

THE FORTY-DAY CHALLENGE

Fasting For Spiritual Power

Do you have loved ones who are hurting? Do you know people who are oppressed and desperate to be free? Do you want to walk in greater revelation and righteousness? You can have the keys to healing, wholeness, restoration and the living presence of God to set captives free! Are you up to the challenge?



For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:4)

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MISSION ~ MERCY ~ MINISTRY

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THE FORTY-DAY CHALLENGE

FASTING FOR SPIRITUAL POWER, AN INTRODUCTION

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:1-5)

Jesus is our ultimate model and guide for Christian living and ministry today. In Luke chapter 4, we see Jesus fasting before He began His ministry in the power of the Spirit. Jesus' works began in the wilderness where He was tested by the devil. Forty days earlier the heavens opened and God's audible voice had declared, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22 KJV) Now, when He was weak, tired and probably feeling anything but the Son of God, the devil came and challenged, "If you are the Son of God..." Jesus held up the truth concerning God's Word, Worship, and Relationship in the face of every one of the devil's taunts. He came out in the power of the Holy Spirit. The early church fathers testified to this saying that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38 KJV)

Trial and testing is the gateway to power and authority for greater works (see John 14:12). The power for greater works proceeds greater sacrifice. It is the sacrificial discipline of fasting which brings us into deeper communion with Christ and which works greater miracles through us. Pastor and author John Piper wrote that "*If we don't feel strong desires for the manifestations of the glory of God, it is not because we have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because we have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Our soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.*" (Piper) A destiny of greatness awaits those willing to step away from life's

pleasures for a time of complete surrender to our Almighty God. As we give Him our undivided focus and attention through fasting with prayer, worship, and scripture, we can expect yokes to be broken, oppressions destroyed, heavy burdens lifted, and shackles of sin removed (see Isaiah 58:6).

How is it that fasting fosters spiritual power in one's life? In his book on fasting, Mahesh Chavda wrote that, "*Fasting helps release the power of the Spirit in our lives. It facilitates the freer flow of the Holy Spirit through you by removing the junk in your life.* (see Matt. 17:21)." (Chavda) The Holy Spirit can only move in as much room as He is given. The more room He is given, the more work He can perform. Apostle Paul taught that "if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body [through fasting], you will live." (Rom. 8:13) With the help of the Holy Spirit we can live the life of power He intends for us, as long as we do that which is required of us. Fasting is a requirement for spiritual power.

After the forty days of fasting in the wilderness and following the time of testing with the devil, the scripture declares that Jesus came out "in the POWER of the SPIRIT" (Luke 4:14 Emphasis Mine). Like Jesus, we too can have the empowering confidence as ministers of the Spirit (see 2 Cor. 3:6). Fasting by the Spirit for the Spirit is what Jesus did to overcome the enemy, and it is what the church must do to overcome in the Year 2012. Fasting is a spiritual weapon in God's holy arsenal. Apostle Paul wrote: "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." (2 Cor. 10:4)

This forty-day challenge is a call to fasting for spiritual power. It is a dare to the church of this generation to hunger, deny, and sacrifice in order to march onward into 2012 doing greater works in the Spirit. Those who accept this forty day challenge will find with it, the keys to walking in the power and anointing that sets captives free and brings healing, wholeness and restoration to the nations (see Luke 4:18-19).

As you begin, take a moment to read the section on 3 Steps to Begin Your Fast in the appendix of this booklet. Short daily devotionals have been written to accompany each of the forty days in this challenge. Each day's devotional includes an inspirational message for you and to share with others and are divided into four sections of 10 days. Each section adds a new discipline focus and will include an opening article to provide deeper insight into the role of that discipline in the challenge.

Take time and allow each message to enlarge the revelation of the Father and instill the unction of the Holy Spirit within you. May these 40 days be rich and satisfying as you offer the first days of the year to the Lord. May you reap long lasting benefits from this dedicated time of prayer throughout all of 2012. We pray that 2012 will be a year of great power as Bethesda Church of God embraces the heart of the Father over us and seeks a fresh understanding of the powerful inheritance He has destined before us.

