

# BREAKING FREE



21 DAYS OF PRAYER  
AND FASTING

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PASTOR JASON'S LETTER .....	1
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK .....	2
COMMITMENT PAGE .....	3
INTRODUCTION TO THE 3-THIRDS STUDY METHOD .....	4
WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FASTING? .....	6
TYPES OF FASTS .....	8
DANIEL FAST BASICS .....	9
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES .....	9
HOW TO P.R.A.Y. ....	10
PRAY FOR SPAIN .....	11
TEACHING, GROUP AND PERSONAL STUDY MATERIAL .....	12
FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT ACTIVITY .....	108
WHAT'S NEXT? .....	110

*Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages are from New Living Translation (NLT) Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation*

**Have you ever tried to open a door that you believe is locked, but you don't have the key?** You jiggle the handle, you give it a few hard slaps and maybe put your shoulder into it, but it refuses to open. Your blood pressure spikes, you begin to lose your cool and then you try something. You turn the knob and discover the door was open all along. That may seem like a far-fetched occurrence, but we often find ourselves seemingly locked out of a life of purpose and meaning. BUT WE DON'T HAVE TO BE! We've been invited into a life of freedom and given the key to identity, purpose and meaning.

As we begin a new year, we're inviting you into a three-week journey of surrender, discovery, sacrifice, prayer, potential and freedom. Jesus declared the year of the LORD's favor has come. Don't remain behind those self-induced, closed, yet unlocked doors...break free! Take this annual opportunity during the Fast as your invitation to reclaim your identity, determine your God-given purpose and fearlessly pursue all that God has in store for you.

We're going to follow Moses through his exodus story and draw our weekly insight from his journey of discovery and mastery. Exodus is a story that just doesn't speak to our past, but to our future. It's a story of birth and destiny. It's a story of choices between building God's Kingdom of peace and restoring order or building empires of self. It's a story of trusting in the story of God. It's a story of *why* we are here and *what* we are meant accomplish. It's a story of what it looks like to be God's firstborn. It's God's story of identity, purpose and freedom.

The Fast is an invitation to draw near God's heart, discern His will, declare His promises and experience His power as we reset our heart, mind, body, and spirit by establishing new spiritual habits and daily disciplines during the first 21 days of the new year.

You can break free from the stronghold you're in and find who you are, what your purpose is and what's next for you as you discover and live in your freedom.

Freedom can be yours. Will you open the door?

Let's find freedom together!

- Pastor Jason



# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This workbook will be with you daily for the next 21 days. Bring it with you on Sunday for the weekly teaching. Bring it to your group for discussion and use it daily for your personal study. Look for the following icons throughout the book to guide you in how to use each section.



## **TEACHING STUDY**

This section is for use on the three Sundays during the weekly teaching message. There is space for notes and each week an activity challenge is issued. If you miss a Sunday or would like to review, messages are recorded and posted online.



## **7-DAY ACTIVITY CHALLENGE**

Each week, an activity challenge page will be included during the teaching message. Use this page to complete the challenge during the week.



## **GROUP STUDY**

The 3-Thirds study method is explained on page 3. These questions will follow the Teaching Notes and can be used for discussion in your group or as an aid in your personal study.



## **PERSONAL STUDY**

Daily scripture reading and commentary to help you dive deep into the Word, record your notes and prayers. You may also use the 3-Thirds questions as you work through the content each day.

## **SHARE WHAT YOU LEARN**

Don't hold on to what you learn or experience during the Fast. A lesson you learn might be what someone else in your life needs to hear. Use this season to pour what God is doing in you, into someone else.

# MY COMMITMENT

Use this page to record the why and how of your commitment to the Fast. Refer to it throughout the Fast, as needed, when you are tempted to give up. Consider the things in your life that may take up time or focus that would be better spent with God, in prayer and in His Word.

Remember that what you choose to fast from should result in a sacrifice on your part. Consider decisions you need to make, family or friends that need to meet Jesus, habits or strongholds that need to be broken.

## **WHY ARE YOU FASTING?**

Write out the reason(s) for your commitment to fast.

## **WHAT ARE YOU FASTING FROM?**

Write down what you will go without during these 21 days.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE 3-THIRDS STUDY METHOD

Scripture is the expert. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher. (John 14:26) Our goal is to encourage our church to read the Bible and discover what God has to say to them. God's Word is full of revelations just waiting to be discovered. Simple, memorable questions allow a disciple to: 1) discover and understand the character of God, 2) encourage them to obediently apply scripture to their life and 3) share it with others.

This Bible study method promotes the authority of God's Holy Word, practical daily discipleship and evangelism. It removes the need for an "expert" to lead them and trusts the Holy Spirit to reveal truth to each group member. This method of looking at scripture gives each person a simple, memorable way to daily dig into God's Word on their own and learn from the Holy Spirit.

*Bottom line: Our mission is to make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples and thus to see God raise up a DISCIPLE MAKING MOVEMENT that will bless the people of this city, this state, this nation and the ends of the earth. (Matthew 28:18-20)*

You will see a similar structure each week that divides your Bible study into 3-Thirds: **Look Back, Look Up and Look Forward.** Each section explores how God's Word is transforming our lives as we live it out in our daily routines. Prayer is necessary for this type of Bible study because we need the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth and reveal to us the thoughts of God (John 16:13-15; 1 Cor. 2:10-16). Once again, we must invite the Holy Spirit into our study as we seek to discover truths about God and His Gospel, commit to obey and not just be hearers of His Word but doers of His Word and pledge to share what we know with others.

## 3-THIRDS QUESTION STRUCTURE

### LOOK BACK

1. How has your relationship with Jesus been the past week?

Questions to consider...

- How have you obeyed what you have learned?
- What are you grateful for?

2. Who did you share last week's lesson with?

Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach us as we study God's Word.

### LOOK UP

READ THE TEXT

Repeat the text in your own words or if studying with a group, have one group member do this.

3. What does this text teach us about God?

Questions to consider...

- What does it say about His character?
- What does it say about His plans?
- What does it say about how He relates to us?

4. What does this text say to me?

Questions to consider...

- Is there a sin I need to address?
- Is there a promise I need to hold on to?
- Is there an example I should follow?
- Is there a command I need to obey?
- Is there a Gospel truth?

### LOOK FORWARD

5. What am I going to do this week because of this text?

6. Who do I think needs to know this?

**PRAY** for the Holy Spirit to help us do what the Bible says and share what we learned with one person.

# WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FASTING?

Spiritual fasting is the process of going without something, usually food, to gain a right perspective of who Jesus is and what He wants from our lives. During a spiritual Fast, the time usually spent preparing meals and eating is replaced with prayer, worship and Scripture reading.

While fasting for weight loss and other physical benefits have become more popular in recent years, the practice of spiritual fasting is often neglected by Christians. Often, believers will avoid fasting because they see it as fanatical or as something just for the spiritual elite, those people who are walking more closely with God. Many Christians are simply unaware of the spiritual discipline of fasting and other believers are afraid of the unknown. Fasting is not comfortable or easy and the idea of going without food may seem odd, especially in our Western culture. However, fasting is mentioned 77 times in Scripture. For comparison, baptism is mentioned 75 times. If the Bible talks of fasting as much as baptism, we shouldn't ignore that. Spiritual fasting is incredibly important and is a large part of a disciple's journey.

## WHY FAST?

According to the Bible, there are three duties of every Christian: give, pray and fast. Read Matthew 6:1-21. Pay particular attention to one word in verses 2, 5 and 16. Jesus says, "*WHEN you give...WHEN you pray...WHEN you fast.*" Those are directives, not options.

Fasting makes you aware of the presence of Jesus in your life. The more you are aware of Him, the more time you spend with Him, the more your relationship with Him will thrive. This will impact your marriage, friendships, career and the way you interact with other people in the world. Ultimately, this leads to the greatest treasure of all, storing up treasures in Heaven. (Matthew 6:19-21)



- Fasting reminds you to hunger for His Word. When Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness, He answered the temptation of Satan by saying, *“People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* (Matthew 4:4) If you’re not hungry for God, this sounds like nonsense, but what truly sustains you is the Word of God.
- Fasting grows a hunger for Jesus in your life and reveals unhealthy habits. When you are hungry (or hangry), you see how the stomach can have control over your actions. While fasting, unhealthy habits are revealed. You’ll realize when you are seeking comfort or avoiding issues by using food, alcohol, social media, etc., that do not satisfy, instead of turning to Christ and His Word. It reveals things that may be controlling you, rather than having self-control. Fasting trains you to seek His will.
- Fasting will help you find balance in life, revealing where you may be out of balance in how you spend your time and resources.
- Fasting helps you see clearly. Do you have a big decision that you need to make? Are you considering a move? Are you considering changing careers? Are you considering marriage or starting a family? Before any major decision, the Bible is clear that we should fast and pray. Psalm 119:105 says, *“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.”* The Word will give us direction and peace in our hearts when we seek God for life’s decisions.

***Taste and see that the LORD is good.***

Psalm 34:8

# TYPES OF FASTS

## THERE ARE SEVERAL DIFFERENT TYPES OF FASTS

- **Partial Fast** – eliminating a certain type of food from your diet for a specific period of time. Many people use the Daniel Fast for this type of Fast, inspired by the type of Fast that Daniel completed in the Old Testament. Other partial Fast options include sun-up to sundown or other time restrictions on eating.
- **Water/Juice Fast** – consuming only water and whole fruit and/or vegetable juices for a time.
- **Complete Fast** – eliminating all food and water for a specific period of time. We see an example of this in Jesus' 40-day Fast in the wilderness. Be sure to seek medical clearance before attempting a water, juice or complete Fast.
- **Media Fast** – no TV, social media, games, music, movies, YouTube, Netflix, etc.— nada for 21 days.

Statistics reveal the average person spends over four hours a day on their phone for social media purposes. That's 86 hours a month! The average person spends 3.6 hours watching TV a day. That means we will spend seven years and eight months watching TV and five years and four months on social media. Eliminate it all for this type of Fast.

In addition to the types of fasts, there are variations on the reasons to fast, whether privately or with a group.

- **Private Fast** – this is between you and God with the intent to get to know God better and pray for personal reasons such as wisdom (Paul in Acts 14:23); grief (Nehemiah 1:1-4); or preparation, as when Jesus fasted in preparation for His ministry. (Matthew 4: 1-17; Mark 1:12-14; Luke 4:1-14)
- **Congregational Fast** – when a church body fasts together to seek God's guidance to help make an important decision. (Acts 13:2-3)
- **National Fast** – when a country or a nation has a very specific reason or need, so they fast and cry out to God for an answer. (Esther 4, Ezra 8:21-23)

# DANIEL FAST BASICS

The Daniel Fast, a type of partial fast, is inspired by two examples found in the book of Daniel. The first reference is Daniel 1:12-15, where Daniel asked to be given a diet of only vegetables and water for ten days, rather than eat the king's food. At the end of the ten days, Daniel was healthier and better nourished than the others. The second reference is found in Daniel 10:2-3, where Daniel fasted for 21 days, refraining from "*rich food, meat and wine.*" Daniel sacrificed the choice foods to focus on worship, mourning and praying to the LORD by consuming a simple plant-based diet and water for those 21 days. Take time to read Daniel Chapter 10 to find out what was happening during those 21 days!

