

JOURNAL 2018

21 DAY FAST



“Learning To Be Content”

DO YOU!

Spencer T. Ellis, Pastor

Well it is that this time of year to embark upon the journey in 21-days of fasting and praying. I thank God in advance for what He is going to do.



The first message that I preached in 2018, was “Do You!” I talked about how the Apostle Paul teaches up to learn to be content in whatever state of situation that you find yourself in. You don’t have to compete with anyone because God made you to “Do You” according to His plan and purpose.

You do know that God created you with a purpose? And did you know you have a part to play in His kingdom here on earth? At Citadel, we want you to experience all God has for you and live out your God-given purpose. This is the reason our mission is to help each person at Citadel be whom God created them to be - believing in Jesus, becoming a spirited filled believer, belonging to family, and building God’s kingdom.

As we incorporate God’s mission into our lives, we begin a process of discovering our purpose here on earth. And it’s important to remember these aren’t things we do once, they’re things we must continue to do each day.

Although our fast lasts for a short season, it brings long-term results, which sharpen us, enabling us to face the challenges of life in His strength. Through fasting, you can experience spiritual renewal and direction for your life . . . restoration of relationship . . . healing . . . release from bondages . . . and so much more!

Fasting is voluntary abstinence and restriction of food and activities for a specified period of time to devote ourselves to prayer and bible reading. It is a means of seeking God by denying the physical in order to focus on the spiritual.

I believe that your obedience and commitment to these 21-days will result in preparing you for much GREATER and to go much HIGHER in your spiritual life.

Spencer T. Ellis
Pastor

Fast Schedule

The fast will begin on Monday, March 12 and will end on Easter Sunday, April 1.

Daily Prayer

March 12 – April 1
6:00 a.m. & 10:00 p.m.

Prayer Conference

(712) 775-8972 (new number)
Code: 280910

Exceptions

- Sundays: no 10:00 p.m. prayer conference calls.

Please share with us. Tell us your testimony, your challenges, what you are learning, etc.; Pastor Ellis would like to share with others.

Pastor will not use your name without your permission.

Use one of the following communication channels:

- **Citadel's APP – Prayer Wall**
- **Email: 21dayfast@citadelofpraise.org**
- **Facebook Group: www.Facebook.com/groups/COP21Days**
 - *This is a Fast Facebook Group where you can connect with others for encouragement, support and prayer!*

Citadel's social media pages:

- **Facebook: Citadel of Praise**
- **Twitter: Citadel_Detroit**
- **Instagram: Citadel_Detroit**
- **CitadelofPraise.org**
- **Hashtag: #COP21**

Citadel of Praise
Copyright © 2018

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author.

Printed in USA by 48HrBooks (www.48HrBooks.com)

SERVICES

- **Daily Prayer Call at 6:00am & 10:00pm.** Prayer Line: (712) 775-8972, Code: 280910. If you have trouble joining our praying line, three-way call a friend and ask them to call in for you.
- **Sundays:** 8:00am, 10:00am, and 12:00noon Worship Services.
- **Friday, March 16:** 7:00-9:00pm, Women's Service and Prayer led by Lady Tracy Ellis.
- **Tuesdays, March 20 and 27:** Sanctuary Prayer at 12:00-1:00pm and 6:30-7:30pm. *No Bible Teaching on these days.*
- **Saturday, March 24:** 8:00-10:00pm, Single's Session and Prayer led by Pastor Ellis.
- **Friday, March 30:** 12:00 noon, Good Friday, "7 Last Words of Christ Service," *preached by Citadel College of Preachers.*
- **Saturday, March 31:** 5:00pm, Easter Baptism Service. *Pastor Ellis will baptize all candidates. Candidate should be in sanctuary by 4:30pm. Baptism clothing will be provided.*
- **Saturday, March 31:** 6:00pm, Easter Worship. *Designed for those who desire to worship on Saturday and avoid the Easter Sunday crowd. Also for those who enjoy going to worship anytime the doors are open. This is a great time to invite guests to Citadel who may attend other churches.*
- **Sunday, April 1:** 8:00am, 10:00am, 12noon, Easter Worship. *Plan to attend at least one of our four Easter weekend services. Bring someone with you! All Easter Services are casual-dress.*

Fast Schedule and Options

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	12	13	14	15	16	17
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; background-color: #e0e0e0;"> <p><u>Choose ONE Fast for March 12-16</u></p> <p>a) Eat ONLY Fruits, Veggies, Salads with no meat, Protein Shake. No Soda.</p> <p>b) Drink Water ONLY from 6:00am-6:00pm each day. <i>No Soda, fried foods, or desserts at any time.</i></p> </div>					<p>No Fried Foods, Bread, Soda or Desserts</p>
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
<p>FREE EATING DAY <i>No Junk Food</i></p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; background-color: #e0e0e0;"> <p><u>Choose ONE Fast for March 19-23</u></p> <p>a) Eat ONLY Fruits, Veggies, Salads with no meat. For dinner you can add one piece of grilled fish or chicken. No Soda.</p> <p>b) Drink Water ONLY from 6:00am-6:00pm each day. <i>No Soda, fried foods, or Dessert at any time.</i></p> </div>					<p>No Fried Foods, Bread, Soda or Desserts</p>
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<p>FREE EATING DAY <i>No Junk Food</i></p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; background-color: #e0e0e0;"> <p><u>Choose ONE Fast for March 26-30</u></p> <p>a) Eat ONLY Fruits, Veggies, Salads with no meat. For dinner you can add one piece of grilled fish or chicken. No Soda.</p> <p>a) Drink Water ONLY from 6:00am-6:00pm each day. <i>No Soda, fried foods, or Dessert at any time.</i></p> </div>					<p>No Fried Foods, Bread, Soda or Desserts</p>
1	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; background-color: #e0e0e0;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>DO NOT EAT ANY JUNK FOOD</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">March 12 – 31</p> </div>					

GUIDELINES *for* FASTING

Choosing your fasting plan is a personal decision. We are all at different places in our physical health and in our spiritual walk with God. Fasting should never be a cause for comparison or competition. **Whichever plan you choose, be 100% committed to completing it.**

Genuine fasting requires planning and preparation, and it also demands an intentional and complete commitment to seeking the Lord throughout the fast. Below are several steps you should take if you desire to fast effectively.

PLAN YOUR PRAYER TIME Determine how much time you will spend praying and studying God's word daily. Part of the fast is filling the time you normally would spend preparing and eating meals with prayer and study. You must be intentional in this.

TAKE A SPIRITUAL INVENTORY BEFORE YOU BEGIN When you fast and pray you are giving up food to discipline your body. Make sure you do the same with your attitudes and thoughts. You want to bring all parts of your life under the discipline of Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

REPENT Acknowledge your sin, repent, and be done with it. For God to hear your prayers you must first empty yourself of your sin. Ask for forgiveness and then live forgiven. (1 Chronicles 7:14-15)

CHECK YOUR RELATIONSHIPS If you have hurt another person, you must go to them and ask for forgiveness. If there is someone who has offended you, pray for them and forgive them. (Mark 11:25-26)

ASK GOD TO TEACH YOU FROM HIS WORD Remember, there is a measure of spiritual blindness in each one of us, so we must ask the Holy Spirit to teach us and to take away our spiritual blindness. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

ASK GOD TO FILL YOU WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT The more you know about the Holy Spirit, the more you can give Him control of your life. And the more you walk with the Holy Spirit, the more He can exercise His influence through you. (Ephesians 5:18)

YIELD YOURSELF FULLY TO JESUS CHRIST Give everything to God. Once you have yielded your physical self you must also yield your inner self. (Romans 12:1)

ASK FOR FAITH The first step toward a stronger faith is developing an expectant heart for things which you are praying. (Hebrews 11:6)

BE AWARE OF SPIRITUAL ATTACKS Remember there is an enemy and he will do anything and everything to destroy your fast and wreck your faith. Be prepared to face the enemy by keeping your thoughts on God and His Word. (Jude 20)

Questions about Fasting

What kind of fast will we observe?