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POWER IN FASTING

STRENGTH CONDITIONING

When visiting the tourist town of Frankenmuth, MI not that long ago, our party stopped inside a cute little coffee shop just off the main street. Being a strong coffee drinker myself I decided to order a *Black Eye*, a mocha espresso mixed with original house blend coffee. When I got up to the counter and placed my order, the young woman jokingly replied “right or left?” while holding up a clenched fist. In striking up a conversation, I discovered that she was currently taking Tae Kwon Do lessons at a nearby dojo.

In Tae Kwon Do, before you learn all the fancy kicks and high flying punches, you start with simple pushups and other strength exercises. A student has to first condition their body to acquire the right muscle tone in order to perform the advanced moves of the art. If the body is not strengthened enough, these advanced moves can in fact cause great harm. The same is true with spiritual power.

Jesus’ disciples tried and tried to help out a distressed father when his son, who was an epileptic, kept falling by reason of evil influences into dangerous and physical situations. All of their attempts were futile as the young boy continued to suffer under these spirits of death. Finally, the boy was brought to Jesus and in a simple display of power Christ commanded the demon spirits to leave and the boy was instantly healed. When the disciples questioned why they were unable to exert this same level of power, Christ responded “But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).

Spiritual disciplines, such as fasting, are the pre-requisites to spiritual power. Jesus certainly understood this principle for He himself had to go through strength conditioning in the wilderness prior to his appointment with the tempter. Jesus

had just come up out of the river Jordan where He was baptized by John. The Holy Spirit came down and ascended upon him like a dove while the Father affirmed his heirship and delight. Then immediately, as Mark highlights, the Spirit led him into the deeper, most remote parts of the wilderness for a forty day fast.

If Christ received the anointing power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the enemy at his water baptism then why the long period of discipline and conditioning away from the people and places of ministry? The answer is; Jesus needed that spiritual power which comes only by prayer and fasting. The devil would never have let Jesus alone if He did not face him in the wilderness. Jesus had to overcome the hinderer in order to work the supernatural acts done throughout his ministry term on earth.

For the church to move into its new level of destiny in ministry it too needs to overcome those things that hinder. We ascertain that “Jesus had taken upon him our flesh, and hence he could be tempted, with a possibility of falling. But his divinity insured his victory over temptation. He became like us in ability to fall, that he might make us like unto himself in power to resist.” (Pendleton, McGarvey and PhilipY) Because Christ overcame the devil in the wilderness so can the spiritually disciplined church, by Christ and empowered of the Holy Ghost, overcome every attack of the enemy and move into a new level of glory (see 2 Cor. 3:18).

The church has been given the power “to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19). Let us fast, let us pray, and let us hold up clenched fists and say “Devil, right or left for your black eye?”

Day One = Starting the Routine

Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the House of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord (Joel 1:14).

God calls us to come together in dedicated times of corporate fasting. It is in these times that the power of God comes upon the hungry seekers. We are promised that when we seek Him, we will find Him (see Deut. 4:29). This promise is spoken of by Moses who in fact fasted forty days on three different occasions.

Amazing things happen when God's people begin to seek His face with specified times of fasting. At a time when the annihilation of the Jews seemed imminent, Esther called her people to a fast (see Esther 4:16). Subsequently, they were redeemed from death with the demise of their enemies following. Years later, when all of Israel assembled at the rebuilt Temple after exile, they agreed to a fast for the Glory of the Lord to once again fill the House of God. As Haggai prophesied the 'latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former' (Hag. 2:9). Even the early church fathers knew that empowerment in ministry is preceded with fasting (see Acts 13:3).

This forty day challenge is more than just a new church initiative. It is a dare. God promises to those who will please Him with fasting that "Then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Is. 58:14)

So go on give it a try. I dare you to see what greatness God will reveal to you, what mysteries He will unfold to you, and what triumphs he will bestow upon you as you fast.

Day Two = Not Too Hard After All

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. (Deut. 30:11)

Two days in – how are you doing?

In the middle of his lecture on genuine fasting, Isaiah declared “the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” (Is. 58:11)

There is a source in you which gives you power to make it. This source is the Holy Ghost; for He is our Guide (John 16:13), our satisfier (Jer. 31:25), our strength (Micah 3:8), our water (John 7:37-39), and our ever flowing fountain (Rev. 22:17).