Three Keys to a Daniel Fast:

1. Consume only fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes and whole grains.
2. Drink only water, herbal teas or 100% fresh fruit or vegetable juice.
3. Avoid ALL sweeteners, breads, meat, dairy and eggs.

## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL FAST

During a spiritual Fast, the goal is to spend more time in prayer and in the Word, not in planning, preparing and cooking in a way that attempts to replace what you have removed. Try not to get caught up in complicated recipes. Make a simple plan and prep for multiple meals in advance so that your mind is focused and in control rather than your stomach. One great way to do this is to make a one-week plan and repeat it weekly. Choose one or two options for each mealtime and get those ingredients in place. Food is meant to fuel the body, so for these three weeks, eat for nourishment, not entertainment, pleasure or comfort.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Find additional resources, such as recipes, menu samples, links, FAQ's and a digital copy of this guide at  
[www.Christs.Church/fast](http://www.Christs.Church/fast)



# P.R.A.Y.

## THERE IS NO SPECIAL FORMULA FOR PRAYER.

There are no “buzz words” or phrases that capture God’s attention more than any other. Prayer is pouring your honest, surrendered heart out to God and seeking His answers to your struggles. When asked by His disciples about prayer, Jesus responded with the LORD’s Prayer.

*“Pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one.’”* (Matthew 6:9-13)

Jesus’ response points out four key attributes of prayer: praise, repentance, asking, yielding. P.R.A.Y. is an acrostic to make it easy to remember every time you pray. This is not a formula, but if you need a little direction in your prayers, this serves as a guide.

**PRAISE:** Praise God for who He is and His attributes. Begin by giving Him your worship and adoration.

**REPENT:** Confess to God the things you have done in word, thought or deed which led you into sin. Confess and repent.

**ASK:** After you have spent time in praise and repentance, make your requests known to God by asking Him to provide your needs.

**YIELD:** God is always at work around you. Take time to notice when He invites you to join Him to become part of His mission.

# PRAY FOR SPAIN



## SPAIN NEEDS JESUS.

Of the 47 million people who live in the nation of Spain, less than 2% profess to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Spain is the only European country that hasn't experienced a modern-day revival, but we can help change that!

**Team Expansion and Christ's Church** are uniting to create a worldwide network of prayer and church planting for Spain. It's a 10-year objective:

- 100 simple reproducing churches in the 17 regions of Spain
- A worldwide network of believers praying daily for revival

We believe this can happen in the next ten years, *but we need your help!*

## JOIN THE 1700 PRAYER FOR SPAIN INITIATIVE

- Receive a daily email prayer prompt every day at 1700 hrs. (5:00 pm).
- Each prompt will guide you on how to pray for the lost in Spain and those working there to make Jesus known and loved.

## Does prayer work?

- Every significant moment of Jesus' ministry was covered in prayer.
- When Jesus saw "spiritual fields ripe for harvest," he asked his followers to pray for Kingdom workers.
- When Jesus sent His disciples to reach the nations, the first thing He told them to do was to pray.

## YES, PRAYER WORKS!

*And you can make a huge difference through your prayers.*

Join the tens of thousands around the world to see revival come to Spain.

To sign up, scan this code or visit [www.christs.church/spain2024](http://www.christs.church/spain2024)



# WEEK 1



# WEEK 1



## TEACHING STUDY

### IDENTITY

**Day 1\* - Sunday, January 7, 2024**

\*Fast begins at sundown

### TEXT:

---

---

---

---

### NOTES:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**TAKEAWAY\*\*:** What do I need to clean out of my life?

\*\*Complete activity on the next page during week 1 of the Fast.









## GROUP STUDY

### LOOK BACK

1. How has your relationship with Jesus been the past week?

Questions to consider...

- How have you obeyed what you have learned?
- What are you grateful for?

2. Who did you share last week's lesson with?

Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach us as we study God's Word.

### LOOK UP

READ THE TEXT

Repeat the text in your own words or if studying with a group, have one group member do this.

3. What does this text teach us about God?

Questions to consider...

- What does it say about His character?

- What does it say about His plans?
- What does it say about how He relates to us?

4. What does this text say to me?

Questions to consider...

- Is there a sin I need to address?
- Is there a promise I need to hold on to?
- Is there an example I should follow?
- Is there a command I need to obey?
- Is there a Gospel truth?

### **LOOK FORWARD**

5. What am I going to do this week because of this text?

6. Who do I think needs to know this?

**PRAY** for the Holy Spirit to help us do what the Bible says and share what we learned with one person.



## READ

### Isaiah 61:1-11

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me,  
for the LORD has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted  
and to proclaim that captives will be released  
and prisoners will be freed.

2 He has sent me to tell those who mourn  
that the time of the LORD's favor has come,  
and with it, the day of God's anger against their  
enemies.

3 To all who mourn in Israel,  
he will give a crown of beauty for ashes,  
a joyous blessing instead of mourning,  
festive praise instead of despair.

In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks  
that the LORD has planted for his own glory.

4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins,  
repairing cities destroyed long ago.

They will revive them,  
though they have been deserted for many  
generations.

5 Foreigners will be your servants.

They will feed your flocks  
and plow your fields  
and tend your vineyards.

6 You will be called priests of the LORD,  
ministers of our God.

You will feed on the treasures of the nations  
and boast in their riches.

7 Instead of shame and dishonor,  
you will enjoy a double share of honor.

You will possess a double portion of prosperity in  
your land,  
and everlasting joy will be yours.

8 "For I, the LORD, love justice.

I hate robbery and wrongdoing.  
I will faithfully reward my people for their suffering  
and make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 Their descendants will be recognized  
and honored among the nations.

Everyone will realize that they are a people  
the LORD has blessed."

10 I am overwhelmed with joy in the LORD my God!

For he has dressed me with the clothing of  
salvation  
and draped me in a robe of righteousness.

I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding  
or a bride with her jewels.

11 The Sovereign LORD will show his justice to the  
nations of the world.

Everyone will praise him!

His righteousness will be like a garden in early  
spring,  
with plants springing up everywhere.

## READ

### Luke 4:14-30

14 Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. 15 He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures.

17 The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,

for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,

that the blind will see,

that the oppressed will be set free,

19 and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

20 He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. 21 Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

22 Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. "How

can this be?" they asked. "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

23 Then he said, "You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself'—meaning, 'Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.' 24 But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown.

25 "Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. 27 And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian."

28 When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. 29 Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, 30 but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.

## REFLECT

Following His baptism, the Spirit of God led Jesus into the desert for forty days of prayer and fasting. Empowered by Holy Spirit, He emerges triumphant over temptation and ready to embody His purpose. The divinely appointed time had finally arrived. It was the moment He was born for. He was the Savior they were waiting for. And no one saw it coming.

Returning to Galilee, God in the flesh enters the stage as Jesus of Nazareth steps forward to unroll the scroll. Over time, the sacred text of Isaiah had become overly familiar to religious observers, but the bold actions of the carpenter's son commanded their attention on this day. The noticeable authority with which Jesus declared the arrival of the "...*time of the LORD's favor*" signaled throughout the synagogue that this was no routine reading or ritual recital; this was an anointed announcement!

As the Son of God incarnated the holy words, His voice thundered the spiritual realm, reverberating the earth, sounding like the breaking of chains. After six-hundred years, the prophetic lock on Isaiah's awaited fulfillment suddenly released as the salvation of mankind revealed Himself as the key. (Isaiah 61:1-11).

*"The Spirit of the LORD is on me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."* (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus of Nazareth. Son of Joseph. Local carpenter. Son of God. Freedom fighter. Liberator. Healer. Deliverer. Proclaimer. Messiah. Savior. Spiritual locksmith! His transfiguration from carpenter to locksmith was challenging to grasp for those who grew up with Jesus then and the same is true for many today. Like those in Nazareth, perhaps our encounters with Jesus only occur when we call on a carpenter to custom-build careers, relationships and houses of dreams. But nobody needs a locksmith until our blueprinted plans misalign with God's perfect will, leaving us locked in, locked out, or locked up from the life He created us to enjoy.

Locked inside a troubled heart, anxious mind, or languishing life.

Locked out, realizing windows of opportunity have closed behind you.

Locked up by past failure, present addiction and future hopelessness.

If your only acquaintance with Jesus has been handyman and custom-builder, consider this Fast your introduction to the Master Creator whose Word opens and closes doors to our past, present and future in ways you never imagined, according to His will (Revelation 3:7-8). But if you're looking for the locksmith, your commitment to this Fast is your proclamation of freedom from habits and hang-ups, situations and circumstances, cycles and sin that have held you or someone you love prisoner from God's truth and blind to Christ's love. Somewhere along the way, everyone becomes captive to strongholds of some kind. But "*...wherever the Spirit of the LORD is, there is freedom.*" (2 Corinthians 3:17) So, if you're ready to push past oppression, restore hope, receive God's vision for your future and move your life forward in freedom, then get ready to do things differently during the next 21 days.

*"...wherever the Spirit of the LORD is, there is freedom."* (2 Corinthians 3:17)

The key has turned. The locks are off. The gate is open.

The year of the LORD's favor is waiting! Who's ready? Let's go!





## READ

### Luke 4:31-44

31 Then Jesus went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught there in the synagogue every Sabbath day. 32 There, too, the people were amazed at his teaching, for he spoke with authority.

33 Once when he was in the synagogue, a man possessed by a demon—an evil spirit—cried out, shouting, 34 “Go away! Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

35 But Jesus reprimanded him. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. At that, the demon threw the man to the floor as the crowd watched; then it came out of him without hurting him further.

36 Amazed, the people exclaimed, “What authority and power this man’s words possess! Even evil spirits obey him, and they flee at his command!” 37 The news about Jesus spread through every village in the entire region.

38 After leaving the synagogue that day, Jesus went to Simon’s home, where he found Simon’s mother-in-law very sick with a high fever. “Please heal her,” everyone begged. 39 Standing at her bedside, he rebuked the fever, and it left her. And she got up at once and prepared a meal for them.

40 As the sun went down that evening, people throughout the village brought sick family members to Jesus. No matter what their diseases were, the

touch of his hand healed everyone. 41 Many were possessed by demons; and the demons came out at his command, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But because they knew he was the Messiah, he rebuked them and refused to let them speak.

42 Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them. 43 But he replied, “I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent.” 44 So he continued to travel around, preaching in synagogues throughout Judea.

