into this new life, empower us to seek the things that are above, where you are seated at the right hand of God. Our hope is alive because you are alive! In you we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

REFLECTION

1. What circumstances are you facing in which you need hope? How can Jesus himself be your hope in those circumstances?

2. List the things in your life that anchor you to hope. Consider people, places, songs, Bible passages, other readings/prayers, etc. How can you recall this list when in need of hope?

DAY 11: OUR ADVOCATE

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” 1 John 2:1

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus our advocate. What a thought here. Stop and take it in for a moment. Almighty and Holy God the Son, the perfect one through whom all that exists was created, hater of sin, and the one whose words will judge sinners, advocates for you. Take it in for a minute. To be clear, I am actually asking you to stop reading this devotional and sit with this thought for a full 60 seconds. He who has every right to bring out the list of all of the charges against us, and instead He becomes our defender in the universe’s highest court. He is able to do this because He has already paid the penalty for all of the charges that would be levied against us, and they are finished. So, He can stand before God the Father and speak better words over us than we could ourselves. When I think about that, what right do I have to judge myself? I’m not saying to belittle or sweep sin under the rug, but if the Advocate doesn’t judge me, but defends me, then what right do I have to condemn myself or harbor the feelings of guilt and shame that I associate with my failings? Jesus’ advocacy of me means that we are free from that. So be free.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for giving us an advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous one. We remember today that He came not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. We rejoice to remember and to live in the freedom that comes with Jesus being our advocate. Even if we sin, He remains, advocating for us. Help us to live with this thought at the forefront of our minds. Keep us free from self condemnation. Thank you that you have given us such a good and righteous defender. Amen.

REFLECTION

1. What are some areas of your life where it is easy for you to fall into the trap of selfcondemnation?

2. How does Jesus’s advocacy change the way you view yourself?

DAY 12: THE JUDGE

“...he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.” Acts 10:42

DEVOTIONAL

Do you want to know what the most overlooked part of the Gospel is nowadays? It is likely this truth—that Jesus has been appointed the ultimate Judge of the whole human race! This truth shows up in ancient creeds and also in the book of Acts. In fact, when Peter preaches to the Gentiles in Acts 10, this truth—Jesus as Judge—seems to be the main point of His gospel presentation. See, Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry and suffering. But even He would need to summon His faith to remember that Jesus would come again, to fulfill prophecy as the righteous Judge—worthy to pass a sentence on our crimes. This Judge, however, would not be some distant Divinity: He would be the very same who humbled Himself and died for our sins!

PRAYER

Almighty God, give us grace in these days after Your humble Incarnation, so that we can throw away the works of darkness and put on the glory of good deeds, and so in the last day we may be raised to life immortal by Jesus when He shall come again in His glorious majesty as Judge. In Your name we pray, Amen. [adapted from the Book of Common Prayer]

REFLECTION

1. How does Jesus as the righteous Judge affect the way you relate to God? How should we talk to the Divine Judge?

2. How does Jesus as the righteous Judge affect the way you view yourself as a Jesus-follower? How can this truth correct and comfort us?

3. How does Jesus as the righteous Judge affect the way you relate to your neighbor? What are the ways Jesus the Judge loves your neighbor?

DAY 13: HEAD OF THE CHURCH

“And he is the head of the body, the church.” Colossians 1:18

DEVOTIONAL

The word “body” is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to the Church, in that there are individual parts that rely on one another to live and function. However, in this passage Jesus Christ is said to be the “head” of the body, as if to suggest that if the head is cut off from the body, it will die. Jesus is the foundation on which the Church stands. Therefore, if Jesus Christ is not preached, is not worshiped, and is not central in the Church, it will be Spiritually dead. The same is true for us on an individual level. If we do not preach Christ [evangelize], worship Christ, and make Christ the center of everything in our lives, we will be spiritually dead.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for leading us and giving us life. May Freedom Village Church, by the power of your Spirit, be a place where Christ is preached, worshiped, and central in all things. May all that we do, say, think, and feel be for your glory. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

REFLECTION

1. Are you spiritually “alive” in the sense that Christ is “head” over your life?

2. What’s the primary reason you attend and stay active in the Church? Is it for the glory of Christ?

3. What is your function in the “body?”

DAY 14: INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift." 2 Corinthians 9:15