As we continue our fast in these forty days, say to yourself “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13) and “he who is in [me] is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

Reminding ourselves, and encouraging ourselves daily will help us to keep our focus. Studies have shown that a positive mindset is key to success. Keeping our minds on Christ and using these scriptures to feed our souls will make this fast a great triumph. Filling our minds with the word of God will make us ready to refute the attacks of the devil as he will surly try to lure us out of our commitment. Looking to Jesus as he was fasting on the mountain we see that His words to Satan were the scriptures that he had already in his mind. Maintaining a constant flow of the bible in our minds allows us to be ready for the inevitable fight ahead.

Day Three = Why am I Doing This Again?

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? (Is. 58:6)

When Jesus came out of his time of fasting in the wilderness, He went into the Temple and reading from Isaiah He decreed "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19) This anointing of power came from the enduement of the Holy Spirit.

This same power of the Spirit is promised to all: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts 1:8a KJV) and "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7)

When Peter and John were entering the Temple, they came across a man begging for alms. Their reply was "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6) What was it that Peter and John had? If we look closely at the text just prior to this occurrence in Acts we see that the Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit had just come upon the Disciples in the upper room. So the answer is that they had the POWER of the Holy Ghost.

If Jesus came down from the mountain with the Power of the Holy Ghost and If the Disciples emerged from the upper room having received that same Holy Ghost power..... Then the purpose of our fast today is to obtain that mighty power of the Holy Ghost in our lives that we might be able to overcome trials, be delivered of bondages, and be healed of sicknesses. So don't loose sight of the goal, as you continue in this season of fasting. Stay strong and be encouraged of the great power we will receive through our faithfulness to Christ's calling.

Day Four = What am I Missing?

Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. (Luke 17:33)

At times, you may begin to feel like you're missing out on things. If you are fasting TV, you're perhaps missing out on what is happening on your favorite show or if fasting sweets and mama just made your favorite cookies you may be asking "what do they taste like?" The truth is that with fasting you will be missing out on things otherwise it wouldn't be a sacrifice.

Jesus once asked "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36) Keep your focus throughout the fast on the idea that what you are fasting for is greater than what your fast is costing you. If we look closer at the words of Jesus found in mark we will find Jesus calling his people unto Him. He is telling them to forsake everything else for His cause.

As we fast, we are with intent and purpose forsaking our flesh; denying our physical body in order to take up Christ's cause. If we allow our focus to shift from what we are to gain, into what we are losing; we may be defeated not only in this fast, but the scripture above tells us we may also lose our entire soul. Time after time in the world that we live in we see people grasping and tugging for more things, for higher ranking, for greater social status. Many interviews reveal that our world's greatest Icons find an insatiable hole they cannot fill.

As Christians we know in our minds that the emptiness which is being filled with the "Stuff" of the world will be a hunger never fully satisfied. In our minds we know that the only true satisfaction can come through our relationship with Jesus Christ. The difficulty is that our spiritual mind is in constant battle with our physical human nature. This is why intentional denying of the flesh in a time purposed for growing closer in relationship to our Lord is so vital. So as we press on in our fast if you find yourself frustrated, hungry, or jealous of the world shift your focus. Take your mind off of your sacrifice. Let us go

forward in our fast feeling confident in our sacrifices not looking behind us at what we have given up, but rather looking forward feeling proud of what we have gained.

Day Five = Fasting as a Discipline

*But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting
(Matthew 17:21)*

Discipline is training to ensure proper behavior, to make yourself do something regularly (Encarta Dictionary).

It is interesting to me that our world accepts a certain amount of self denial in order to achieve a particular goal. If we look at Olympic athletes they spend hours and hours of their time training. They deny any food that doesn't fit into their strict training regimen, they forgo any activity they distracts them from their goal. With intense focus they self sacrifice anything that does not align its self with their main goal, which of course is the Gold! Go for the Gold is the slogan we hear ring out with fervor all throughout the Olympic season. If we ask anyone in our world to turn their focus from the training Olympian, to the church; all of the sudden self sacrifice is absurd. In the world, we are to abstain from certain things in order to achieve a desired goal; however in the church our great and giving God is only supposed to be there to grant us the desires of our hearts right?

For some strange reason our powerful God is seen either as a Genie who grants our wishes or as a terrifying punisher of those who sin against Him. It would be a travesty, if as the church; we did not attempt to show the world the true nature of our awesome God. Does God desire that we self sacrifice? Yes absolutely he does, but this is not because He wants us to feel bad, hungry, mistreated, or left out. It is because He wants us to condition ourselves just like the Olympians. He wants us to be as close to Him as possible that we might finish the race. The book of Hebrews says it this way:

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1)

Day Six = What if I Fail?