## REFLECT

Because those in Nazareth rejected Him, Jesus removed Himself from the people and took His power with Him. Arriving in Capernaum, His same message drew an entirely different response. Although both crowds in each city were amazed at His teaching, only one acknowledged the authority and power His words possessed. Because of the faith of the people, Jesus displayed His power in Capernaum. People came from everywhere to bring their loved ones into His presence, and He healed them. His touch cured illness, rebuked affliction and demons were cast out at His command.

Nazareth's loss was Capernaum's gain. The power Jesus had to release the oppressed, heal the sick, and comfort the poor had a way of inciting anger in the spiritual realm and inspired awe in the hearts of man. The crowds Jesus drew between Nazareth and Capernaum were no different. Although He offered the same Good News to two different groups, He received two different reactions. In turn, He responded in two different ways, which produced two different results.

Nazareth refused His message, so Jesus removed His power.

Capernaum revered His Word, so Jesus healed their sick.

Nazareth rejected their hometown hero, so Jesus never returned.

Capernaum respected His authority and five disciples followed from here.

Because the crowd in Nazareth was offended by Jesus and pushed Him away, nothing changed for those desperate for healing and oppressed by demons. They missed the healing miracles, forfeited emotional, mental and spiritual freedom, and declined God's favor. But the Capernaum crowd was amazed at His teaching, acknowledged His authority and desperately sought to be close to Jesus. Because they responded with humility, hope and belief, Jesus responded with miraculous healing and deliverance from evil.

Although Jesus offers RELIEF from poverty, FREEDOM from torment, RECOVERY from sickness, RELEASE from oppression and the blessing of THE LORD'S FAVOR to everyone, ultimately, your response to the authority of God's Word determines your result. How will you respond over the next 21 days as the Holy Spirit reveals an inconvenient truth? Are you ready to wrestle with yourself as the Holy Spirit reveals areas in your lifestyle that are inconsistent with His Word?

The 21 day Fast usually draws two kinds of crowds - those who crowd around curiosity but quickly become offended by discomfort and inconvenience and those who crowd around Jesus. New Year resolutions rarely last, but all things Jesus are eternal. So, choose which crowd you'll follow: Follow one and nothing changes. Follow Jesus and nothing stays the same.



## READ

### Matthew 11:1-19

1 When Jesus had finished giving these instructions to his twelve disciples, he went out to teach and preach in towns throughout the region.

2 John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, 3 “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”

4 Jesus told them, “Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen— 5 the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.” 6 And he added, “God blesses those who do not fall away because of me.”

7 As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. “What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? 8 Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people with expensive clothes live in palaces. 9 Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. 10 John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say,

‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
and he will prepare your way before you.’

11 “I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived,

none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is! 12 And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it. 13 For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. 14 And if you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come. 15 Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

16 “To what can I compare this generation? It is like children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends,

17 ‘We played wedding songs,

and you didn’t dance,

so we played funeral songs,

and you didn’t mourn.’

18 For John didn’t spend his time eating and drinking, and you say, ‘He’s possessed by a demon.’ 19 The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, ‘He’s a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!’ But wisdom is shown to be right by its results.”

## REFLECT

Days 3-6 of the Fast are usually the most difficult. Body and soul detox is in full swing. Many will doubt their decision to fast, and the struggle is real. The tempter has whispered that fasting is intolerable, inconvenient, unhealthy or unreasonable. The tempter's voice could sound as familiar as family irritated by a new menu or friends who can't comprehend your spiritual commitment. As you entertain excuses to quit, expect the adversary to cook up your favorite weakness with a delicious side of doubt, served on a silver platter designed especially for you.

John the Baptist was no stranger to prayer and fasting. But he suddenly became acquainted with doubt when his zeal for God and devotion to Jesus landed him behind bars. Lonely and discouraged, even the prophet whom Jesus declared the greatest to have lived, questioned his faith and wrestled with doubt. Imagine how John struggled knowing Jesus was performing miracles for strangers and proclaiming freedom for captives while leaving the prophet who prepared the way for Christ chained to a prison cell. So, when he heard about these things, John *"...sent his disciples to ask Jesus, 'Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?'"* (Matthew 11:2-3)

As followers of Christ, there will be seasons when doubt becomes our most brutal contender. Like John, perhaps your boxing match between faith and doubt began when a legitimate threat threw the first punch. During such difficult periods, it's natural for the doubt in our minds to challenge the faith in our hearts and when these forces duke it out in our spirit, even the fiercest faith warriors find their inner selves feeling beaten and bruised. Or like most, even the slightest perceived threat to our comfort and lifestyle is more than enough to turn our perceived faith into a *"...weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind."* (Matthew 11:7)

*"Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!"* (Matthew 11:15) It's normal to grapple with doubt while growing in faith but we must learn how to recognize the difference between sorting through the difficulties of life that strengthen our human resolve and discerning strategies from hell, devised to render us powerless. As doubt seized the opportunity to exploit John's faith while he was in jail, ultimately, he remained unwavering. But like John, the enemy

patiently watches us, waiting for our most vulnerable moments to present the perfect opening for him to pounce. In the spiritual realm, doubt never plays fair and invariably looks for the opportune time to hit below the belt, sucker punch from behind and kick when you're down.

Doubt can be the fiercest opponent your faith will encounter. But Jesus knew we would go toe -to-toe with such adversaries. He reminds us, "*...from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it.*" (Matthew 11:12). Because God has compassion for our spiritual struggles, He came to our defense in the flesh with FORCE! And just when His opponent assumed victory, the resurrection forced our enemy under Christ's feet, forced him to hell, slammed the gate shut and Jesus holds the key.

Do you believe this, or do you still doubt it? How will you respond the rest of this week as your comfort is challenged and your schedule inconvenienced? Will you continue until you've conquered your cravings? Are you willing to wrestle with your flesh until your spirit wins? What if it seems as if your prayers go unanswered? Do you trust that God has a good reason and most likely, a better plan? What if God asks you to take risks? Are you willing to trust the Holy Spirit, believing He is guiding you toward a higher purpose according to God's will?

As the forces of good and evil war violently in the spiritual realm, we must forcefully defeat our spiritual doubts. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; good news, freedom, recovery and release are available to those ready to receive. (Luke 4:18-19) Keep your eyes on the prize, believing without a doubt that "*...God blesses those who do not fall away because of me.*" (Matthew 11:6).





## READ

### Isaiah 9:1-7

1 Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

2 The people who walk in darkness  
will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness,  
a light will shine.

3 You will enlarge the nation of Israel,  
and its people will rejoice.

They will rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest  
and like warriors dividing the plunder.

4 For you will break the yoke of their slavery  
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,  
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

5 The boots of the warrior  
and the uniforms bloodstained by war  
will all be burned.

They will be fuel for the fire.

6 For a child is born to us,  
a son is given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His government and its peace  
will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne  
of his ancestor David

for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the LORD of  
Heaven's Armies

will make this happen!



## READ

### Matthew 4:1-17

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. 2 For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

3 During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

4 But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say,

'People do not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, 6 and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

'He will order his angels to protect you.

And they will hold you up with their hands

so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

7 Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'"

8 Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

10 "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say,

'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'"

11 Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

12 When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. 13 He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

15 "In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali, beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River, in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

16 the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.

And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,

a light has shined."

17 From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

## REFLECT

Repentance involves more than weeping over our wrongdoings and confessing our sins. Although these are genuine expressions of remorse, repentance doesn't end with getting into good standing with God but is the beginning of God's plan for redemption. "*Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*" (Matthew 4:17) The kind of repentance Jesus speaks of, compels us to pray, "*May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done*"... That positions the heart of His people to access the power of God to be displayed here "*...on earth, as it is in heaven.*" (Matthew 6:10) In failing to embrace the complete mission for which God sent His Son, we miss the ultimate intent of our Father's heart to not only forgive His children but to redeem His creation. God wants to do more than wipe our sin slate clean; His will is for us to embrace the full spectrum of repentance in alignment with the complete mission of Christ.

The Son of God brought the hope of the world to earth with Him. Before returning to His Father, He promised those who remain in Him will do "*...even greater works...*" and that if we "*...ask for anything...*" in His name, He will do it! (John 14:12-13) Therefore, the Kingdom realm is within reach for those who believe in Him and obey Jesus' command to repent. Learning to recognize this direct connection between repentance and redemption should empower us to turn from the limitations of sin as we "*...let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you...*" (Romans 12:2) Repentance results in redemption, which is precisely what Jesus came here to do.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR: an invitation to the Kingdom of God

FREEDOM FOR PRISONERS: release from sin, strongholds, and shame

SIGHT FOR THE BLIND: a renewed vision for God's perfect will

RELEASE FOR THE OPPRESSED: renewed strength, opportunity and hope

Heaven is not merely something to look forward to; His power is available to us now! Authentic repentance gives us access to Kingdom power that redeems people, reforms households, restores families, revives communities and changes the world. Until we can approach God

from His Kingdom perspective, surrender to Christ's mission and commit to pray, "*May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*" for the fullness for which Christ called us into repentance. (Matthew 6:10).

Many Christians have likely conquered the short list of "sociably unacceptable" sins but have yet to access the transforming power of the Kingdom of Heaven. If you've accepted Christ as your Savior, this is not an issue of salvation or whether someone will go to Heaven someday. The question is, how much of Heaven's power do you desire in your life today? As we enter Day 5 of our Fast, we've been commanded to repent, so that our souls long to participate in Christ's mission to redeem man and restore the damage man's sin has caused. How is unrepentant sin hampering you from cooperating with His mission and hindering the power of Heaven from touching your unredeemed places? Ask God's Holy Spirit to reveal the sin separating you from His mission and invite Him to continue speaking to you on this issue throughout our Fast. As He reveals and refines this message, you can join Christ's mission by obeying His command to repent in your heart and do your part to redeem the wrong caused by your actions. Welcoming the complete process and purpose of repentance connects us to the Kingdom of Heaven, accessing its redemptive power to break the stronghold of sin and bring forth redemptive healing. The Kingdom is near. Repent! Heaven is within reach.



**Matthew 16:13-28**

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

14 “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

15 Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

17 Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. 18 Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

20 Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

21 From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.

22 But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, LORD,” he said. “This will never happen to you!”

23 Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. 26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds. 28 And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.”

## REFLECT

Before the Kingdom could be ushered in, Jesus must first be ushered out. But His disciples could not grasp the high cost of events to come and Jesus knew that for Peter to be effective in changing the world, he would first need to change his thinking. In preparing His disciples to take up their cross, Peter's confession of Jesus' deity became the Rock upon which Christ would build His Church. However, his response to the suffering that must first occur posed a stumbling block in Peter's character that Jesus would need to remove. In one breath, a confession; in the next, contempt. Peter's indignance for the requirements of God's plan to pay for our sins certainly deserved Jesus' harsh rebuke.