DEVOTIONAL

Gifts are naturally given things that do not require any kind of payment. It's given willingly, and a freely given gift shows the character of the giver. Jesus was an indescribable gift sent from God. Jesus knew His identity and His purpose as the Son of God on earth and taught us how to love [Matthew 5:43-44 "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"], how to pray [Matthew 6:9-14 "So then, this is how you should pray:..."], and also why He came on earth [Mark 2:17 "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."]. But the most significant fact about Jesus is how He is the perfect gift that was given to us to show us God's love for us [John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son"]. The Almighty God loved us so much that He sent His only son in the humble form of a human being, as a helpless baby in a manger, and then had Him die on the cross after living a sinless life. Nobody ever deserved this indescribable love, but it's granted if we choose to believe in God. Out of all the miracles and promises, Jesus is the ultimate gift that highlights God's love for us.

PRAYER

Thank you, God, for Jesus. For the gift that we never deserved, but was given because of your generosity. Because of your bottomless mercy and never-ending love for us. Guide us to tangibly feel the depths of your love day by day as we grow in faith. Send us people, allow events to happen, use anything around us to constantly remind us of your love for us and the priceless sacrifice of Jesus. Thank you for loving us, and encourage us to love like you have loved us.

REFLECTION

1. What are some gifts/blissful moments in life you know were given from God?

2. What characteristics of God can you derive from those gifts/moments?

3. What hinders you the most from fully trusting in God's love for us?

DAY 16: OUR MEDIATOR

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 2:5

DEVOTIONAL

The good news is not just that there is a loving God—although that is true! The good news is that there is also a man, Christ Jesus, who is the mediator for all humankind. This high and holy God, able to conquer sin and death, is also approachable through this humble mediator. 1 Timothy 2 is a call to all believers to prayer. There is no better human exemplar of prayer than Jesus Himself. But, you might say, Jesus is God—He doesn't need to pray! But Jesus lives forever interceding steadfastly for us anyway, at the right hand of the Father [Romans 8:34]. This blessing is intended for everyone—every member of the human race. “Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger and dispute” [1 Timothy 2:8].

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, please give us Your love, that we might make requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving on behalf of all people, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. We trust that this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. In the name of our Savior, Amen.

REFLECTION

1. Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus is still living and active in ministry on our behalf? How could that change the way you live the rest of your life?

2. How could we pattern our relationships to other people the way God loves other people?

3. What would your prayer life look like if you prayed for all people? What about your daily life?

DAY 17: FOUNDER AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH

“...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

DEVOTIONAL

After presenting a series of references to Old Testament men and women of faith, the writer of Hebrews now directs us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the supreme example of a life of faith. And who is Jesus described as? The founder and perfecter of our faith. As we run life's race, regardless of hardships, trials, or temptations, we are encouraged not to look to the world, anyone else, or to ourselves, but to Christ alone. God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross a death that we deserved. He served as the ultimate sacrifice for our salvation from sin. Let's be reminded that through His atoning work, Christ's perfection leads to the perfection of His people, which will be realized fully on the last day - and let's keep our eyes focused on Him while running this race. "Looking to Jesus means life, light, guidance, encouragement, joy: never cease to look on Him who ever looks on you." - Charles Spurgeon

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, In a world that pushes so many distractions upon us, may we not get caught up in our current circumstances or our own sinfulness. Rather, help us to turn away from all of these things and steadfastly fix our gaze on you alone, the one who lived a flawless, sinless life and who conquered death. May we be reminded of and encouraged by the fact that you died on the cross to cleanse us of our sins. And may we ever be reminded that you are King, seated at the right hand of the throne of God, reigning victorious.

REFLECTION

1. Are you continually fixing your eyes on Jesus? In what area[s] of your life must you reset your gaze upon Christ?
2. Take a moment to reflect on the fact that He is the author of salvation. What does this mean in your life?
3. Take a moment to reflect on the fact that He is the finisher of our faith. What hope does this give you as a believer? How does this encourage you to live your life differently? How does this help you look at your circumstances differently?

DAY 18: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11

DEVOTIONAL

Psalm 23 famously begins, "The Lord is my shepherd—I shall not want." The Israelites would have been thinking and singing of their Lord as a caring shepherd for generations. Jesus' assertion is a paradigm-shift on at least two accounts: 1. Jesus is likely claiming to be the Lord—the God of Israel! Only such a power could be expected to guard and lead a whole nation, and 2. Jesus subverts expectations about Himself as the leader of His people. Other nations would have looked to their leader to fight for them and emerge from the battle victorious and undying. But Jesus says He will give His life to take care of His people. This concept, however, is not so far from understandable: a bad shepherd probably runs at the first sign of danger—a wolf attack, for example. A good shepherd would stand in for His flock and face down the mortal danger. This is precisely what Jesus did. But, as the gospel tells us, He emerged victorious and undying...