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

The dictionary tells us that the meaning of failure is to fall short, to be left wanting, insufficient, or to turn out badly. A failure cannot be characterized until the action or time period in question has come to a complete end or close. For instance a student may perform poorly on a test or assignment thereby receiving a failing grade however the class as a whole is not a failure and the student is able to redeem their grade by performing better on the next assignment.

We can see this same principle applied to the lives of many Christians throughout the Bible. David, for example is known to be the man after God's own heart, however he encountered many failures. From adultery to murder David's life was littered in failure. So if David was so fallible how then could he earn such a prestigious title "a man after God's own heart"? (See Acts 13:22)

Paul made it very clear in 2 Corinthians. It was not the perfection or lack thereof that lent to David's great title, but rather God's grace. David had an amazing relationship with the Lord. He loved him and learned from him at every turn. No matter the choice, whether good or bad; He knew that the Grace of God would allow him the ability to remain in right relationship. David made mistakes. Big ones, but his life was not characterized as a failure because of them. Why? Because he was able to repent ask for forgiveness and learn from each situation.

If you find yourself struggling to stay on task don't throw your hands up and quit. Don't simply give up and call it a failure. Repent to God learn where you went wrong, and refocus your perspective on Christ. Through God's grace you will be able to abound in every good work.

Day Seven = Determination Station

And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. (Esther 4:1-3)

Have you ever found yourself to be desperate? I mean really truly life depending on it desperate? This was the scene in the book of Esther. The Jewish nation had a death sentence hanging over their head, and the only glimmer of hope that could be found was a pretty young woman by the name of Esther. If ever there was a long shot odds prediction this would have been it. If anyone wanted to place a bet on the outcome of this situation it probably wouldn't have been in the favor of the Jews.

It seems that this kind of underdog, last ditch effort sort of determination is what often drives mankind to great feats of victory. It is this bottom of the barrel, I am all out of options attitude that finally brings people to the door of Christ, where He has been knocking all the time. (Rev. 3:20) When all else has failed, and we have exhausted all of our resources; often times we look up and say GOD HELP!!!!!!!

At this moment in time Mordecai and the Jewish people had a choice. Option one give up. Option two turn to Christ and fast and pray for deliverance. Mordecai and Esther chose option two. They had the determination required to change their situation. They said to God here is all we are and all we have. They looked to God and God heard their cry. Are you desperate for anything in your life? Do you have a broken relationship or a seemingly constant financial battle? Maybe you need a better job or are simply unsure of the direction of your life. Whatever you are facing, ask yourself are you determined enough to see this fast through? It takes guts I mean real unwavering courage to face the turmoil that is our lives, but we don't have to do it alone. As we continue our journeys look to God for the answers to your troubles. God is faithful and will reveal them to you just as he did for Esther.

Day Eight = Don't Let it Get Away

Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. (Psalm 32:6)

Fasting is to be coupled with time spent in the word, in prayer, and in worship. At the end of the day, the most used excuse in not including these emphases is “well, time just got away from me”. Don't let it get away! Self-Control is a fruit of the Spirit and is more than just a virtue we can reach for. It is attainable.

By this time in the fast, most of us have at least thought about abandoning the mission. We have already gone a full week abstaining from whatever it is we have chosen and by now it may seem like that was good enough. One of the most popular New Year's resolutions not achieved is the one where we all resolve to exercise more, eat better and lose weight. Why is it that we simply cannot seem to finish what we have started? We use excuses like it was a valiant effort or better luck next time to appease our consciences. If you have slipped up, given in, or even given up on your fast it's not too late.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

The scripture referenced above is the response God gave to the Apostle Paul. Paul was experiencing some trouble or more specifically a thorn in the flesh. Paul's experiences with this thorn were unpleasant, and he inquired or rather pleaded to the Lord to remove it. What we can gather from this portion of scripture is that even the GREAT Apostle Paul experienced moments of weakness. The amount of strength or will power one possesses is not at all the point. The revelation of God's perfect strength given to us in times of great weakness is how both Paul and we will be able to carry on and finish our journey.