*"Get away from me, Satan!"* (Matthew 16:23), was no implication of demonic control or possession but a well-deserved reprimand, for Peter unwittingly agreed with the adversary. Without correction, his negative response could unintentionally set a *"...dangerous trap..."* for the Savior in equipping the disciples to accomplish God's will. Although Peter was genuinely concerned for the well-being of Jesus, in this moment, the outspoken disciple came up short as he counted the cost of following Christ and his fear of suffering compounded his urge to control. If left unchecked, the Rock would become a stumbling block to his own Kingdom assignment and others for whom the Kingdom was prepared. Like most of us, Peter was *"... seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."* (Matthew 16:23), and Jesus needed His leader to increase his vision for God's plan, God's will and Christ's Church, believing *"...all the powers of hell will not conquer it."* (Matthew 16:18).

As we continue to examine ourselves through the process of repentance, consider the mindset of Peter that incited Jesus to issue His sharp rebuke. How do you respond when the Holy Spirit scolds you for refusing to make necessary adjustments to your health, relationships, family or career that must take place to align your heart closer to God's will? How could your limited perspective limit God's plan for your life by seeing things merely

from a human point of view? How has your refusal to submit to God's Word in Scripture and His voice in your heart unknowingly brought you into an agreement with Satan? Is your mindset a stumbling block restricting God's Kingdom power in your life or worse, entry into the Kingdom for someone else?

Praise God! Jesus followed Peter's famous rebuke with a clear plan of action. "*If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me*" (Matthew 16:24). A rebuke is a call for repentance and an opportunity to correct the course. As we examine our response to the Spirit's rebuke, consider the spiritual consequences of trying to "...*hang on to your life...*" and the Kingdom rewards of giving up your life for Christ's sake (Matthew 16:25). "*For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all the people according to their deeds.*" (Matthew 16:27)





**Mark 9:1-13**

1 Jesus went on to say, “I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God arrive in great power!”

2 Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus’ appearance was transformed, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them. 4 Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus.

5 Peter exclaimed, “Rabbi, it’s wonderful for us to be here! Let’s make three shelters as memorials— one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 6 He said this because he didn’t really know what else to say, for they were all terrified.

7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him.” 8 Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus with them.

9 As they went back down the mountain, he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 So they kept it to themselves, but they often asked each other what he meant by “rising from the dead.”

11 Then they asked him, “Why do the teachers of religious law insist that Elijah must return before the Messiah comes?”

12 Jesus responded, “Elijah is indeed coming first to get everything ready. Yet why do the Scriptures say that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be treated with utter contempt? 13 But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they chose to abuse him, just as the Scriptures predicted.”

## REFLECT

Six days after Peter confessed that Jesus is “...*the Messiah, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16), Jesus “...*took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone.*” (Mark 9:2). Although Jesus often spoke openly in predicting His death, the disciples’ first-century worldview limited their comprehension of a Kingdom yet to come. Knowing the weight of the assignment ahead for His friends, Jesus orchestrated the inner circle expedition to prepare their minds and strengthen their faith for the events that would soon unfold. He led His men to a higher place to show them a bigger picture of God’s plan, with a clear view of the Messiah’s mission.

Lifting the curtain between Heaven and Earth, a glimpse of God’s glory shone a light on His Son. As Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in dazzling white, the disciples were terrified and amazed as they witnessed the Transfiguration of Christ and a transfer of authority and power. With the Law complete and prophecy fulfilled, the heroes from history stepped aside to make way for salvation. The disciples’ view of the Messiah was evolving and this pivotal moment on the mountain revealed greater insight into God’s greater purpose. Jesus had not called, equipped and trained them to revolutionize Israel from the oppression of Rome. He was getting them ready to release all of humanity from the oppression of sin. The mission was never about freedom for one people of one nation; it was about redeeming mankind to reclaim the world.

As we continue our pre-planned excursion through the Fast, consider how your view of God’s plan for His Kingdom is evolving. Each day is an ascent as you study scripture, spend time in prayer and set your intentions to submit to His will. Just as Jesus needed to lead His disciples to a higher place to reveal a higher purpose, He is leading you. How is the Holy Spirit transforming your perspective from mere human to Heaven-minded, earthly to eternal, carnal to Kingdom? Keep following Jesus to a higher place as we continue the Fast. “*I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God arrive in great power!*” (Mark 9:1)





# WEEK 2







## **WEEK 2 ACTIVITY CHALLENGE**

What values guide your life and help you remain on course?

Take time this week to think and pray through your four guiding life values and attach a verse to each value.

Write a vision statement for your life using your four values.

Have you ever thought about doing this for your family? Check out how to write a Family Mission statement on page 108.







## GROUP STUDY

### LOOK BACK

1. How has your relationship with Jesus been the past week?

Questions to consider...

- How have you obeyed what you have learned?
- What are you grateful for?

2. Who did you share last week's lesson with?

Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach us as we study God's Word.

### LOOK UP

#### READ THE TEXT

Repeat the text in your own words or if studying with a group, have one group member do this.

3. What does this text teach us about God?

Questions to consider...

- What does it say about His character?

- What does it say about His plans?
- What does it say about how He relates to us?

4. What does this text say to me?

Questions to consider...

- Is there a sin I need to address?
- Is there a promise I need to hold on to?
- Is there an example I should follow?
- Is there a command I need to obey?
- Is there a Gospel truth?

### **LOOK FORWARD**

5. What am I going to do this week because of this text?

6. Who do I think needs to know this?

**PRAY** for the Holy Spirit to help us do what the Bible says and share what we learned with one person.

**Mark 9:14-29**

14 When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. 15 When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him.

16 “What is all this arguing about?” Jesus asked.

17 One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, “Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won’t let him talk. 18 And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn’t do it.”

19 Jesus said to them, “You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

20 So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth.

21 “How long has this been happening?” Jesus asked the boy’s father.

He replied, “Since he was a little boy. 22 The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can.”

23 “What do you mean, ‘If I can’?” Jesus asked.

“Anything is possible if a person believes.”

24 The father instantly cried out, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!”

25 When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. “Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak,” he said. “I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!”

26 Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, “He’s dead.” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, “Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit?”

29 Jesus replied, “This kind can be cast out only by prayer.”

## REFLECT

As we begin week 2 of our Fast, strongholds begin breaking, oppression starts lifting, breakthroughs begin happening and prayers are being answered for people that are experiencing the power of the Kingdom of God here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

But what if this has yet to be your experience? What if you've kept your commitment to fasting, been consistent in your quiet time, faithful in prayer and still, nothing? No response from God, not even a sign that your prayers are going past your ceiling. Or what if things are worse now than before you started? You believe God's Word and press on with prayer, but there's still the stronghold that won't let go, the death grip that won't release and the thing that keeps you awake at night that you cannot control. Maybe you're worn out and worn down but haven't given up – yet. But you're struggling to hold on to belief, teetering on the edge of letting go.

As Jesus encounters the father of a demon-possessed boy, this is precisely the spiritual conundrum he is in. Disappointed, the disciples couldn't heal his son; the father was caught in the middle of the most common Christian paradox of all time. His response says it all when Jesus poses a question concerning his faith. *"...I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"* (Mark 9:24)

Desperate and exhausted, the father's faith was fading along with any hope that his son could be healed. Perhaps you also know the feeling of being wrung out with worry and despair, familiar with the anguish of this heart-rendering spiritual dilemma. You want to believe, yet find yourself filled with doubt, inwardly wrestling through the crisis of belief in vain. Feelings of hopelessness are genuine. Indeed, the father felt helpless as he pleaded with Jesus to *"... Have mercy on us and help if you can."* (Mark 9:22) To which Jesus responded, *"Anything is possible if a person believes."* (Mark 9:23)

When facing a soul-crushing season tormented by the enemy, it's crucial to remember the IF is everything. The IF makes the difference for us in believing Jesus is good, or that Jesus is God.

When you believe Jesus is God, demons flee at the mention of His name; oppression evacuates with the sound of our worship and mountains move by the strength of our faith.

However, the struggle is real when the battle is on and when we feel like we can't continue, believe that Jesus can. Although the boy's father questioned his belief, he didn't give up and go home when the disciples failed; he went to Jesus. Because he persisted, Jesus responded, rebuking the evil spirit, saying, "*...I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!*" (Mark 9:25)

Finally, the father got His miracle, the boy got his freedom and the disciples learned that "*...This kind can be cast out only by prayer.*" (Mark 9:29) Once the enemy latches on, he will not let go without a fight. When Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, the boy shrieked, convulsing violently until he appeared dead. When your faith is perplexed by the paradox of spiritual belief, press into Jesus. When you pray, describe every disappointing, disturbing and demonic detail. Have the same conversation the father had with Jesus, telling Him *that you do believe*, asking Him to *help you overcome your unbelief*.

As we continue the Fast, consider the areas of your life the enemy has latched onto. Press into unbelief through prayer, Scripture and worship. Don't let go until God shows up, the demons are gone and the people you are praying for are finally set free.



**Mark 5:21-32**

21 Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. 22 Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, 23 pleading fervently with him. "My little daughter is dying," he said. "Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live."

24 Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. 25 A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. 26 She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. 28 For she thought to herself, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed." 29 Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition.

30 Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my robe?"

31 His disciples said to him, "Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

32 But he kept on looking around to see who had done it.



## REFLECT

Jesus and the disciples crossed the sea of Galilee and when they came to shore, a large crowd gathered around them. As multitudes amassed, people arrived from all over, pushing, pulling and pressing to claim the miracle they came for. Among them was a woman who suffered an incurable condition that caused her to bleed for 12 years. Drained of her finances from searching for a cure, she found no relief from her social stigma nor a remedy for her sickness. In fact, she had gotten worse. Without any hope of recovery, someone came along and told her about Jesus.

In great desperation, she rose and took a risk to find the miracle man she had only just heard of. Under Jewish law, she knew that in her condition, she could not touch Him without causing Him to become “unclean.” But with faith, she thought, *“If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed.”* (Mark 5:28) So she took a chance and touched the hem of His robe. After 12 long years of sickness and shame, the woman could feel a miracle take place as the bleeding stopped and she was healed.

*“...Who touched my robe?”* (Mark 5:30), Jesus asked, as healing power went out of His body. The disciples responded that it was impossible to know because of the size of the crowd. Jesus already knew the answer but asked the question to bring her forward publicly and confirm she was healed by faith.

Like the crowds who came to receive blessings from Jesus, we press in and pray hard, hoping He will notice when we show up, answer our prayers and meet our needs. But like the bleeding woman reaching out from the crowd, Jesus knows the difference between the touch of many who come to Him desperate in need and the touch of one who is desperate with faith.

From bleeding bodies to bleeding hearts, we've all experienced times of distress at some point and many have endured long seasons of suffering. Like the woman with the issue of constant bleeding, we arrive at the end of our rope, drained of resources, in despair with little hope and desperately in need of God's merciful, healing touch. But few of us express desperate faith in a way that moves us to action, pushes us past our problems and gets us within reach of our miracle.