We will observe a type of Daniel and other kinds of fast. There are scriptures for the Daniel Fast. In Daniel, chapter 1, the Prophet ate only vegetables (that would have included fruits) and drank only water. In Daniel, chapter 10, the Prophet ate no meat nor any precious breads or foods and he drank no wine for 21 days. So from these scriptures, we get the guidelines:

1. Only fruits and vegetables
2. Only water as a beverage
3. No meat, sweeteners (sugar) and no breads

Who should or should not fast?

All believers who are physically able to fast should do so, in order to bring their bodies into submission to the spirit of Christ. Anyone with physical or medical conditions that could be aggravated by fasting should consult their physician before participating in a fast. If you are medically unable to fast or abstain from the prescribed food and beverage, then find something else you enjoy doing and choose to fast from that – television, social networking sites, etc.

Children and youth may choose to participate in a limited-fast under supervision of parents or guardian. This fast includes selecting certain days a week to participate in the fast and/or abstaining from activities they enjoy, such as social networking (facebook, twitter, Instagram, snap chat, skype, etc.), video games, television, cell phone, texting, etc. During these times youth should seek God in prayer, read scriptures, listen to gospel and worship music, etc.

What is the purpose of fasting?

Fasting and prayer combined can bring about a transformational revival in you. It can be a very powerful tool in seeking God. The ultimate purpose of the fast is not you and what you seek, but God. Fasting is a true way to sacrifice for God and humble oneself to Him (Psalm 35:13, Ezra 8:21). Fasting is an act of worship and honoring.

Since fasting and prayer is aimed at breaking the bonds of evil on a person's life, a loved one's life, or on a body of believers, including a family, church, or ministry, expect distractions from the enemy. Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life. When fasting and praying, it is vital to be alert to the tricks of the enemy. This keeps you from reacting to the enemy instead of responding the way God desires.

What if I have never fasted?

God is pleased at our desire to connect with Him. We encourage you to step out on faith and, if necessary, gradually build up to the specified time. For the first 7-10 days, do at least 1-3 days of fasting. Do not become discouraged if you feel tempted to eat outside of the prescribed parameters of the fast; God will give you the strength to overcome your temptation. Ask the Lord to identify someone that can hold you accountable and encourage you during this journey. If possible, team up with a partner.

How do I manage my schedule while fasting?

Physically. Throughout your fast, you may feel somewhat weaker than normal. During the first few days, you may feel tired and irritable. Lightening your workload and cutting down on strenuous exercise would be a very good idea to maintain your health and your morale.

Spiritually. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. It is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spiritual. While fasting, if you dissipate your energy on numerous errands or busy-work to the neglect of spending special time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually. You will find yourself becoming discouraged and frustrated with your fast instead of being benefited and uplifted and blessed. I encourage you to arrange your schedule accordingly! However, DO NOT neglect your family, employment, and church obligations while fasting.

What should I expect?

A natural response to fasting and prayer is an increase in hunger for the abstained food. As a result, you may experience hunger pangs, headaches, bad breath, and strong odor from your body as you are eliminating toxins from your body. For this reason, please consider personal hygiene and take extra care of your body. It is perfectly normal to experience these things; therefore breath mints and sugar-free gum are acceptable.

How do I respond to others regarding my fasting?

If you are asked why you are not eating or eating differently, nonbelievers may be satisfied by such a brief answer as, "I have other plans for lunch or I'm doing something different for a while." Be polite and respond, "I rather not talk about it." Christians should be satisfied when you answer that you are fasting.

If friends and family express concern for your health, ease their fears by telling them that you will stop fasting the moment you feel you are harming your body or if the Lord leads you to end your fast.

There is usually no reason for telling strangers or casual acquaintances that you are fasting. If you do, they may subject you to a lot of questions that you may not want to answer. But in any case, use your best judgment and the Lord's leading in telling people about your fast. (Matthew 6:16-18)

Can I celebrate my or someone else birthday, anniversary, special event?

If you must miss a day of fasting because you are attending an event, promise God that you will make it up on Saturday, Sunday, or the week immediately following March 27. Don't be deceived by the devil! The missed day that you makeup, may very well be the day that you experience your greatest breakthrough.

How do I make the best out of this 21-day experience?

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your determination in the face of difficulties and temptations.

Final Fasting Tips

- Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need. Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give into temptation. Choose well when selecting products, stick to raw food as much as you can, and limit artificial ingredients.
- Make it a priority to be on all prayer calls and attend church during your 21-day fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.
- If you mess up, don't get discouraged. Just get right back on track and keep going. God's mercies "are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22–23). He wants you to finish, and He will give you the grace and strength to do it.

Points of Action for 21-days

- **Avoid conversation about the lives of others.**
- **Avoid forms of conversation about past hurts, fears, and disappointments.**
- **Avoid people who are controlling and negative.**
- **Avoid people who have the potential to influence you toward habits you are trying to break.**
- **Every day, do something to build what you're trying to build, or stretch what you're trying to stretch.**
- **Be totally honest with yourself and God.**
- **Remove negative thought processes, patterns, actions, and attitudes with the intent to speak, act, and function with the wisdom of God, Word of God, and the mind of Christ.**

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD IS NOT THE RESULT OF TRYING HARDER BUT OF SURRENDERING MORE!

Journaling: Charting Out the Journey

A Christian journal helps you preserve the thoughts, prayers and promises of God that come to you throughout the day. It can be a significant spiritual companion and a reminder of how God's promises have come to pass in your life. Whatever the reason, journaling is an important part of our Christian life. Many times we need to reflect on our circumstances to gain a clearer understanding of God's will and desire for us. Writing things down brings clarity to those thoughts. **The wonderful thing about keeping a Christian journal is that you can write about your strengths, weaknesses, victories, losses, challenges, or anything that touches you while fasting, praying and reading the Scriptures.**

If you are not familiar or accustomed to praying, feel free to use this as your daily prayer.

Consecration Prayer

Father, I give You thanks and praise, for this is the day that You have made; I will rejoice and be glad in it.

I thank You for Your provision, Your protection, and Your power. I thank You for Your presence that surrounds me by night and by day. I thank You for Your Word, which is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway. I thank You that by it, I receive guidance, wisdom and abundant life.

I thank You God, that no weapon formed against me shall prosper, and every tongue that rises against me in judgment, I condemn for that is Your heritage unto me.

I thank You, Lord, for increase is my portion. I thank You, that because I seek to be like Jesus, that I shall increase in wisdom, stature and in favor with God and man. I thank You that the years of my life are increased.

Father, I ask that You help me exercise good stewardship of Your gifts of my time, talent, and financial increase by returning to You in sacrifice a portion of these blessings. I thank You, Father, for this is my set time of favor.