As we continue our fast do not look for personal perfection or rely on personal strength. Look to God stay focused on His

grace and His perfect strength. In doing this the rushing waters shall not reach you just as the psalmist wrote.

Day Nine = It's Just the Beginning

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Gal. 3:1-3)

Through fasting God is calling His people to a wholly dependence upon Him. Our own religious rhetoric and antics are not sufficient for His spiritual blessings. Andrew Murray in his book, *Absolute Surrender*, wrote that “*God has called the Church of Christ to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the church is living for the most part in the power of human flesh, and of will and energy and effort apart from the Spirit of God.*” (Murray)

Fasting in the times of Christ were very religious acts done ceremoniously out of tradition. Spiritual leaders would fast publicly making their spiritual authority known, but Jesus seeing all this taught His disciples this way: “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face..... And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16-18)

Spiritual authority of Christ's disciples comes not from religious programs but from the anointing of the Holy Ghost. Fasting for spiritual power is not so that we can put on appearance, but so that we can receive the empowering reward of the Spirit in and through our lives.

When Jesus was questioned further about fasting; He illustrated that one should not put new wine, which is the Holy Spirit, into old wine skins, which is our bodies. The new wine must be put into new wine skins so that the wine and its skin are both preserved and made useful (see Matt. 9:17). Physically and spiritually renewed through anointed fasting, the fresh power of the Holy Ghost can abide within. Fasting by the Spirit for the Spirit is just the beginning for His church.

Day Ten = Art of Reflection

and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. (Luke 2:37)

Congratulations! You have made it to day ten. No small feat for sure. I hope that the last ten days have been empowering to you. As you look back over the first “quarter” of our forty day fast what challenges have you been able to overcome? What trials have you succumb to? What revelations have been revealed to you?

As we soldier on into the next 30 days of our fast it is important to take note of the things we are experiencing. Whether good or bad take the time to chronicle your voyage. Share your experiences and look for life lessons that you can take away from this period in your life. It is in this time of deep inner reflection and time spent with the Lord that we can learn meaningful truths that will apply to the entirety of the rest of our lives.

Looking into the passage above we find a woman by the name of Anna. Not much is known of her background other than the fact that she was an elderly widow and a prophetess of the Lord. What we can learn from her is at least two fold. First that she worshipped the Lord through fasting and prayer. And secondly that she remained in the temple courts speaking of the Lord and His redemption to anyone who would listen to her. It is important that we seek ways to encourage, and share God’s goodness with others. This time of fasting is not only intended for our personal experience but also that we would be able to expound upon the greatness of God to anyone who is willing to listen.



POWER IN SCRIPTURE



For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:4)

THE ONLY RULE

Every soldier knows the code. Every soldier is taught, studies and abides by the code. What code is this? It is none other than the Code of Conduct of the US Army:

- I. I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.
- II. I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command, I will never surrender the members of my command while they still have the means to resist.
- III. If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and to aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.
- IV. If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.
- V. When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.
- VI. I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America. (Armystudyguide.com)

In Isaiah 59, we read about how bad the nation of Israel had become. There was no justice, no righteousness. Iniquity and violence was plaguing the land and its populace. Even those in key positions to uphold the laws and keep justice were instead

dealing in wickedness. Who would stand up for the righteous people, was there anyone who could intercede on their behalf? God looked and found no one. So, in His great mercy He decreed that His strong arm would become salvation for the Lord's redeemed.

God himself was going to come down and fight against all the injustice; and in preparation "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak." (vs. 17) All of this armor God put on in order to bring justice, salvation, victory and redemption to His chosen people. And He came down to wage this war as the Son of man, Jesus Christ.

After forty days of fasting in the wilderness, Satan, the Prince of wickedness, came to Jesus, who was clothed in armor, and began to pick a fight with Him, to cause Him to do evil. The first test was with bread to counter his hunger. But Jesus replied to the tempter that man should live by every word of God and not just on bread with which to eat. The great expositor John Gill explains that "*Christ, in this...bears a testimony to, and establishes the authority of the sacred writings; and though he was full of the Holy Ghost, makes them the rule of his conduct.*" (Gill)

The greatest and strongest spiritual warrior to ever live and breathe on this earth, in his first contest as a soldier and commander in the Army of the Lord, declared that He knew the Code and was going to live by it. His Code of Conduct was not a list of man-made articles but is the Word of God; that which is given by God and anointed by the Holy Ghost (see 2 Peter 1:21).