Without risk, there is no faith and faith is the key that opens the door to the power of the Kingdom. In what area of your life are you in most need of healing? Compassion? Restoration? Desperate people do desperate things. What will you do to hear Jesus say, "... *Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.*" (Mark 5:34)



**John 9**

1 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. 2 “Rabbi,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?”

3 “It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. 4 We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. 5 But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.”

6 Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes. 7 He told him, “Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “sent”). So the man went and washed and came back seeing!

8 His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some said he was, and others said, “No, he just looks like him!”

But the beggar kept saying, “Yes, I am the same one!”

10 They asked, “Who healed you? What happened?”

11 He told them, “The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.’ So I went and washed, and now I can see!”

12 “Where is he now?” they asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied.

13 Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, 14 because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him. 15 The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, “He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!”

16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath.” Others said, “But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?” So there was a deep division of opinion among them.

17 Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, “What’s your opinion about this man who healed you?”

The man replied, “I think he must be a prophet.”

18 The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. 19 They asked them, “Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?”

20 His parents replied, “We know this is our son and that he was born blind, 21 but we don’t know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself.” 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish

## READ

### John 9 (continued)

leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. 23 That's why they said, "He is old enough. Ask him."

24 So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, "God should get the glory for this because we know this man Jesus is a sinner."

25 "I don't know whether he is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!"

26 "But what did he do?" they asked. "How did he heal you?"

27 "Look!" the man exclaimed. "I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

28 Then they cursed him and said, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! 29 We know God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where this man comes from."

30 "Why, that's very strange!" the man replied. "He healed my eyes, and yet you don't know where he comes from? 31 We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. 32 Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he couldn't have done it."

34 "You were born a total sinner!" they answered. "Are you trying to teach us?" And they threw him out of the synagogue.

35 When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

36 The man answered, "Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him."

37 "You have seen him," Jesus said, "and he is speaking to you!"

38 "Yes, LORD, I believe!" the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.

39 Then Jesus told him, "I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind."

40 Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, "Are you saying we're blind?"

41 "If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty," Jesus replied. "But you remain guilty because you claim you can see."

## REFLECT

Nothing is fair in our sin-fallen world. From disability and disease to disaster and tragedy, the innocent often seem to suffer the most. While there's no simple answer to why God allows suffering, the testimony of His Word and life change in His people are evidence that the source of suffering can become the gateway God enters to reveal Himself as the Light of the World.

When the disciples encountered a man who had been blind since birth, they asked Jesus if this man's condition resulted from his sin or the sin of his parents. Using the opportunity as a teachable moment, Jesus corrected them, replying, "...*This happened so that the power of God could be seen in him*". (John 9:3). With spit and mud spread over his eyes, the Light of the World gave sight to a blind man as neighbors and onlookers watched in disbelief. Before their eyes, a blind beggar was born again and as word spread, so did his testimony, "...*I was blind, and now I can see*". (John 9:25).

No different than the Pharisees who questioned God's power then, many Christ followers are still skeptics today. Though the Pharisees believed Jesus shouldn't do God's work on the Sabbath, modern Christianity seems to think that God should always do all the work. However, a spiritual principle in plain sight of this Scripture indicates that when it comes to our desire to be freed from our condition, even the most helpless of blind beggars must do their part to participate in their healing.

Jesus told the blind man to go wash in the pool of Siloam, so "...*the man went and washed and came back seeing!*" (John 9:7). When people asked about his miraculous healing, he testified, "...*I went and washed, and now I can see!*" (John 9:11) Whether needing healing from affliction or deliverance from sin, activating God's power is a participatory event, not a passive experience. Jesus did His part, the man did his part and as a result, he received miraculous vision. When we are willing to admit our need and trust God's methods, we allow Him to reshape our pain & suffering.

Whether physical, mental, emotional, relational or spiritual, there's no debilitation God can't heal. But if even a blind beggar is required to take action and participate in his healing, then expect something to be required of you. Instead of asking, "Why did this happen to me?" or "What did I do wrong to deserve this?" ask God instead what you must do to endure your trial until you're able to see The Kingdom from His perspective. When we do our part, God always does His part. Ask Him for eyes to see His power is at work through your weakness, so the power of God can be seen through you (John 9:3).





## READ

### Mark 5:1-21

1 So they arrived at the other side of the lake, in the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus climbed out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the burial caves and could no longer be restrained, even with a chain. 4 Whenever he was put into chains and shackles—as he often was—he snapped the chains from his wrists and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Day and night he wandered among the burial caves and in the hills, howling and cutting himself with sharp stones.

6 When Jesus was still some distance away, the man saw him, ran to meet him, and bowed low before him. 7 With a shriek, he screamed, “Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In the name of God, I beg you, don’t torture me!” 8 For Jesus had already said to the spirit, “Come out of the man, you evil spirit.”

9 Then Jesus demanded, “What is your name?”

And he replied, “My name is Legion, because there are many of us inside this man.” 10 Then the evil spirits begged him again and again not to send them to some distant place.

11 There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby. 12 “Send us into those pigs,” the spirits begged. “Let us enter them.”

13 So Jesus gave them permission. The evil spirits came out of the man and entered the pigs, and

the entire herd of about 2,000 pigs plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water.

14 The herdsmen fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran. People rushed out to see what had happened. 15 A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons. He was sitting there fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid. 16 Then those who had seen what happened told the others about the demon-possessed man and the pigs. 17 And the crowd began pleading with Jesus to go away and leave them alone.

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. 19 But Jesus said, “No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the LORD has done for you and how merciful he has been.” 20 So the man started off to visit the Ten Towns of that region and began to proclaim the great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed at what he told them.

21 Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore.

## REFLECT

Arriving in the region of Gerasene, Jesus encountered an unusually violent, demon-possessed man, whose miserable life was reduced to roaming among the dead, buried in tombs. His rage overpowered all attempts of physical restraint and his mental, emotional, and spiritual capacity were held captive by invisible forces. Confined by torment, imprisoned by oppression and shackled to shame, self-mutilation seemed the only relief from his wretched existence. Then, one day, Jesus arrived and removed the man's chains, restored his mind and set him free.

Running to Jesus as He rowed onto shore, the double-minded demoniac bowed low in reverence before shrieking in protest. But the Son of the Most High refused to be taunted as He confronted the demons by name. Commanding them out of the man, He cast them into pigs that plunged off a cliff and the entire herd fell to its death. Because Jesus doesn't make deals with the devil, the transfer of spirits from human to swine was in no way a negotiation with demons; He used the opportunity to foreshadow their fate as water was their preview to fire. (Revelation 20:14)

When the herdsmen witnessed this wild encounter, they spread news of what happened around town. The pig owners lost their herds, the locals lost their entertainment, and it all came down to Jesus setting a man free. So, as the people told Jesus to "*...go away and leave us alone*" (Mark 5:17), they let it be known that a man's soul was worth less than their pigs, his dignity was worth less than their laughs and Christ had cost them too much.

We don't have to look far to find people filled with legions of rage, oppression and angst. But we often must remember to look at ourselves, our role in the Kingdom and our value towards challenging people. As the response of the pig owners exposed their value for pigs over healing and freedom of a human soul, what is Jesus saying about the way you express value for lost people? As the herders witnessed the exorcism, it undoubtedly wasn't the first time they looked to the wild antics of the naked, possessed man as an entertaining distraction on long, boring nights. Have you considered how entertaining yourself with nudity and violence is enjoyed at the expense of another's human dignity? Not to mention,

filling a void with perversion opens the door to oppression, depression and self-harm, not unlike the symptoms the possessed man experienced.

As Jesus instructed the disciples to sail across the sea in the middle of a storm (Mark 4:35-41), He moved them from the comfort of their clean Jewish culture to the unclean region of Gerasene to heal a demonically unclean, uncivilized man. He intentionally went out of His way to teach them (and us) that even demon-possessed Gentiles are worth going the extra distance with the price He paid on the cross. As Jesus brought the disciples into this story to demonstrate the Kingdom, how is He positioning you to become part of someone's Good News story of freedom and healing?

The power that expels demons from possessed people is the same power that exposes pig owners and herders for who they are. Who is the Holy Spirit bringing to mind and how is He reshaping your values toward people? Just as Jesus took the disciples across the seas in a storm, the Holy Spirit is moving us from the comfort of cul-de-sacs and social circles to the fringes of society. How far will you go with Good News of God's freedom taking His Kingdom into Gerasene-like places?



## READ

### Luke 10:1-24

1 The LORD now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. 2 These were his instructions to them: “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the LORD who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields. 3 Now go, and remember that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. 4 Don’t take any money with you, nor a traveler’s bag, nor an extra pair of sandals. And don’t stop to greet anyone on the road.

5 “Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, ‘May God’s peace be on this house.’ 6 If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. 7 Don’t move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don’t hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay.

8 “If you enter a town and it welcomes you, eat whatever is set before you. 9 Heal the sick, and tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God is near you now.’ 10 But if a town refuses to welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 ‘We wipe even the dust of your town from our feet to show that we have abandoned you to your fate. And know this—the Kingdom of God is near!’ 12 I assure you, even wicked Sodom will be better off than such a town on judgment day.

13 “What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. 14 Yes, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on judgment day than you. 15 And you people of Capernaum, will you be honored in heaven? No, you will go down to the place of the dead.”

16 Then he said to the disciples, “Anyone who accepts your message is also accepting me. And anyone who rejects you is rejecting me. And anyone who rejects me is rejecting God, who sent me.”

17 When the seventy-two disciples returned, they joyfully reported to him, “LORD, even the demons obey us when we use your name!”

18 “Yes,” he told them, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning! 19 Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you. 20 But don’t rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven.”

21 At that same time Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and he said, “O Father, LORD of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way.



## **Luke 10:1-24 (continued)**

22 “My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

23 Then when they were alone, he turned to the disciples and said, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you have seen. 24 I tell you, many prophets and kings longed to see what you see, but they didn’t see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn’t hear it.”

## REFLECT

Jesus “...chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead” (Luke 10:1), to prepare the way of the LORD. Their instructions were to heal the sick when welcomed and shake the dust when rejected, going from town to town sharing the Good News. But no matter where they went or how people responded, NO-MATTER-WHAT, they were to announce to everyone everywhere that “...*The Kingdom of God is near.*” (Luke 10:8-11).

On day one of our Fast, we read that Jesus announced that He will give the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 16:19) Along the way, we've encountered those who welcomed Him, those who rejected Him, the countless He healed and the disciples He trained to use the keys and spread the Good News until His return.

As we enter day 13 of our Fast, prepare to enter a turning point as a disciple on an assignment. Once again, the Holy Spirit is passing the keys, commissioning new and more disciples to go into all the world with the Good News of His Father's Kingdom (Matthew 28:19-20). The harvest is here and no longer are we to sit as spectators in church buildings- we're called to be representatives of God's Kingdom.