I thank You, Lord, that I am blessed in the city and in the country, blessed in my going out and coming in; I thank You, that my relationships are blessed, that my children are blessed, my home is blessed, my investments are blessed. I thank You, Father that although my enemies step to me one way, they shall flee from me seven ways. I praise You, Father, for the table you have set before me in the presence of my enemies. I thank You, God, for You have commanded blessings to come upon me and overtake me, as I diligently pursue Your word, Your work and Your way.

I thank You that no evil will befall me; neither shall any plague come near my dwelling, for You have given Your angels charge over me. They keep me in all my ways. In my pathway is life, healing and health.

Forgive me, Lord, for allowing any fear, guilt, self-rejection, self-hatred, unforgiveness, bitterness, envy, sin, pride, or rebellion to open the door to any sickness or infirmity. I renounce these things and cast out all spirits of infirmity that would attack my body in the name of Jesus.

Lord, You heal all of my diseases. You are the health of my countenance. I decree and declare that I am loosed from diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes, heart attacks, all cancers, high cholesterol, arthritis, blood diseases and physical pain. I command all hereditary spirits of sickness to come out of me, along with any other assignment that was sent to attack my body, for by the stripes of the Lord I am healed. I thank You that, by the blood of the lamb I am delivered, and by the power of God I am set free indeed, for you have redeemed my soul from destruction.

I thank You that I prosper and am in health, even as my soul prospers.

Father, I sever all ungodly soul ties, immoral and unproductive relationships in the name of Jesus.

- I forgive any person who has ever hurt me, disappointed me, abandoned me, mistreated me, or rejected me.
- I renounce all envy, jealousy and covetousness in the name of Jesus.
- I renounce all selfishness, self-will, self-pity, self-rejections, self-hatred, and self-promotion in the name of Jesus.

Lord bless my latter end more than my beginning. Thank You, for restoring to me the years that the devourers have eaten.

I pray Your blessing upon the Body of Christ today. May Your peace surround us. May Your power strengthen us. May Your wisdom instruct us. May Your presence protect us.

I pray that You order my steps, guide my feet and salt my speech in ways that glorify You and edify my brothers and sisters. I pray that discernment would increase, that I may see opportunities to be a blessing to others. I pray that the souls that I touch today will see You shining through me.

I decree and declare that victory is mine today, in the name of Jesus. Goodness and mercy shall follow us. Favor goes before me. The joy of the Lord strengthens me. Through You, I am complete. Through You, I am more than conquerors, this day.

I commit this day to You, in the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN!

21-DAY
“AVOID NEGATIVITY” CHALLENGE
Exchanging a Negative Attitude for a Grateful Attitude

- The goal of this challenge is to begin to remove negative thought processes, patterns, actions, and attitudes with the intent to speak, act, and function with the wisdom of God, Word of God, and the mind of Christ.
- You didn't become negative overnight, so the negativity will not leave overnight.
- However, with purposeful focus on: small powerful confessions, meditation of the Word, and prayer - your environment can and will become more conducive to a joyful and more fulfilled life.

Some things to avoid during the next 21 days:

- Do not police other people – this is a personal challenge – Remember to get the beam out of your eye first – *Matthew 7:3*
- You may realize in the course of the day how negative your words, comments, responses and overall communication may be – don't let it discourage you and become overwhelmed by it
- Do not become religious about this – if you have a goal and fail – get back up and continue
- Though it may be challenging and difficult – **DON'T GIVE UP!**

Some things to expect within the next 21 days:

- Easier decision making
- Renewed focus and vitality
- Clarity of spiritual vision
- Keener hearing (God's voice)
- Less fatigue
- Greater energy
- More joy
- Deeper fulfillment

MORNING ROUTINE

- ✓ Morning Thanksgiving – don't stop until you get to work – Fill your environment with your love for God through your praise and worship
- ✓ Determine and declare that you will not *internalize* negative actions/behavior in your environment – be quick to forgive
- ✓ Determine to slow down and think before you speak – to avoid sarcasm and cynicism
- ✓ Bless people with a genuine smile
- ✓ Remove *at least* one negative word, phrase, or comment from your daily conversation
- ✓ Confess the Word

EVENING ROUTINE

- ✓ Evening Praise and Meditation
- ✓ Turn off/get off of the: TV, computer, or phone at least 1-hour before going to bed
- ✓ Meditate on devotion, one or several of the scriptures listed, or other edifying scriptures.
- ✓ Confess the Word

SCRIPTURES TO MEDITATE ON & ONE-LINE CONFESSIONS

MY HEART IS PRECIOUS AND I CHOOSE TO GUARD IT FROM NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND IMAGES

- ✓ **Proverbs 4:23** (NLT) - Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

MY WORDS MINISTER GRACE AND EDIFICATION

- ✓ **Ephesians 4:29** - Let no corrupt **word** proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart **grace** to the hearers.

I WILL SPEAK WORDS THAT PRODUCE LIFE TODAY

- ✓ **Proverbs 15:4** (NASB) - A soothing **tongue** is a tree of **life**, but perversion in it crushes the spirit.

MY ANSWER IS ON TAP, BECAUSE I ASK

- ✓ **James 1:5** (AMP) - If any of you is deficient in **wisdom**, let him **ask** of the giving God [Who gives] to everyone liberally *and* ungrudgingly, without reproaching *or* faultfinding, and it will be given him.

GOD IS WITH ME, EVERYWHERE I GO

- ✓ **Hebrews 13:5** - *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

I DWELL ON EXCELLENT THINGS

- ✓ **Philippians 4:8** (NASB) - Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

MY THOUGHTS ARE PRODUCTIVE AND FRUITFUL

- ✓ **Proverbs 21:5** (KJV) - The **thoughts** of the diligent tend only to **plenteousness**; but of every one that is hasty only to want.
- ✓ **2 Corinthians 10:5** (KJV) - **Casting down** imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

OTHER PEOPLE'S ACTIONS DO NOT DISTURB MY PEACE

- ✓ **Proverbs 24:19** - Do not **fret** because of **evildoers**, Nor be envious of the wicked;
- ✓ **Isaiah 54:17** (NASB) - "No **weapon** that is **formed** against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their vindication is from Me," declares the Lord.

I WILL ALWAYS CREATE AN INVITING ATMOSPHERE FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH MY WORDS AND ACTIONS

- ✓ **Ephesians 4:30** - And do not **grieve** the **Holy Spirit** of God [do not offend or vex or sadden Him], by whom you were sealed (marked, branded as God's own, secured) for the day of redemption (of final deliverance through Christ from evil and the consequences of sin).

I AM STRENGTHENED BY THE JOY OF THE LORD

- ✓ **Nehemiah 8:10** (NASB) - Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

*Negativity Challenge is borrowed and modified from the late Bishop Ben Gibert, Detroit World Outreach.
Journey devotions are borrowed and modified from Gateway Church Groups, Dallas, TX.*

Devotion Day 1

Date: March 12 Scriptures: Psalms 55:22 By: Mallory Bassham

Have you ever found it's easy to believe and trust God when all is well, everything is settled, and life is good? But when things get difficult, sometimes we wonder where God is. At some point or another, we all experience extremely tough times. I'm not talking about minor inconveniences, but gut-wrenching, tragic life events that shred us to the very core. They hit without warning and hijack our life, emotions, and faith.