The Word of God needs to once again become the only rule for faith and practice in the Army of the Lord. It must be made our Code of Conduct by which the church lives and breathes.

Fasting opens up the mind and heart to receive the Word of God more clearly. It aides us in learning it, knowing it, and in living it. Fasting empties oneself of everything else that satisfies in order to be filled with that which is eternally

rewarding. Studying scripture is a necessary part of any fasting initiative.

As we wage war against temptations and struggles and every form of spiritual wickedness in the world that we live in (see 1 Cor. 10:3-4), we will need the authority of the Word of God in our mouths to overcome. Having it in our mouths means being ready to speak it and act on it at any moment even in the face of the harshest of opposition. As God Himself gave this command to His holy army charged with interceding for the world:

“And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the Lord, “from this time forth and forevermore.” (Is. 59:21)

Day Eleven = Weaklings Made Strong

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
(Ephesians 6:10)*

We read that God put on armor to fight against His enemies (see Isaiah 59:17). How much more than do we need to have on armor to fight in this present day battle against the forces of evil (see Eph. 6:12).

Paul, in referencing the message of the Cross, that blessed Gospel which is the power of God, said that “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:27) Some mere words on a page might seem like nothing against an avid foe, a simple little story about a righteous guy dying on a dreadful cross may sound contradictory; nevertheless, it is this story that can cause every demon to scurry, every tall giant to whimper, and every evil force to dissipate.

God’s story, His Word, is even stronger than an ardent dissenter. It brings grown men to their knees and strong women to tears. His Word is full of life and power for the scripture testifies of itself when it says “For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12) It is the Word of God which builds up faith in every believer (see Rom. 10:17). It is the Word of God that guides and leads us on the right paths (see Ps. 119:105).

As we fight this good fight of faith that we are called to (1 Tim. 6:12), we are encouraged to hide His Word in our heart and not let it be taken out of our mouth (see Psalm 119:11, 43). We are called to speak the Word of God into our own lives and into the lives of others. For the strength of the Lord comes from the might of His Word. You will be your strongest when you are in the Word. The Holy Spirit works through the power of the Word as He works the works of Christ Jesus in the world through weak vessels that are in the Word: “*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts*” (Zech 4:6 KJV).

Day Twelve = When in Rome

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (Eph. 6:11)

At the height of the Roman Empire, it was the strongest and most advanced civilization known to man. Stretching over a span of approximately 6.5 million km of land surface (Wikipedia), the empire engulfed the entire continent of Europe and more. Even though the empire was this vast with all of its many cultures blending together, there was something different about the people and their behavior in the main political city of Rome. In Rome, you did not want to be different from everybody else otherwise you would be noticed as an outsider. So, as the old saying goes “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”, meaning behave as those around do.

The roman soldiers always made sure they put their armor on yet; so many times Christians fail to put theirs on. Then we wonder why feel so beat up and abused at the end of the day. When you find yourself surrounded by enemy forces do as the roman soldiers do and put on your armor. As we go through the scriptures we find a list of what to put on in order to make it as Christians in a pagan city:

- Put on righteousness (Job 29:14)
- Put on Strength (Isaiah 51:9)
- Put on the armor of light (Rom. 13:12)
- Put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:14)
- Put on incorruption (1 Cor. 15:53)
- Put on the new man (Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10)
- Put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11)
- Put on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:14)
- Put on tender mercies (Col. 3:12)
- Put on love (Col. 3:14)

As they say, ‘when in Rome’.

Day Thirteen = Wrestle Mania

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12)

Have you ever been to a wrestling match? If not, let me give you a basic run down. The wrestlers, who have been training for a long time before this match come out one at a time as they are announced and applauded by the crowds. After both wrestlers are in the ring, they remove their outer robes and go to their respective corners where their coaches and trainers are standing by just outside the ring. In their corner, the coaches give them last minute advice and strategy pointers that may help them win their fight.