As the LORD sent 72 new disciples to teach and prepare the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, He is sending us to prepare the way for His return and the mission is still the same. To share God's love, forgiveness and mercy with our testimony of joy and salvation - deliberately, intentionally and unashamedly to the people and places assigned to us. When God places people in our hearts and opportunities in our path, “*Don't take any money...nor a traveler's bag...*” (Luke 10:4), but rely on the Holy Spirit to provide everything you need to invite them into His Kingdom. Jesus doesn't need our bag of tricks to convince family or influence our friends; His name speaks for itself. Be authentic and humble and beware of distractions.

When The Holy Spirit reveals a person or place to you, respond by going immediately, knowing He is with you.. One of our missions is to bring forth the 'peace' of God's Kingdom in our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces and communities. Just as the 72 brand-new disciples were learning to practice their faith, we must also practice and learn by going and doing. We must get comfortable extending words and actions that bring spiritual and physical peace and healing to friends, family and strangers in such a way they can see Jesus. Be confident, knowing that anyone who accepts your message is also accepting Jesus and anyone who rejects you is rejecting Him. (Luke 10:16)

Notice the ability to heal the sick, preach the Kingdom and have “...*authority over all the power of the enemy...*” (Luke 10:19), wasn't only reserved for the original 12 disciples. Because the 72 were willing to go as “...*lambs among wolves*” (Luke 10:3), Jesus granted access to His power to accomplish His will. And for those of us who desire the Kingdom, we too, are given access to the same power and more, through His Holy Spirit: “...*anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.*” (John 14:12)

Although some are familiar with practicing this level of discipleship, others may not be. For those who rejoice that your “...*names are registered in heaven*” (Luke 10:20), then “*Blessed are the eyes that have seen what you have seen.*” (Luke 10:23) For the “...*wise and clever,*...” who question the power of God to work through His people, the power of the Kingdom will be hidden. (Luke 10:21)

As we continue our Fast, ask the LORD of the harvest to send more workers into His fields. Pray for increased urgency & courage to reach those who don't know the Good News. In Jesus' name and through His Spirit, may He teach us to access His authority over the enemy as we prepare for the way for His return, unlocking the door to His Kingdom. (Luke 10:19).





**John 10**

1 “I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! 2 But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. 5 They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice.”

6 Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, 7 so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. 9 Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. 10 The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. 12 A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. 13 The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.

14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, 15 just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

17 “The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”

19 When he said these things, the people[were again divided in their opinions about him. 20 Some said, “He’s demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?” 21 Others said, “This doesn’t sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

22 It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. 23 He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon’s Colonnade. 24 The people surrounded him and asked, “How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

25 Jesus replied, “I have already told you, and you don’t believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father’s name. 26 But you don’t believe me because

## READ

### John 10 (continued)

you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, 29 for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. 30 The Father and I are one."

31 Once again the people picked up stones to kill him. 32 Jesus said, "At my Father's direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?"

33 They replied, "We're stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God."

34 Jesus replied, "It is written in your own Scriptures that God said to certain leaders of the people, 'I say, you are gods!'" 35 And you know that the Scriptures cannot be altered. So if those people who received God's message were called 'gods,' 36 why do you call it blasphemy when I say, 'I am the Son of God'? After all, the Father set me apart and sent me into the world. 37 Don't believe me unless I carry out my Father's work. 38 But if I do his work, believe in the evidence of the miraculous works I have done, even if you don't believe me. Then you will know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father."

39 Once again they tried to arrest him, but he got away and left them. 40 He went beyond the Jordan

River near the place where John was first baptizing and stayed there awhile. 41 And many followed him. "John didn't perform miraculous signs," they remarked to one another, "but everything he said about this man has come true." 42 And many who were there believed in Jesus.

## REFLECT

Has the Good Shepherd called you by name? If He has, perhaps you didn't even know you were lost, but you KNOW the exact moment you were found. Through His gate, He leads us and by faith, we follow Him into eternal salvation. Grazing in freedom, we can find rest in His grace. And though thieves and robbers plot to sneak in and steal, we're protected and safe under His watch, knowing "...*No one can snatch...*" us from His hand (John 10:28). But as we rest secure among our flock of saved sheep, the Good Shepherd's gate will not always stay open. As Jesus searches for those "*not in this sheepfold*" He needs our voice to call for the lost and He "...*must bring them also*" (John 10:16), before His gate shuts for good.

As we "...*come and go freely...*" through His gate (John 10:9), we have the privilege of entering into the presence of Jesus to worship and going out into the world to witness. As we count the lost sheep in our neighborhoods, offices and communities, we should never be satisfied that some sheep have followed our Shepherd's call when people we know outside of His sheepfold don't even recognize His voice. As Jesus speaks through the saved to call for the lost, how are you using your voice? Have you been silent about Jesus in certain sheep circles or vocal about your salvation? Would flocks of lost sheep say you sound arrogant and aggressive about your faith, or do they hear you speak in tones of mercy and grace? Can a lost sheep trust the words that come from your mouth, or are you unquestionably honest and trustworthy?

"...*no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen...*" (Matthew 24:36), but there will be a day when salvation's entrance through the Shepherd's gate will shut for good. And at that time, "...*he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.*" (Matthew 25:32-33)

Outside of your family, who are the lost sheep the Good Shepherd has assigned to you? What are their names? How will you invite them into His eternal sheepfold? What steps will you take to lead and disciple them through His gate of salvation? Only the Gatekeeper knows how long the gate remains open. Before the gate shuts for good at those of us who are saved must do all we can to lead the unsaved to the Father's sheepfold.



# WEEK 3



# WEEK 3



## TEACHING STUDY

### PURSUIT

Day 15 - Sunday, January 21, 2024

TEXT:

---

---

---

---

NOTES:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**TAKEAWAY\*\*:** What are seven daily actions that I need to place in my day to help me pursue God's purpose for my life?

\*\*Complete activity on the next page during week 3 of the Fast.



## WEEK 3 ACTIVITY CHALLENGE

What are seven daily actions that I need to place in my day to help me pursue God's purpose for my life?

What daily behaviors, habits, actions or goals are going to help you pursue God's purpose for your life? Create a daily framework that will reinforce your identity, values and purpose. Make these simple and achievable goals (things you want to do) not avoidance goals (things you don't want to do). Be clear not fuzzy. Fuzzy goals get fuzzy results. Drill down to seven achievable daily behaviors that will guide you daily and help you stay on course for 2024.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Make it a daily goal to check-off four of your seven daily behaviors, habits, actions or goals.

Now that you have cleaned out the things/stuff from your life, established your core values, created a vision statement and determined your daily seven, think about one goal that the Holy Spirit is impressing upon you for 2024.

Is it easy? Can it be accomplished by your own abilities? Can you do it without God's help? Your goal should be so big that the only way it can possibly be accomplished is if God shows up! He can do immeasurably more than you think or imagine. Take Him up on His challenge.

My goal for 2024:



In week 1, we emptied our refrigerators of the things we needed to remove. Now, let's refill our refrigerator! You decide what goes in your life, no one else does. What has the Holy Spirit said to you about what should be in your life?

Let's fill the shelves with what we've learned and what we've already decided and THEN with what room we have left, fill in the other things. Who you are, your purpose and what you're pursuing should take the primary space and everything else should fit around those.





## GROUP STUDY

### LOOK BACK

1. How has your relationship with Jesus been the past week?

Questions to consider...

- How have you obeyed what you have learned?
- What are you grateful for?

2. Who did you share last week's lesson with?

Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach us as we study God's Word.

### LOOK UP

#### READ THE TEXT

Repeat the text in your own words or if studying with a group, have one group member do this.

3. What does this text teach us about God?

Questions to consider...

- What does it say about His character?

- What does it say about His plans?
- What does it say about how He relates to us?

#### 4. What does this text say to me?

#### Questions to consider...

- Is there a sin I need to address?
- Is there a promise I need to hold on to?
- Is there an example I should follow?
- Is there a command I need to obey?
- Is there a Gospel truth?

#### **LOOK FORWARD**

5. What am I going to do this week because of this text?

6. Who do I think needs to know this?

**PRAY** for the Holy Spirit to help us do what the Bible says and share what we learned with one person.

**Mark 4**

1 Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. 2 He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

3 "Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. 4 As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. 5 Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. 6 But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died. 7 Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. 8 Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" 9 Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

10 Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant.

11 He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, 12 so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled:

'When they see what I do,

they will learn nothing.

When they hear what I say,

they will not understand.

Otherwise, they will turn to me

and be forgiven.'"

13 Then Jesus said to them, "If you can't understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? 14 The farmer plants seed by taking God's word to others. 15 The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. 16 The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. 17 But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. 18 The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God's word, 19 but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. 20 And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

21 Then Jesus asked them, "Would anyone light a lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed? Of course not! A lamp is placed on a stand, where

## READ

### Mark 4 (continued)

its light will shine. 22 For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light. 23 Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

24 Then he added, “Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. 25 To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.”

26 Jesus also said, “The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, while he’s asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens. 28 The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. 29 And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.”

30 Jesus said, “How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? 31 It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. It is the smallest of all seeds, 32 but it becomes the largest of all garden plants; it grows long branches, and birds can make nests in its shade.”

33 Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could

understand. 34 In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables; but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them.

35 As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” 36 So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). 37 But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

38 Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?”

39 When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. 40 Then he asked them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

41 The disciples were absolutely terrified. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “Even the wind and waves obey him!”

## REFLECT

*"...Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."* (Mark 4:9) Jesus taught using parables to unveil spiritual truths so that only those with receptive hearts would be permitted to understand. He withholds from those whose hearts are not responsive or ready to help bring forth the fruit of His Kingdom.

In the parable of the four soils, the seed is the Word of God and the four soils represent various ways we tend to respond to His Word. As the Holy Spirit reveals the meaning of the soils, what is He telling about your heart? If *"A tree is identified by its fruit..."* (Luke 6:43), what spiritual fruits are you visibly producing?

*"...If you can't understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables?"*(Mark 6:13), let alone the mysteries of the Kingdom of God? As we begin our last week together, ask God to teach you how to let His Word till the soil in your heart. As broken ground invites deeper seeds, allow God to help you break spiritual ground, addressing areas that have been hardened by the busyness of life and worries of the world. With each turn of the soil, His Holy Spirit unlocks the mysteries of His coming Kingdom and your purpose in bringing it forth.

As the leaves on the trees turn green, *"In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that the Kingdom of God is near."* (Luke 21:30-31) Therefore, *"... Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD that He may come and shower righteousness upon you."* (Hosea 10:12)



**Matthew 18**

1 About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

2 Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. 3 Then he said, “I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. 4 So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

5 “And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me. 6 But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

7 “What sorrow awaits the world, because it tempts people to sin. Temptations are inevitable, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting. 8 So if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one hand or one foot than to be thrown into eternal fire with both of your hands and feet. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

10 “Beware that you don’t look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father.