I will never forget when my husband went to see our family doctor for a headache and ended up in the emergency room. In one morning, he went from laying on the couch at home to laying on a hospital bed in the intensive care unit. My faith was really tested when I learned brain hemorrhages, like the one he had, are usually fatal. One week later, he came home and had no evidence of trauma. It was an absolute miracle! But the days while he was in the hospital were long, my heart was heavy, and my spirit was pressed into the heart of the Father, who truly sustained us.

In times like this, what we really believe becomes evident. We try to find purpose or a reason for what's happening and ask ourselves what God is teaching us. Practically speaking, how do we walk through circumstances like this?

The Bible tells us to draw near to Him, and He will draw near to us (James 4:8). There are moments in life when we have to trust that, as we are vulnerable with our pain, He is faithful. He sent the Holy Spirit to walk with us. We have to believe He'll never let us go, and even when we can't see His hand, we can trust His heart.

It has to be a willful decision to have faith, be patient, and trust in His Word. When we are totally vulnerable before God, we find strength to take one more step. When our faith is put to the test, God's presence and Holy Spirit calm us, heal our hurts, and renew our strength. The key to receiving His renewed strength is to give Him the entire burden we carry. This happens as we spend time in His presence and in His Word. Our part is to press in honestly and trust Him, and His part is to sustain us (Psalm 55:22).

Whether you're facing a devastating situation or you feel overwhelmed in a certain area of life, you can run to the Heavenly Father and tell Him everything. He will carry your burden, and He will sustain you.

Prayer

Thank You God for always being there and for giving us the Holy Spirit so we will never be alone. Help us when we experience difficult situations and times of despair and stumbling. Give us faith to continue to seek Your presence and hear Your voice. Thank You for being steady and dependable, our Rock, and our Redeemer. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 2

Date: March 13 **Scriptures: St. John 15:4** *By: Niles Holsinger*

Reverend George W. Gray was the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Lexington, Missouri, for 21 years until he retired. He spent the rest of his life serving his small rural town, frequently making hospital visits and stopping by people's homes to pray for them. When Rev. Gray passed away, his funeral was not attended by thousands, only a hundred or so. When those who attended his funeral were asked what they remembered most about Rev. Gray, they all said the same thing. They didn't talk about his great preaching or his leadership or his church management skills. They talked about how he prayed. Rev. Gray did not pray fancy, exuberant prayers. He prayed like a man who was talking to his best friend. When he prayed you knew God was listening, because he knew God was listening. He knew God, and God was his friend.

As a young pastor in my early twenties, this story made an incredible impact on me. It reordered the priorities of my life. I no longer wanted to pray just when I had a to-do list of things I needed or wanted from Him. I wanted to be a friend of God. I wanted to talk with Him and hear from Him, a God who knew my name and whose voice I recognized. I left that service not only wanting to be a man who was used by God, but a man who was *friends* with God.

Like any friendship, our friendship with God will only grow as deep and intimate as the time we are willing to commit to it. It's amazing how many things we make time for in our lives that have so little eternal value, and consequently, we always find ourselves too busy for the Lord. The incredible beauty in committing time every day to speak to God and listen for His voice is He wants to spend time with us even more than we do with Him.

How often do we only communicate with God when we're in trouble or when we have a big decision to make? Of course He wants to help us, but even more than that, He just wants to talk with us every day, just like a friend would. In fact, He sent His Son to die so we could be friends with Him. John 15:15 says, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

The entire story of the Bible is the story of a Father pursuing His children, of God pursuing us. He wants to meet with you every day, anytime, wherever you are. Find the time. Make the commitment. Become friends with God.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, here I am. I want to hear from You. I want to know You. I want to be Your friend. Speak to me, let me hear Your voice and know Your heart for me today, and every day. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 3

Date: March 14 **Scriptures: Romans 15:7** *By: Mallory Bassham*

Have you ever felt rejected? You're definitely not alone. In the book of Genesis, we read about Joseph and how he was rejected by people throughout his life. As a young man, his brothers threw him into a pit and sold him as a slave, and then when he was older, he was framed for a crime against his boss's wife. Yet even after he was betrayed by his own flesh and blood, sold as a slave, and experienced unfair suffering and anguish, he still maintained his integrity and faith. To top it off, he not only reconciled with his brothers, he blessed them abundantly! It's only because of Joseph's great faith that he could continue to love God and not become bitter and full of self-pity.

Most of us haven't experienced that level of rejection in our lives, yet we've all dealt with it. While rejection strips us of joy, it does something else as well. It gives us the opportunity to reach down into the depths of our souls and decide to believe God loves us.

Throughout the New Testament we see examples of acceptance. Jesus washed feet (John 13), touched lepers (Matthew 8:3), ate with sinners (Mark 2:15–17), and displayed unlimited patience for the unlovable (Hebrews 12:3). Paul, who murdered those who followed the teachings of Jesus right up until he had an encounter with God, went on to tell the church in Romans 15:7 to “accept one another just as Christ has accepted you.”

Just like Paul, we were once lost but now we're saved. When we invited Jesus into our lives, He accepted us as sons and daughters in His family, and no one can change that. We have the gift of fellowship and friendship with others who love the Lord.

God knew we would deal with rejection, so He gave us a verse to remind us He will never leave us: “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

We may occasionally flounder when we feel rejected, but being anchored in the love of Jesus is our greatest calling. Trusting God to guard your heart is the best security possible. He loves you no matter what, because you are forever and always family.

Prayer

Thank You Lord for always accepting me and extending grace toward me. Help me to bring my struggles and disappointments to You that I might have the mind of Christ. Thank You for the provision for me to be part of Your family. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 4

Date: March 15 Scriptures: Romans 10:17 By: Matt Hernandez

There's an old story about a rabbi named Akiva who went to his village to gather supplies. Walking back to his cottage, he took the wrong path and ended up in an unfamiliar part of town. Suddenly, a voice came through the darkness: "Who are you, and why are you here?" Shocked, he realized he had wandered into the Roman garrison, and the voice had come from a young sentry keeping guard. Akiva answered his questions with another question: "How much do they pay you to stand guard and ask that question?"

The sentry, seeing he was just a rabbi, answered meekly, "Five drachmas a week." At that point the rabbi said, "Young man, I will double your pay if you come with me, stand in front of my cottage, and ask me those questions each morning: 'Who are you, and why are you here?'"

I believe these are questions burning inside all of us. Deep in our bones we believe our life was made for more, so we're asking, seeking, and searching. These two questions point me back to Jesus, which will always point me back to the Scriptures. In John 10:10, Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." What I have found through reading the Scriptures is abundant life doesn't just happen when we die, but Jesus offers it to us right here and now! The Gospel isn't about Jesus coming to teach us how to get to Heaven but about Jesus coming to teach us how to live.

We come to this understanding by reading God's Word daily. These sacred texts are more than just 2,000-year-old stories. They tell a larger story of a God who is living, breathing, and active, and He wants nothing more than to be living, breathing, and active in our lives. We, as followers of Jesus, have our part to play in this larger story. I once heard someone say the Bible is black words on a white page, and we get to fill the space in between with our story. We participate and make it personal by reading the Scriptures and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us through these sacred texts.