According to the Apostle Paul, you and I are in a wrestling match. Our opponent is none other than the Gates of Hell itself, not a physical attribute but a spiritual one. The roaring crowds are the saints who have gone on before. Right now, in your devotional time, you are sitting in your corner waiting for that last minute advice before you take center ring in the outside world. So, here are some pointers for you that will help in giving your enemy a knockout:

1. *Resist the enemy.* This piece of advice comes direct from the first church where James instructs “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7) In other words, don’t just stand there and let him hit you; Resist Him! There are two keys to resisting. The first is the Word of god. The Psalmist advises us to hide it in our hearts (Ps. 119:11). When you know the Word then you can use the Word. The second key to resisting is humility. Again James instructed that to be lifted up one must first humble themselves before the Lord (James 4:10). The enemy can use your own pride against you. Don’t defeat yourself, stay humble knowing that the fight is not yours but the Lord’s.
2. *Maintain positive relationships.* One thing you do not do in a wrestling match is listen to the voices in the crowd. Some of them may be against you. The Bible says “Do not be

deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” (1 Cor. 15:33) Listen to encouraging words and positive reinforcement. Negativity is a form of distraction which the enemy deploys against you.

3. *Abide in Christ and His Word.* Jesus shared a story to his disciples about a vine pruner and his vines. In this story the vine pruner keeps a good watch on the vines. When he finds any dead branches he quickly cuts them off and throws them into the fire to be burned. Using this to give a spiritual story, Jesus taught that the branches have to be connected to the root of the vine if it wants to keep healthy and vibrant. He then declared that He [Jesus] was the root and that they were the branches. To keep healthy and strong so as to escape a fiery end we need to keep connected to Christ. Your determination to the Lord determines how long you can stay in the fight. Jesus went even further to say that “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” (John 15:7)
4. *Praise God.* David had the right frame of mind when he sang these words: “In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?” (Psalm 56:4) This was his song when the philistines had seized him in the town of Gath. The enemy will always use some other fleshly or material object to get you down. {Much like wrestlers using folding chairs.} But David knew from the Word that God’s hand of protection is greater. When your opponent seizes you, just Praise God and sing: “What can flesh do to me?”
5. *Claim Christ’s authority over evil as is sanctioned in the Word.* Paul warned to the church not to forget their position in Christ. He said “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Gal. 5:1) We have been called to live free. Free from oppression, depression, corruption, disruption and all other forms of spiritual impediment. You do not have to be held down by your wrestling opponent. You are free from all of his clutches. Not only this, but we have the authority through Christ to hold the enemy down, down under our feet. “And he put all things under his feet and

gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Eph. 1:22-23)
This positional authority is taught in the Word of God.

As coach and trainer, my advice to you before you wrestle today is; Read the Word, Pray fervently, and stay on track with your fasting routine. You will win!

Day Fourteen = Holy Cleats!

Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (Ephesians 6:13)

The defense is lined up. You look around keeping in mind the play call. You begin, “ready, set, hike!” Ball in hands as you stand in the pocket looking for that open receiver. What’s this? In the corner of your eye you spot your protection failing and the defense is closing in about to tackle for a loss. What to do? Run? Or stand there to make the play that was called? You decide to stand and wait for your intended receiver to get open. You pound your cleats into the ground preparing for the potential hit about to come hoping to stand firm enough to make the play.

This might be what crosses your mind as you play quarterback for a little family football. This is also what might have gone through the mind of a roman soldier during the days of Paul. Their shoes also had cleats, like metal spikes, on the bottoms. In wartime they would line up and dig those nail-like cleats into the ground so as to not be moved by the engaging enemy.

As the Apostle Paul clearly had in view the Roman soldiers garb as he described the armor of God, he too recognized the importance of not being overcome by the enemy. He wrote to the church in Galatia “*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*” (Gal. 5:1)

During your fast the enemy of sin, will no doubt, come to knock you off your feet. Question is; what are you digging into to keep yourself standing? Are your holy cleats thrust into the Word of God so that even after all the spears have been thrown or those meant to protect have been tossed to the ground, you can stand when the enemy comes?

Day Fifteen = Hold It Up

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)

Further describing the armor of God, the Apostle Paul advises us to “*Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth...*”(Eph. 6:14). It is interesting that Paul would start his list, out of all things, with a belt. He could have started with the sword, or the shield, or the shiny breastplate...but a belt? Why? The belt is what held the sheath that the sword goes into. Going to battle without a sword is problematic and not having a place for the sword is scary.