12 “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? 13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander away! 14 In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish.

15 “If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. 16 But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. 17 If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

18 “I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.

19 “I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. 20 For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”

21 Then Peter came to him and asked, “LORD, how often should I forgive someone [i] who sins against me? Seven times?”



## READ

### Matthew 18 (continued)

22 “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”

23 “Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. 24 In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. 25 He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.

26 “But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ 27 Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

28 “But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

29 “His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. 30 But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

31 “When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. 32 Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous

debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ 34 Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

35 “That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

## REFLECT

For approximately three years, the disciples had front-row seats to all the miracles and mysteries of Jesus as they traveled together from town to town, preaching the Good News of the coming Kingdom. Focused on His mission, Jesus leveraged every public interaction and intimate conversation with His inner circle as a discipleship masterclass for Kingdom building. Knowing how He would return to Heaven, the Son needed to teach them about His Father so they could continue building His Kingdom long after He was gone.

Financially and culturally oppressed by Roman rule, the disciples imagined ushering in a golden age of freedom and self-governance in Israel with peace and prosperity for the Jews. And as Jesus' right-hand men, they assumed they had earned their rank among the greatest in the Kingdom. But as they asked Jesus, "...*Who is the greatest...*?" (Matthew 18:1), He picked up a child and called them out, explaining what God truly considers "great" in the Kingdom and that the Kingdom is within.

In a world of opposites, Jesus flips the value system, because the key to unlocking greatness in the Kingdom of God begins with humility. As we read His masterful response to the disciples' question, it could be understood as something like this: repentance, humility, presenting yourself as innocent, protecting the innocence of others, not tempting others to sin, distancing yourself from anything that causes you to sin (Matthew 18:1-10), looking for those who have strayed, bringing others into the fold (Matthew 18:12-14), maintaining integrity when confronting disputes, desiring reconciliation, seeking unity among the church, guarding the unity of the church, working toward forgiveness (Matthew 18:15-20), practicing extravagant forgiveness, extending extravagant grace and trusting God to distribute justice. (Matthew 18:21-35)

As Jesus unlocked the path to greatness for the disciples, what did His Holy Spirit reveal about humility? In correcting their motive for justice and power, He spoke of His Kingdom as an inward reality. What is the Holy Spirit teaching you about building God's Kingdom from the foundation of this inner reality?

In teaching the attributes of humility paraphrased above, Jesus led His disciples to discover that achieving greatness from the inward reality of Kingdom principles, our humility has the power to manifest the Kingdom in the outward reality of others.

The disciples spent time with Jesus to unravel the mysteries and the same is true for us. Abstract principles of spiritual truths are hidden from those who are not His disciples and are impossible to grasp without the Holy Spirit as our teacher. Meditate on these things through prayer and journaling, asking God's Spirit to show you which areas of your life He is leading you to become great.



## READ

### Mark 10:17-31

17 As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. 19 But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'<sup>[a]</sup>"

20 "Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."

21 Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22 At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!" 24 This amazed them. But Jesus said again, "Dear children, it is very hard<sup>[b]</sup> to enter the Kingdom of God. 25 In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

26 The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked.

27 Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God."

28 Then Peter began to speak up. "We've given up everything to follow you," he said.

29 "Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, 30 will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life. 31 But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then."

## REFLECT

A universal truth difficult to dispute is that there's one Law for the rich and another for the poor. But when Jesus preached the Good News, He changed the game and flipped the system from the Age of Law to the Age of Grace. Rich, poor, Jew, or Gentile, grace leveled the field through salvation in Jesus, making it possible for all to be saved.

When the rich man asked how to enter the Kingdom, he sincerely believed his list of good deeds would earn him a pass through the pearly gates. So, in using his possessions to test his heart, Jesus pointed the way to eternal life, which could only be found through following Him. But the rich man's internal struggle between God, possessions and money was written all over his face as it fell. The rich man faded into the crowd and went away sad.

The rich man's response revealed the heart of the matter in that he relied on possessions and good deeds to pave his path to eternity rather than relying on Jesus to lead His way. "*... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!*" (Mark 10:25) Because money affords self-reliance and self-sufficiency, it hinders our desire to seek the Kingdom and diminishes our need to depend on God. If a rich man feels empty, he can fill the void with luxuries of the world rather than a relationship with our heavenly Father. At the slightest sting of pain, the rich man has options to ease the very suffering God may have intended to use to draw him closer to His Kingdom. And when tempted to value possessions over people, no matter how long his list of "good deeds," he will have broken the two most important commandments - to love God with all his heart and love his neighbor as much as he loves himself (Mark 12:30-31).

If the first thing you think when reading this passage is relief because you don't consider yourself rich, you've missed being led through the eye of the needle to the inward reality of the Kingdom. No matter how many or few zeros you have behind your name, threading the spiritual needle is an equal access opportunity requiring complete denial of self and total reliance on Jesus. God doesn't want your money; He wants your heart. And Jesus isn't teaching us to disown loved ones and live in poverty. He's threading us through the eye of

the needle by challenging our WILLINGNESS to forsake anything or anyone that hinders our love for God, our passion for people and our mission for His Kingdom.

If the first thing you think when reading this passage is relief because you don't consider yourself rich, you may have missed the point. No matter how much money you have, God doesn't want your money; He wants your heart. He wants you to deny self and totally rely on Jesus. Jesus isn't teaching us to disown loved ones and live in poverty. He's threading us through the eye of the needle by challenging our WILLINGNESS to forsake anything or anyone that hinders our love for God, our passion for people and our mission for His Kingdom.

It's one thing to follow the rules of religion, but an entirely different path to follow Jesus. It's one thing to attend church on Sunday and another to meet with Jesus each day. It's one thing to throw a few bucks in the offering plate now and then, but another to commit a percentage of income to build the Kingdom. It's one thing to seek eternal life, but another to forsake all and follow Him.

As Jesus used the rich man's possessions to test his heart, how do you sense God is testing you? With energy invested in school, career and the corporate ladder, how much energy do you spend seeking the Kingdom? After time spent on kids' activities, social activities and personal hobbies, do you still get up, get dressed and attend worship? Do you value your children's spiritual development as much as you value education and health? After retail therapy, expensive dinners, nice vacations and monthly bills, how much is left over for offering and charity?

If you have the money to evade consequences intended to correct your spirit and avoid suffering designed to develop your character, would you take the road less traveled or the easy way out? If Jesus asked you to reduce your lifestyle to increase His Kingdom, forsaking all for the Good News He has for the poor, captive, blind and imprisoned, would you follow Jesus through the eye of the needle, or like the rich man, would you sadly fade away into the crowd?

The amount of money you have is not the object, but money is often the obstacle to our entrance into the Kingdom. Ask God for eyes to see how to thread this needle in such a way that you see the barriers between you and the Kingdom and pray for the courage to remove forsake it all and follow Him.





**Luke 13:10-30**

10 One Sabbath day as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, 11 he saw a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit. She had been bent double for eighteen years and was unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Dear woman, you are healed of your sickness!” 13 Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised God!

14 But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. “There are six days of the week for working,” he said to the crowd. “Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath.”

15 But the LORD replied, “You hypocrites! Each of you works on the Sabbath day! Don’t you untie your ox or your donkey from its stall on the Sabbath and lead it out for water? 16 This dear woman, a daughter of Abraham, has been held in bondage by Satan for eighteen years. Isn’t it right that she be released, even on the Sabbath?”

17 This shamed his enemies, but all the people rejoiced at the wonderful things he did.

18 Then Jesus said, “What is the Kingdom of God like? How can I illustrate it? 19 It is like a tiny mustard seed that a man planted in a garden; it grows and becomes a tree, and the birds make nests in its branches.”

20 He also asked, “What else is the Kingdom of God like? 21 It is like the yeast a woman used in

making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

22 Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he went, always pressing on toward Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, “LORD, will only a few be saved?”

He replied, 24 “Work hard to enter the narrow door to God’s Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. 25 When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘LORD, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ 26 Then you will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ 27 And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.’

28 “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out. 29 And people will come from all over the world—from east and west, north and south—to take their places in the Kingdom of God. 30 And note this: Some who seem least important now will be the greatest then, and some who are the greatest now will be least important then.”

## REFLECT

While teaching in the synagogue on the sabbath, Jesus saw a woman whose spine was terribly crooked. Without hesitation, He speaks healing words over her sickness, "*Then He touched her, and instantly she could stand straight ...*" For the first time in 18 years, the deformed woman was able to stand tall and hold her head high because not only did Jesus heal her body, He also restored her dignity, and oh, "*...How she praised God!*" (Luke 13:13)

However, the religious leader of the synagogue responded using the Sabbath Law to scold the people, exposing his lack of mercy and love. Jesus takes him to task, pointing out that if a man can care for animals on the Sabbath, God can certainly provide a suffering woman with proper rest that comes from true healing. When He "*...shamed His enemies... all the people rejoiced at the wonderful things he did.*" (Luke 13:17), but the chasm between the Kingdom of God and religious leaders continued to widen because they did not recognize the Son of God.

Turning His attention back to the audience, Jesus spoke in parables to help them understand what they just witnessed. Like a tiny mustard seed that grows into an enormous tree or a little yeast that doubles bread in size, the Kingdom of God is here to stay and will continue pushing outward until the whole world has changed.

When the synagogue leader wielded the religious system to stop the supernatural, it couldn't be done. When he used the Sabbath Law to put a lock on compassion, Jesus opened the door to His Father's Kingdom. When Jesus revealed the Kingdom through a miracle of healing, the mercy He showed to a suffering woman exposed the misguided agenda of an indignant man's heart. Jesus was making it clear to everyone listening that no matter how much religion attempts to control it, society tries to dismiss it, or government attempts to silence it - the Kingdom of God cannot be stopped until its mission is complete.

In defense of the religious leader born and raised during the Age of Law, undoubtedly, his job was to preserve the system of his day to keep it in its place. Then suddenly, Jesus arrived

to change the system, opening the door to salvation and bringing humanity into the Age of Grace. But like the leader who didn't recognize the entrance into the Age of Grace, many of us do not perceive the narrow door into the Kingdom Age.

As the religious leader's adherence to a strict system of Law prevented recognition of the Messiah, many of us subscribe to a lazy system of Grace, endangering our entrance through the narrow door of the Kingdom. Church on Sunday, dinner table prayers, holiday-only-generosity and half-hearted attempts to share the Good News are - at best, attempts to enter the Kingdom through general admission. But the wide doors we carve from leftover schedules and paychecks conveniently make more room for ourselves than for Jesus.