If we are all image bearers of God, then the more we come to know our Creator the more we know about ourselves and who we are in Him. It's in this discipline that we discover our identity and our purpose. It's in this holy moment when we can answer the questions, who am I, and why am I here?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, through Your Word, I pray I come to a deeper understanding of who You are. Teach me the part You have called me to play in this larger story. Holy Spirit I am asking for You to show me through the Word who I am and why I am here. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 5

Date: March 16 **Scriptures: Matthews 16:26** *By: Zach Neese*

One of my favorite lines in literature comes from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: “Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” Why do I love that quote so much? Because sometimes it’s easier to believe for impossibilities than possibilities. When we pray for something we know is possible, we tend to fret over the “how.” *How will God answer this prayer?* When I pray for impossibilities, I am unconcerned with the “how” because when something is impossible, the only option is a miracle. God has to do it or it won’t get done. I have to stop believing in the “how,” and start believing in the “who”—my Father.

Some years ago, we were at a party and my 18-month-old daughter, Maggie, toddled fully dressed into a swimming pool. I didn’t see her go in, but my daughter Charis did, and she immediately dove in to save her baby sister. The problem was that Charis was only three years old, and she couldn’t swim either! When I got to the edge of the pool, I was met with a terrifying sight: my precious little girls staring up at me, a foot under water. In one hand Charis gripped her little sister’s jacket, and with the other she was pulling against the water—stretching toward the surface with every ounce of her inadequate strength.

Was there ever a possibility Charis could save Maggie from the pool? No. But that thought never crossed her mind. She just knew her sister needed her, and she went in after her.

I cannot tell you how proud I was when I pulled my two girls out of the water and Charis, sputtering on the deck of the pool, was completely unflustered. She was unafraid! As if she knew the whole time this was the only possible outcome. *Of course Daddy would jump in and pull us out! Daddy can do anything! We are his little girls!*

Charis may not have known much, but she knew this: When the waters are so deep and you’re drowning, your Father can still touch bottom. He is there. He cares. And He can do anything. If you can believe that much, you will see miracles. In fact, in Mark 9:23 Jesus says, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”

You may be facing a “drowning” situation as we speak. You or someone your heart adores might be caught in the undertow, life’s waves breaking over you, and you are going down. It’s not your job to do the impossible. Your job is to jump in, get your “impossibility” in one hand, and reach for your Father with the other. That is really all intercession is. Taking the impossible to God who does the impossible before breakfast.

Prayer

Father, God, show me today if there is an impossibility You would like me to take hold of in prayer. I believe nothing is impossible for You. I believe You are here and You care. Would You jump into this situation? Take it into Your strong hands, with Your unfailing love, and do what only You can do. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 6

Date: March 17 Scriptures: Psalm 61:3-5, Psalm 92:11, Romans 15:13

Question to consider...

Who are your closest friends?
How did you build that relationship?
Time + Sacrifice = Love
What can you do to grow in a deeper relationship with God?

Reflect and P.R.A.Y.:

Praise – Praise the Lord for dying for me, to take away my sins, but even more so from rising from the dead and giving me hope of eternal life.

Repent – Forgive me when I sin against you. When I get too busy and distracted and don't spend time with you.

Ask – Help me to focus on you more, I want to build a deeper relationship with you. Show me how to do that.

Yield – I wait on you now, to be filled with your resurrection power – that I might reflect your love and grace to others today.

Notes _____

Devotion Day 7 Corporate Worship Day

Date: March 18

Prayer Focus: Pastors

As never before pastors are under attack spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Satan is doing everything possible to destroy pastors across the nation. Pastors leaving the ministry have risen to epidemic proportions. Every month 1,700 pastors leave the ministry. That's almost 55 a day!

Your pastor faces spiritual and emotional attack every day. The expectations placed on pastors are enormous. Pastors are expected to be super-Christians, powerful leaders, steadfast theologians, financial wizards and fundraisers, meet every need of every person in the church, work 60-70 hours a week, and maintain the perfect home life.

Satan knows that as the pastor goes, so goes the church. If he can destroy pastors, then he can ruin churches. Every year 7,000 churches close their doors. As never before your pastor needs people like you praying for him.

On today, pray for all Pastors and families:

- Protection
- Restored joy
- Rest and Freshness
- Strength, Holy Spirit Power and Anointing
- Provision and financial abundance
- Vision and direction from God

6:00 a.m. Conference Prayer only. Attend Worship Service: 8:00 a.m. 10:00 a.m., or 12:00 noon.

If you cannot attend because of illness or work, view services LIVE via streaming at www.CitadelofPraise.org or view by downloading Citadel's mobile app on iTunes or google play.

Devotion Day 8

Date: March 19 Scriptures: Galatians 2:20 By: Marcus Breecheen

When I was a kid, my parents decided to convert our garage into a room in our house. It was a great idea. Our family had grown and we needed the extra space, so they hired a man from church who was good at construction. Every day after school I would go into the garage to see how much progress had been made. The contractors created this new space with all sorts of materials: wood and sheetrock, paint and insulation, carpet and windows, and wiring. To this day, this extra room is still a vital part of my parents' home.

The work Jesus does in people's lives is much the same. Most days I don't notice the progress at all. Other days, His work seems amazingly profound. He does things I would have never thought about. Sometimes I'm surprised at how many things need work! My theology has weak spots, and my selfishness shows at strange moments. My prayer life is awkward, and some days I can't tell the difference between temptation and sin, and I feel horrible either way.

I'm grateful that as a young believer, I discovered some very strange, yet interesting language when I read Galatians 4:19. It says, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you." God promised to *form* Christ in me. The key here is that God is the one doing the forming, not us.

So what does it mean for God to *form* Christ in us? It's a progressive change over a lifetime, which is called sanctification. When we are first saved, our spirits are justified and immediately put in right standing with God because of Jesus' sacrifice, but our souls—mind, will, and emotions—must be sanctified, as it says in Ephesians 5:26, "with the washing of water by the word." It's clear, based on this Scripture, that we have a role to play too. The more we devote ourselves to God through worship, prayer, and reading and memorizing Scripture, the more our love for Him will grow. Jesus being formed in us is a work done by God when we devote ourselves to Him and follow in Jesus' footsteps.

The glory of the gospel is that Jesus is not only the way of salvation but also the sustainer and grower of our life in God. Christ is *formed* in people. He lives today on the earth, through you and me. That is the gospel. Are you being washed by the Word? You'll be amazed how life-changing it is to devote yourself to reading God's Word and following in Jesus' footsteps.

Prayer

Father God, Your faithfulness is so unyielding, yet we can live so many days thinking You're not there at all. Sometimes we are audacious enough to think we need a better deal from You. On our best days, we know You permeate every place we call our own. And Your mercy is new every morning. We welcome You into every part of our lives and say, in Your mercy, form Christ in me. Do whatever is necessary to finish this process, to Your own glory. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 9

Date: March 20 **Scriptures: Ecclesiastes 4:12** *By: Chelsea Seaton*

Being open and vulnerable is not easy for me. When asked how I'm doing, it's more natural for me to respond with, "I'm great, blessed, and wonderful!" rather than the truth, even if I'm having a rough time. I think most people would say this is true for them as well. We would rather do anything else than be honest and say we don't have everything under control. Admitting our weaknesses and asking for help is not easy.

If we look deeper, what keeps us from asking for help is actually good, old-fashioned pride. Our culture glorifies *independence*, but God created us to be dependent on Him and others too. Asking for help isn't just biblical, it's beneficial! In Ecclesiastes 4, Solomon tells the story of a man who toiled under the sun and was depressed because all his work was meaningless. He goes on to explain that when you have a friend by your side, everything changes: "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10). God's Word makes it clear that finding friends and being honest about your struggles sets you up for greater success than you would have alone.