PRAYER

The Lord is my shepherd—I shall not want. Thank you for giving Your life as the good shepherd. We confess that Christ was raised from the dead, and He can not die again; death no longer has mastery over him. We confess that if we died with Christ, we will also live with Him. Grant that we may follow our Shepherd into this salvation and may the life we live, be lived unto God.

REFLECTION

1. Jesus says later in John that greater love has no one than this: that one lay down His life for His friends. What role does sacrifice play in your relationships?

2. What are some reasons why you can be thankful that Jesus is your shepherd?

DAY 19: GREAT HIGH PRIEST

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”

Hebrews 4:14

DEVOTIONAL

If you have not read the book of Hebrews for a while, I encourage you to read it again. Hebrews is full of rich theology and encouragement. And it does a wonderful job of explaining the priesthood of Jesus. Jesus is not only our King, but he is our Priest as well. And it is through Him that we have access to the Father. Jesus is the reason that we can come to the Father in prayer and be heard. And as Hebrews 10:19-23 assures us, we can have confidence that we are heard.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for making it possible for me to come before you now in prayer. Because of your life, death, and resurrection, you have made a way for me to not only live a new life as a new creation, but you have made it possible for anyone who confesses your name to be heard by the living God. Thank you that, at anytime, I can bow my head and communicate with the God of the universe. Amen.

REFLECTION

1. Have you ever thought about how amazing it is to be able to communicate with the God of the universe?

2. What does a life of prayer really look like? (hint: God doesn't expect us to be on our knees 24 hours a day)

3. How can you plan to continue this journey of spending time in prayer every day? Are there things you need to sacrifice?

DAY 20: WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

DEVOTIONAL

We just finished celebrating Christmas, the birth of our Savior, Jesus. Christmas is a time for us to reflect on the gift of Jesus. John 3:16 tells us that God’s motivation for sending his Son was love. “For God so loved the world, he sent his only begotten Son....” And why did he send his Son? “...that whoever believes in him (Jesus) should not perish but have eternal life.” Verse 17 expands and says that God sent Jesus “...in order that the world might be saved through him.”

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the gift of your Son. Your Word tells us that you loved us so much that you sent your Son to save us. We have all experienced the darkness of sin. Sin is what we need to be saved from. Thank you for the forgiveness of sin that comes through your Son. Thank you for making a way, not just to escape but to find life. Help me to surrender to your way each day. Amen.

REFLECTION

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Take a minute and think about each of these four names. Ask these questions for each of them: 1. How is Jesus _____ to you?

2. How is he _____ to the church?

3. How is he _____ to the world?

DAY 21: I AM

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’” John 8:58

DEVOTIONAL

In response to the Pharisees’ question, “Who do you think you are?”, Jesus replied, “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.’ You are not yet fifty years old,’ the Jews said to him, ‘and you have seen Abraham!’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds” (John 8:56–59). The violent response of the Jews to Jesus’ “I AM” statement indicates that they clearly understood what He was declaring—that He was the eternal God incarnate. Jesus was equating Himself with the “I AM” title God gave Himself in Exodus 3:14. Such a statement, if not true, was blasphemy, and the punishment prescribed by the Mosaic Law was death (Leviticus 24:11–14). But Jesus committed no blasphemy; He was and is God, the second Person of the Godhead, equal to the Father in every way.

PRAYER

Jesus, help me to live my life continually in awe of Your greatness and in wonder over the reality that before anything came into existence, You were. I pray that as these 21 days of prayer and fasting come to a close, I would continue to keep my heart and mind focused on You and the things of Your Kingdom. Thank You that You are always available when I call out to You. Help me to be diligent in seeking You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

REFLECTION

1. As these 21 Days of prayer and fasting come to a close, take some intentional time to simply be still before the Lord and meditate on all the great names of Christ that we have been meditating on over these past weeks. Are there any names that deeply resonate in your heart? What could God be revealing to you about those names in terms of what you should be believing and how you should be living?

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MAY THESE 21 DAYS BE THE BEGINNING OF A LIFETIME SPENT IN DAILY PRAYER AND RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS! IT IS THE SECRET SAUCE!