Nothing can stop the coming Kingdom! As Jesus made this message abundantly clear then, let's ask His Holy Spirit to make it clear to us now. Though we are saved by faith and not by works, what is He saying to you about "*Work(ing) hard(er) to enter the narrow door...?*"

As Jesus warned, "*...many will try to enter but will fail.*" How well have you stewarded your Kingdom purpose in the Age of Grace (Luke 13:24)?

As the Kingdom Age draws near, many claim to follow Jesus but really don't know Him. Church affiliations, baptism certificates and religious titles don't secure your entrance into the Kingdom. But true repentance of sin that transforms your heart and genuine love for God that transforms people is the key to entering the Kingdom in the Age of Grace now and the way through the narrow door in the Kingdom Age to come.



**Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:6-8****Matthew 22:1-14**

1 Jesus also told them other parables. He said, 2 “The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. 3 When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come!

4 “So he sent other servants to tell them, ‘The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!’ 5 But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business. 6 Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them.

7 “The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their town. 8 And he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren’t worthy of the honor. 9 Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.’ 10 So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn’t wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. 12 ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?’

But the man had no reply. 13 Then the king said to his aides, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

14 “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

**Revelation 19:6-8**

6 Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder:

“Praise the LORD!

For the LORD our God,[b] the Almighty, reigns.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice,

and let us give honor to him.

For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb,

and his bride has prepared herself.

8 She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.”

For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God’s holy people.

## REFLECT

The “religious” people failed to obey God as they rejected Jesus’ call to righteousness. So, Jesus confronts them with the reality of their fate in a parable about a feast.

*“The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a King who prepared a great wedding feast for his son.”* (Matthew 22:2) The first invitation was ignored. The second invitation was mocked and some even slaughtered the messengers. Because the king was furious that his son was rejected by the favored guests who denied his honor, he destroyed them and burned their towns.

But the feast must go on! So the servants hit street corners and highways to invite anyone else they could find. No matter how good, bad or ugly the people had been, all who accepted the invitation were given white wedding garments to exchange for their rags. However, as everyone cleaned up to present their best, one man remained improperly dressed. Ready to celebrate, though refusing to change, he showed up wearing rags instead of linen. But when the King asked, *“Friend, ...how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?”* he had no excuse or reply. Because he showed up unchanged, he was unfit to attend, so the King ordered him out to be cast into the night, with the door locked behind him for good.

In this parable, the King is God, the Son is Jesus and we are the invited guests. The man without the wedding garment is the one who professes to be ready for the Kingdom but has never clothed himself in the righteousness of God through His Son Jesus Christ. No matter the reason, whether he was rebellious, ignorant, arrogant, lazy or busy, there was no excuse for the man to not change from filthy rags into clean garments for the grand occasion of honoring the Son.

In other words, it’s one thing to attend church and another to show up for the Kingdom. While the gift of salvation is free, the evidence of our love for God and people requires effort and produces fruit. Like the man who showed up to celebrate the feast, it’s one thing to

come as you are and get your foot in the door, but another to be dressed for service when the invitation arrives to stand before our King.

In our Scripture references the past three weeks, Jesus has walked us through various elements of continuing His mission for the Kingdom. His Holy Spirit has unlocked many mysteries that will continue to be revealed for those who continue to pursue Him. Not only have we been introduced to our mission for the Kingdom, but God's Holy Spirit has helped us get dressed for the occasion.

*“Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to Him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and His bride has prepared herself. She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.’ For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God’s holy people...”* (Revelation 19:7-8)

Righteous acts and good deeds are not religious deeds that earn favor in Heaven but reflect Christ's love for us and the power of God's Kingdom through us. If fine linen represents the righteousness and good deeds of the people, are you dressed and ready for the feast? As you pray, ask our King if He would approve of your garments. Ask His Holy Spirit to give you eyes to look at your lifestyle, language, and the way you love your neighbor to assess how well you reflect His Father's Kingdom and ask for ears to hear what garments need to be changed.

All are called to be dressed and ready, but sadly, some will show up unprepared. If we are the Kingdom, be dressed for the Kingdom! Or prepare to be cast out with others who refuse to change into the dark, gnashing your teeth as you.





**John 13:1-17; Luke 4:18-19****John 13:1-17**

1 Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. 2 It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. 4 So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, 5 and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

6 When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "LORD, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

8 "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

9 Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, LORD, not just my feet!"

10 Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not

all of you." 11 For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12 After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? 13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'LORD,' and you are right, because that's what I am. 14 And since I, your LORD and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. 15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. 16 I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. 17 Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

**Luke 4:18-19**

18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,

for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,

that the blind will see,

that the oppressed will be set free,

19 and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

## REFLECT

As we gather around His table, the evening meal is served. Jesus gets up, removes His outer clothing and wraps a towel around His waist. He pours water into the basin and begins washing our feet. The feeling is awkward as our Master reduces Himself to a servant. His demonstration of humility as He illustrates service and love establishes our final “last shall be first” lesson as His disciples of His Kingdom.

Knowing how Jesus introduced realities of the Kingdom that we don’t yet fully comprehend, He senses our hesitation. Like Peter, our instinct at first, is to pull back. Then Jesus pushes forward and says, “...*Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.*” (John 13:8) The ultimatum disarms our reluctance, so we offer ourselves inside and out for Christ to wash clean. But not everyone is clean. Though we’ve been shoulder to shoulder on our journey with Jesus, He knows the enemies at His table. Like Judas, there are always those who go through the motions, knowing full well their intent to betray.

The hour is near. Our time is short. Jesus removes the towel from His waist, dries our feet, puts on His robe, and returns to the table. The tension has eased - slightly less awkward, still very humbling. We look at our feet and then look back at Jesus. He looks into our eyes, then looks into our hearts. He knows we are flawed, slow to listen, quick to speak, always assuming more than we should.

The atmosphere shifts. The silence is broken. As Jesus speaks, we lean in to listen to the question He asks: “...*Do you understand what I was doing?*” (John 13:12)

As Teacher, His question is our commission. As LORD, His question is our command. (John 3:14)

His commission: *“And since I, your LORD and Teacher, have washed your feet...”*

And PREACHED THE GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

And PROCLAIMED FREEDOM FOR PRISONERS

And RECOVERED SIGHT FOR THE BLIND

And RELEASED THE OPPRESSED

And PROCLAIMED THE TIME OF THE LORD’S FAVOR

His command: *“...you ought to wash each other’s feet.”*

Go PREACH THE GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

Go PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR PRISONERS

Go RECOVER SIGHT FOR THE BLIND,

Go RELEASE THE OPPRESSED

Go PROCLAIM THE TIME OF THE LORD’S FAVOR! (Luke 4:18-19)

After 21 days at the table with Jesus, He’s shown His *“...example to follow...”*. Now it’s our turn to do as Jesus did *“...Do as I have done to you.”* (John 13:15). *“Now that you know these things,...”* (John 13:17) the key has turned, the locks are off, the gate is opened and there’s no going back as if we’re unaware. As He passes the keys to His Father’s Kingdom, whose chains will you loosen? What healing will you bring? Whose oppression will you lift? And how will you use your freedom in Christ to go and set others free?



# MAKING A FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT

As parents, we have certain things we hope to instill in our children. These could be a values to hold or a passions to pursue or work ethics. Often, we are surprised when our kids don't display the behaviors that we wanted them to have.

Children and teenagers are bombarded daily with messages, rules and expectations. On any given day, our child might be expected to hear and apply 15+ things to their lives. Consider homework in 6 different subjects, instruments or sports they are practicing, church, chores and things parents are trying to instill.

In most cases whatever seems most urgent trumps what is most important. How do we make sure the most important things stay the most important things?

**Create a family mission statement!** Doing this won't answer that question entirely, but it's a good place to start. Like any good organization, a mission statement is a guide to help your family understand "Who we are and how we behave."

Here are five tips for establishing a Family Mission Statement:

- 1. Make it fun:** Don't call a family meeting and get really serious. Instead, go out to dinner as a family, make banana splits together, take a family road trip, or even camp out in the backyard. The point is... make a memory out of this experience with your family!
- 2. Create a list:** Have everyone in the family list qualities or characteristics that they think define ,or should define, your family. Examples: Hard working, Jesus following, servant hearted, generous, etc. Try to make this list as specific as possible. In what areas do we work hard? How do we follow Jesus? Who do we serve? The more specific your list, the more intentional it'll be. Once you get this list, give everyone a few votes and tally up the four most important characteristics to your family. This could be adjusted based on the age of your children or created just between Mom and Dad on behalf of their growing family. If old enough, be sure that the input of your children is taken into account.

**3. Make the statement:** Once you have a list of the top four characteristics, your job is to turn it into a statement. Using our examples from tip #2, here is what this could look like: “The \_\_\_\_\_ family is committed to being Jesus followers that work hard and seek to help others by being generous with our time, talents and treasure.” This is a very generic statement. Be sure to get more specific than this.

**4. Deuteronomy 6:6-9:** Many homes have signs that say “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” or “Home is where the heart is” or something along those lines. What if this mission statement was on the walls of your house? What if your whole family memorized it? This isn’t a one-time activity. This statement becomes the bedrock of the most important values for your family and it can help hold each other accountable.

**5. Make it stick:** Find ways to celebrate with each other when these characteristics are displayed. Celebrate these things more than you celebrate good grades, championships and recitals. We celebrate what we care about!

Keep in mind there will come a time to update this statement as your family grows or kids get older. There might be things to instill in teenagers that kindergarteners aren’t ready for yet. However, don’t let this keep you from making a mission statement for your family now!

What’s next? GET TO WORK!

*“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” -Philippian 4:13*

# WHAT'S NEXT?



## ABIDE: LIVE

You're invited to Abide: Live on January 28, 2024.

**[www.christs.church/abide](http://www.christs.church/abide)**



## GET CONNECTED, JOIN A GROUP!

Groups are an integral part of the discipleship journey. We have several group options both virtual and in person.

**[www.christs.church/groups](http://www.christs.church/groups)**



NEW SERIES BEGINNING JANUARY 28TH



## *BUT GOD*

GENESIS VOL 3  
CHAPTERS 37-50

You intended to harm me, but  
God intended it all for good. He  
brought me to this position so I  
could save the lives of many people.  
Genesis 50:20

**BUT GOD.** There's something powerful about these two words! A simple conjunction combined with a powerful noun highlights the worst and the best of God's redemptive story. On one side of that phrase is sin, rebellion, disobedience, the worst of the human spirit, hopelessness, darkness, and death. On the other side is grace, worship, obedience, purpose, hope, light and life. From Noah to Paul and everywhere in between the phrase **BUT GOD** is used by human authors to describe God's activity in nearly every salvation story in scripture. **BUT GOD** is a signal to lean in closer and pay attention because God is about to move.

[www.christs.church/butGod](http://www.christs.church/butGod)



[WWW.CHRISTS.CHURCH](http://WWW.CHRISTS.CHURCH)