I saw this play out in my own life when I trained for my second marathon. I trained alone for my first one, and it took me five and a half grueling, horrible hours to finish. For my second marathon, I trained with a group of friends and finished one whole hour faster! In our group, we encouraged each other to do things we couldn't do alone, and all of us achieved greater things because we worked together.

You can go to church every weekend and not let anyone know you. You can fake your answers when people ask how you're doing and not have anyone to help you when you fall. Or you can admit that you need help. You can get in a Gateway Group and overcome things you thought would never go away. Let people know you, because when you do, you will gain so much more than you realize.

Prayer

Lord, thank You that we don't have to walk alone. I lay down my pride today and ask that You would help me get connected with other believers who I can be honest with and receive encouragement from. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 10

Date: March 21 Scriptures: Ezekiel 36:26 By: Kyle Fox

Welcome home!” *Huh? What did she say?* I didn’t know how to respond to the sweet lady who greeted me the first time I walked into Gateway Church over a decade ago. I’m pretty sure I awkwardly mumbled, “You too?” as she handed me the bulletin. I wondered if she said this to everyone or if she knew insecurity and social anxiety had a paralyzing grip on my life. In hindsight, I know the Holy Spirit prompted her to say those words the evening God gave 19-year-old me (the most insecure person ever) the courage to attend a Saturday night service by myself. That’s when everything changed; I left with a new heart and a place to belong.

Weeks before, a doctor told me my battle with social anxiety would hinder my ability to thrive in social settings and make engaging in conversations a struggle for the rest of my life. If he could only see me now! This part of my story is why Ezekiel 36 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. Ezekiel, an Old Testament prophet whose name means “God will strengthen,” paints a vivid picture of God’s salvation and restoration. After Ezekiel tells the people of Israel God will give them a new heart and put His Spirit in them, we see an illustration of what this looks like in the life of a believer.

“And when I bring you back, people will say, ‘This former *wasteland* is now like the *Garden of Eden*! The abandoned and ruined cities now have strong walls and are filled with people!’” (Ezekiel 36:35, NLT) The word for wasteland here means deserted, to have no sign of life. Compare that to the garden described in Genesis when God walked with Adam and Eve. In Hebrew, Eden means luxury and delight. This is more than a slight change; it’s a complete one-eighty.

A few years ago at Starbucks, I ran into an old classmate from high school. He didn’t believe me when I told him what I do for a living. “A pastor?!” It’s because he remembered the old me: a relational wasteland, terribly insecure, and emotionally crippled by social anxiety. Thankfully, that’s not me anymore. Quite the opposite! The devil’s plan was for my weakness to stifle my potential. For too long I settled on surviving, but all along, God’s desire was to completely transform weakness into strength.

Does something in your life resemble a wasteland? For the past week, we’ve been focusing on believing in Jesus. Part of believing in Jesus is believing you are who He says you are and trusting His ability to transform every area of your life. Your weakness does not define you. The more barren the wasteland appears, the more bountiful the harvest when we walk in our God-given identity. His strength is made perfect in our weakness, and He wants to reveal His strength and restorative power to you today.

Prayer

God, thank You for the gift of a new heart. Please show me if there is an area in my life You want to transform. I believe in Your ability to make all things new, and I choose You as my source of identity today. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 11

Date: March 22 Scriptures: Psalm 127:3-5 By: Zach Neese

Do you know that you are a child of God? And children *always* have access to their Father. It is not a request; it is a *right*.”

I was leading morning chapel at Church and had just finished speaking these words when one of my squirrely little toddlers escaped from her mommy and ran up on the platform with me. Wrapping both arms around my leg, Charis stared back at the Bible students who were eagerly waiting to see how I would handle this ironic disruption. Talk about putting your money where your mouth is! This is my daughter, and I had just finished saying, “Children always have access to their father.” It was her *right* to be with me, wasn’t it? So I put my hand on her head, closed my eyes, and began singing. As we worshipped, Charis unwrapped herself from my leg and began dancing around the platform, twirling her frilly dress like a pint-sized praise ballerina. No self-consciousness. No fear. She simply *belonged* there. In that moment the presence of God stooped low to dance with Charis. As He came closer, she got down on her chubby little knees and bowed her head to the ground in worship, her unruly curls forming a pink-bowed circle on the platform. God moved and the place fell apart. It seemed the entire student body was on the ground in tears. That morning Bible students from 50 nations learned more about God from a baby girl than they did from their professors.

We need to see our kids the way God sees them. Children are not just the future of God’s kingdom; they are His kingdom (Matthew 19:14). Isaiah 11:6 says, “And a little child shall lead them.” Ministry comes naturally to them!

Imagine a three-year-old walking up to total strangers in Town Square asking, “Do you know Jesus loves you?” Imagine four little girls in Easter dresses walking up and down the street inviting the neighbors to church. Imagine our sons and daughters laying hands on the sick, giving food to the homeless, and asking their Father for miracles. That is the kingdom.

Children pray with more faith, preach more simply, prophesy more fearlessly, and love more purely than we do. Each of your children is an arrow God has placed in your hand, trusting that you will fletch, sharpen, aim, and release each child into darkness-shattering greatness. Please take this seriously: no one can sharpen your arrows but you. You do not need to be a Bible scholar to read the Bible to your children, pray with them, or bless them before bed. You just need to see them as God sees them, ask Him how to lead them, and be there to obey.

Start today by asking the Lord for wisdom and guidance as you raise your children to be arrows in God’s kingdom.

Prayer

Father, help me to see my children through Your eyes. What do You see? What would You like me to do to help build Your kingdom in them? How can I obey Your Word by raising them up in the way they should go? Now please give me this one thing: that my children will be pillars in Your house and never depart from Your presence. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 12

Date: March 23 Scriptures: Romans 8:14 By: Robb Brewer

When I was 14 years old, my dad started teaching me how to drive a vehicle with a standard transmission, and the first lesson was to back the car out of the garage. He sat me in the driver's seat while he lectured from the passenger side about the gear shift under my right hand and the myriad of pedals at my feet. Honestly, I didn't hear a word he was saying because I was so excited about driving—even if it was in reverse. And really, what was he going to teach me anyway, right? After all, I'd been observing drivers for 14 years.

So when it came time to release the pedal under my left foot, I didn't hear him say the word, "slowly." With the car in reverse, I took my foot off the clutch suddenly. The car jolted backward and died. My first thought was, *I broke the car*. My second thought was, *I smashed the garage door*. My third thought was, *my dad is going to kill me in the garage*.

I glanced over at my dad. He was staring straight ahead, jaw clinched. I managed to let the word "sorry" dribble out of my mouth. Without so much as a look in my direction, he said, "Now, are you ready to listen to me?" And with that, I gave my will over to my father.

This really is the picture of salvation. Our Heavenly Father doesn't sit in the driver's seat. He doesn't control us. He offers navigation from the passenger side. It's up to us to steer, press the accelerator, and apply the brake appropriately, but we have a choice. Will we decide where we go or will we go where He prompts us?

A submitted will brakes when God says slow down, accelerates when He says to press forward, and goes to the right and the left when the Father offers directions. At any time, we have the choice to say, "No, I don't want to go that direction," or "This is too slow, I'm speeding up." But then we're no longer submitted, and discipleship apart from submission is impossible. This is made clear to us in Isaiah 55:8, which says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord." Try as we might to make our own way in life, God's way is always better.

I eventually got out of the garage. But I only learned to do so when I started listening to my dad. Before long, he directed me to start moving forward. He taught me to become an accomplished driver, and that growth has enabled me to drive along some of the most majestic and beautiful places on this continent; and it all began in a little garage with a submitted will.

Are you fully submitted to God's will in your life? Is there an area that you need to give over to Him?

Prayer

Father, in this moment, I submit my will to You. I don't want to do anything without Your direction. I want to grow as one of Your followers, so I now prioritize Your voice over my own. Grant me strength to live in obedience and submission all the days of my life. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 13

Date: March 24 Scriptures: Mark 2:1-12

Fasting can be one of the most straining practices of following Christ. By this time you may be finally coming out of the initial withdrawals that happen during a food fast. Maybe you're the unlucky type and they have only gotten worse. I would just encourage you to not give up! If you are struggling and feel like quitting, reach out to those who are in this with you. Jason has set up a Facebook group where we are constantly talking about each other struggles, triumphs, and tips for coping.

We are a church family and we are here for each other when some of us may be feeling “paralyzed.” I know it may be hard but it is worth it! We are praying for all of you! Keep going!

Praise God for his faithfulness so far. He has moved mountains at this church and he will do it again!

Repent of the temptation to give in or give up. The enemy wants you to quit because he is deathly afraid of what is to come in the time of fasting.

Ask God for strength not only for yourself, but for your church family around you fighting alongside you.

Yield to the direction and council the Lord is giving you. He is much smarter than you are, its best you take his advice. (It’s kind of the whole point to this fast)

Notes _____

Devotion Day 14
Corporate Worship Day

Date: March 25

Prayer Focus: Family

Family is one of the most important things to God’s heart. No matter where you go, you are not by yourself. You carry with you a part of the past generation and the future generations. “Every deed has a seed” In other words the deeds you choose to do in this lifetime create a seed for future generations.

I often hear the story of great-great-grandmothers who prayed for her children, grandchildren and future generations while she was on her death-bed. I wonder how many times we’ve coasted on the prayers of someone else. What a sweet blessing and what an amazing heritage.

Imagine how our culture might change if we as parents and grandparents would spend more time praying for our families. And here’s the scary thing: If we don’t pray for our children and grandchildren, who will?

My prayer is that I will be as faithful as those who came before me. I hope our children and grandchildren will remember a mama, daddy, and grandmother who loved Jesus, loved them and prayed for them. How about you?

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16)

6:00 a.m. Conference Prayer only. Attend Worship Service: 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., or 12:00 noon.

If you cannot attend because of illness or work, view services LIVE via streaming at www.CitadelofPraise.org or view by downloading Citadel’s mobile app on iTunes or google play.

Notes _____

Devotion Day 15

Date: March 26 **Scriptures: 2 Thessalonians 2:15** *By: Josh Morris*

Imagine for a moment I invited you into my home for a time of fellowship so we could grow in our friendship with one another. You accept this invitation, knock on my door, and come in expecting good conversation and possibly a time to gather around my table and enjoy a meal together. How would you feel if once you were inside, I invited you yet again to come into my home? What if I wondered out loud whether you were really there or not? All the while, you are standing right there with me and responding with reassuring proclamations of your presence. How many times would it take for me to ask you to come into my home *when you're already in my home* before you'd think I'd lost my mind?

Does this story sound familiar? Unfortunately, this absurd scenario bears far too much resemblance to my relationship with Christ when I was a young believer. For many years after I invited Jesus to be my Lord and Savior and to live in me, I wondered if He really responded to my invitation. Was He really there? Of course, He was! In Revelation 3:20, we read, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

He stands in the home of our hearts crying out for us to invite Him in so He can enter into relationship with us. Yet we often doubt His presence, so we continue to invite Him in even though He is already with us. It's a cycle that repeats itself over and over.

So how do we stop this pattern? We trust and believe what He said in His Word is true. We do this by applying ourselves to the spiritual disciplines of reading our Bibles, praying, and fasting. Not only is it important we commit to these disciplines, it's important we stay focused on their purpose. They aren't pointless traditions. They are at the heart of our relationship with Jesus and help us realize when we invite Him into our lives, He truly is with us. Not just for a time but forever.

Allow yourself to move past any doubt of His presence in your life, and instead, approach reading the Word, praying, and fasting with excitement as you are transformed into His disciple. Enter into moments of prayer basking in the light of true communion and conversation. Enter into fasting with the understanding that He denied His flesh while on earth and suffers with us in all the trials that beguile us. Let's commit to stop doubting His presence in our lives and instead start building a loving relationship with the One who lives in us.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, Thank You for coming into my home and never leaving. I want to live in Your presence and build a lasting relationship with You. Draw me to You and help me to see the spiritual disciplines as a way of growing closer to You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 16

Date: March 27 **Scriptures: Matthew 16:19** *By: Amanda Johnson*

Has a small child ever helped you make cookies? If so, you know how much extra time, patience, and clean-up it takes. Sure, it would be easier (and faster!) for you to make the cookies without their “help,” but the look in the child’s eyes when they get to enjoy eating the finished product of their work makes it all worth it.

In the same way, have you ever wondered why God needs you to help build His kingdom? If He is really the all-powerful, all-knowing God, couldn’t He do this without your help? Wouldn’t it be easier for Him to do it Himself?

The reason God needs us is because He has *decided* to need us to build His kingdom.

And, the crazy part about it is He doesn’t *need* anything. Acts 17:25 says, “Nor is He worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.” He is self-existent, self-sufficient, and self-sustaining. Yet, God decided to need you.

God doesn’t need us to exist, yet He decided to need us to co-exist. He chose to partner with us on the earth. The first example of this takes place in Genesis 2, when God let Adam name the animals. Genesis 2:19 says “And whatever Adam called each living creature that was its name.” He decided to partner with Adam by letting him choose the names rhinoceros, llama, and turkey!

In Mark chapter six, it says, “Jesus could not do a mighty work there because of their unbelief.” Now that’s an amazing verse! It doesn’t say Jesus would not, it says He could not because they didn’t believe. Is it possible God has limited His unlimited power on this earth to our faith—*our partnership*?

Mark 16:18 says, “They will lay hands on the sick and they will recover.” It doesn’t say, they will recover and they will lay hands on them. They will recover is God’s part, but it doesn’t happen until we do our part. He chooses to use our prayers to heal and build His kingdom. Jesus also said, “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose will be loosed” (Matthew 16:19). His kingdom is built and expanded through our hands and our prayers!

God has a great plan to redeem the brokenness in the world and build His kingdom here on earth, but it requires a partnership with us, His Church. What is your God-given role in His kingdom? Have you decided to partner with Him?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for choosing to partner with me on the earth. Please help me see what is my part in building Your kingdom. I humbly offer all I have to Your work on the earth. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 17

Date: March 28 **Scriptures: 1 Peter 4:10-11** *By: Jelani Lewis*

I didn't receive an allowance growing up. (Full disclosure: there was one summer my dad paid me three dollars to mow the front yard, but since I couldn't purchase an eight-count nugget meal from Chick-fil-A with it, in my humble but right opinion, it doesn't count.) And while I don't think there is anything inherently wrong with giving your children an allotted amount of money for doing chores around the home, it was not part of the Lewis family value system. I can only conclude that my parents felt my siblings and I should wash the dishes and keep our rooms clean—not because of payment, but because we were part of the family. Though I would not have been able to articulate it this way, I inherently understood members of the Lewis family not only consumed but also contributed.

The Bible tells us that as believers, we're part of the body of Christ and the family of God. In 1 Peter, the apostle begins this letter declaring his audience to be the elect, the chosen, or, very simply, the family of God. In chapter four, today's verse, he challenges them: "God has given each of you a gift from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another." The idea here is clear. We have all been graciously gifted by God, and we are called to use our gifts not for ourselves but to serve others. In doing so, we bring glory to God.

I believe our gifts are like napkins. A napkin can be placed in two areas: the collar of your shirt, which proclaims, "Feed and serve me," or on your arm, which declares, "I am here to serve you." Likewise, depending on the posture of our hearts, our gifts are either a tool for selfishness or a tool to serve others.

Belonging to the family of God means we are always invited to the Father's table to eat and consume; however, because we are members of His Body, we should be equally motivated to serve and contribute. The concluding question we should pause and ponder is *where will I place my napkin today?*

Prayer

Father, I thank You that I am not an orphan but I am Your son or daughter, belonging to the body of Christ and the family of God. I thank You for the gifts You have given me, and I ask You to reveal how You have gifted me and how You want me to use each gift to serve others and bring you glory. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 18

Date: March 29 **Scriptures: Romans 12:1-2** *By: Mark Harris*

When we moved to Texas several years ago, we were *warmly* welcomed by our new Gateway family. I can also say we were just as warmly welcomed by the Texas summer sun. As we looked for our new homestead, I was hesitant to buy a house with a swimming pool. Being a previous pool owner, I was fully aware of the responsibility of maintaining a swimming pool; however, the Texas heat made us do it! We ended up becoming proud owners of a small, sometimes clean, sometimes efficient, swimming pool.

Through trial and error, I have definitely learned a pool requires daily attention. A body of water that's not constantly moving will have a gradual build-up of algae and bacteria. A swimming pool needs to cycle all of its water through a clean filter, with the right combination of substances, several times daily. If neglected, a body of water will turn swamp-green with algae, and it takes a while to get it back to clean, pure, refreshing, swimmable water.

Our lives are very similar to the body of water we call a swimming pool. They need daily attention, daily filtering, and daily infusions of the right substances. When we fail to get our daily infusion of time with God, we can become polluted by the stuff of this world. However, when we turn our attention to God in prayer and worship, leaving behind the cares of this world, our thinking, hearing, and vision become more clear. His presence—His clean filter—purifies us.

In the same way, when we spend time in God's Word, all the things that pollute and destroy us fall away. Our lives become clean and pure before God. In fact, Ephesians 5:26 says that we can be cleaned "with the washing of water by the word." His Word removes the algae and bacteria of life, then fills us with His wisdom.

Without the substance of God's Word and filter of His presence, we end up being shaped by and conformed to this world. The good news is, His mercy and love invite us in. We can bring all of our filth, pollution, and sin to His filter, and He will clean us and make us pure and beautiful. When we are willing to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, He promises to transform us, renew us, and fill us with the substance of His Word.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, I lay my life before You today as a living sacrifice. I surrender everything to You. Purify me and cleanse me. Fill me with Your wisdom. Help me to hear Your voice and follow Your path. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 19

Date: March 30 **Scriptures: John 15:12-13** *By: Chad Skyes*

Recently when someone asked me what I like to do for fun, I responded with, “I read books.” I have to admit, sometimes this makes me feel really boring. I wish I had a cool hobby like mountain climbing or rebuilding old motorcycles. The truth is I’m a reader.

In searching for a book recently, I noticed something interesting. The self-help genre has skyrocketed in popularity! You’ve probably seen these books online or on the shelves at a bookstore. A deluge of books aimed at you becoming the most efficient you, the put-together you, the superhero you. In fact, in 2014, self-help was the world’s bestselling genre.

The explosive popularity of these books says something about the deepest desire of every human being. We all have an internal drive to be transformed into something beyond what we are now. We all want to *become someone*. But, what does this journey of *becoming someone* look like? The story illustrated in most self-help books tells us to relentlessly work on ourselves. We’re offered countless theories, strategies, and applications to get us there. The conclusion is if we heavily invest in *ourselves*, then we’ll reach our full potential.

As Christians, however, we have quite another paradigm. To be a follower of Jesus does not mean a constant turning inward to live our best life, but a constant turning *outward* toward God and others in service, sacrifice, and love. The deep kingdom truth revealed in the life of Jesus is this: only when we forget about ourselves and serve, care for, and love others, will we ultimately become all He made us to be. In fact, look at what Jesus says in Matthew 10:39: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” Focusing on our own self-development to the exclusion of serving others only results in a distortion of God’s vision for our lives. Jesus is our example, and we are called to follow in His footsteps by doing what He would do and loving as He loves.

What does this look like in your life today? Are there areas you need to lay down in order to follow Jesus? As we lay down our desires daily and live for the sake of loving and serving others, we’ll find that by God’s grace we’ve become God’s full vision of who He created us to be. Then, and only then, will we become who we’ve always wanted to be.

Prayer

Father, thank You for sending Your Son into the world to show me how to live in Your kingdom. Show me what You want me to lay down in order to follow You. And just as Jesus freely loved and served people, not even preserving His own life, enable me to do the same. I choose to die to self so I can live for Christ. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion Day 20

Date: March 31 Scriptures: Luke 17:11-19

Take that final step of Gratitude. Write down things that you are grateful for, that are only because of the power of Jesus. Are there prayers in your life that have been answered and you were too busy to thank the source? Start a new habit of gratitude – it's contagious!

Praise

Jesus for the blessings in your life.

Repent

Of the times you were too busy to thank him.

Ask

Jesus to help you begin this new habit of gratitude.

Yield

To seeing what step you need to take with Jesus' help.

Notes _____

Day 21
THE FINAL DAY

Date: April 1 YOU MADE IT!!!

Take a few minutes to look over your prayer requests for this fast. Where has God already moved? Where has He changed your mind? What has yet to be answered? What do you need to give to Him today and trust that He will answer? How do you know Him better today than you did 21 days ago?

As we wrap up this season of prayer and fasting and you haven't seen God move yet, just give it to Him and trust that He knows what's best. Yield your request and all the circumstances surrounding it to God and then go on with life. We must trust Him when He says yes. We must trust Him when he says no. We must trust Him when he says wait. And we must trust Him even when He says nothing. If you haven't seen an answer, don't take that as a rejection or He hasn't heard your request. He has heard you and is working to bring about the best for you. But know this about God's power in your life. While He has the power to do many miraculous things in your life, the greatest miracle He has ever worked is healing you from the deadliest disease known to man...sin. He has brought all of us back from the dead. NEVER lose sight of that miracle!

Every single recorded miracle in the Bible had one goal...point people to a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father. So if you're discouraged...don't doubt Him. He has already healed you. If your rejoicing...thank Him. He has healed you. And if you're still waiting...trust Him. He loves you.

6:00 a.m. Conference Prayer only. Attend Easter Worship Service: 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., or 12:00 noon

If you cannot attend, view services LIVE via streaming at www.CitadelofPraise.org or view by downloading Citadel's mobile app on iTunes or google play.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to continue to fall upon our church and services.

Notes _____