The Matthew Henry Commentary says the belt "girds on [secures] all the other pieces of our armor." *Truth should cleave to us as a belt cleaves to our body.* (Henry)

Jesus, praying to the Father, gives a clear and straightforward definition of truth: God's Word. The Holy Bible (Scripture—the word of truth) was given by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16). The Greek expression translated "inspiration of God" literally means "God-breathed"! He actively and fully inspired the Bible to reveal His truth to us. His truth came to us through the person of the Holy Spirit. “But when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.” (John 15:26 KJV)

His promises, His commands, His word—they are all truth, plain and simple. After all, "The LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27). If God says something, there is no force that can stop Him from doing it—we can rest assured that it will be done.

The belt used in Roman armor, as we have learned, provided a place for the soldier's sword. Our sword—the sword of the Spirit—likewise needs a sheath. Truth is vital because, like a Roman soldier's belt, it allows us to carry the sword of the Spirit and use it effectively. (United Church of God International Association)

Day Sixteen = Starving to See

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matt. 5:6)

As we continue studying the armor of God in Ephesians, the Apostle Paul went on to describe another piece to the armor: "and having put on the breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6:14). We can never be right enough "as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10) This is because it is not our righteousness but His that makes us right before our maker. To be righteous is to do what is right in God's eyes. God's commandments are righteousness. In contrast, lawlessness is sin, and sin is the opposite of righteousness.

A lesson from ancient Israel provides an ironic example of just how important the breastplate of righteousness can be. Perhaps you recall the cowardly and capricious life of King Ahab, but how did this evil king's life come to an end? This selfish leader who allowed a man to be killed just so he could have his vineyard (1 Kings 21)? This king of Israel "who did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:30, New Revised Standard Version)?

God had prophesied that Ahab would die in the battle described in 1 Kings 22. So Ahab decided to disguise himself, while his ally King Jehoshaphat of Judah wore his own kingly robes. Their enemy had ordered his captains, "'Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel.' When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, 'It is surely the king of Israel.' So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out. When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him.

"But a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate...at evening he died; the blood from the wound had flowed into the bottom of the chariot" (1 Kings 22:31-35).

It is perhaps poetic justice that this unrighteous king lost his life due to an opening in his armor. The Bible says “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.” (Prov. 11:4) Without righteousness, we leave ourselves open to almost certain death. With righteousness—just as with a breastplate—the otherwise fatal attacks of our enemy are thwarted.

As previously stated, it is not our righteousness but His that makes us right before our maker. As we desire more of Him, His righteousness begins to clothe us and as we live more in righteousness, we begin to see more of Him in us. “For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.” (Ps. 11:7) For His righteousness imparted transforms us by the Spirit.

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor. 3:18 KJV) We must be hungry for that new level of destiny which awaits those striving towards righteousness.

Day Seventeen = Put Your Shoes On

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns. (Isaiah 52:7)

The armor of God discourse in Ephesians 6 continues in reading: "and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace." (Eph. 6:15) Shoes were probably not the flashiest piece of the soldier's armor. But without them, the entire forward march would become a dragging walk.

Moses found himself one day standing before a bush that was on fire but was not burning; an amazing site to behold. While standing there, out of the bush a voice came and spoke saying "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). God wanted Moses' feet to feel the heat on the sandy rock underneath him from the fire burning. Although, the scripture does not state conclusively, it is understood that Moses put his sandals back on after leaving that 'Holy Ground' in order to fulfill the mandate of the Lord given there.

Likewise, God brings us to special times in His presence where we can kick off our shoes and feel the warmth of His power under us. There He fills us with His grace and calls us to His work. He says "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15) and "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8b) When we leave His Holy Ground, we feel the anointing to do anything He challenged us to. We jump up, ready to go and conquer the world. Just one thing; put your shoes back on.

The Bible says in relation to our conquering; "The God of Peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." (Rom. 16:20) If you truly believe that, then put your shoes on and let's get to work.

Day Eighteen = The Source of Evil

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (1 John 5:4)

The next piece of the armor of God that we come to is the Shield. The shield traditionally is thought of as a defensive tool, however in God's armor it is a method of offense. "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16).

To quench the arrows of evil aimed at the church, we need to know what the source of evil is. Where did evil come from? In whom or what does it exist? In the very beginning of creation, when God created Adam, He commanded him saying "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen. 2:16, 17). This commandment reveals what God desires from mankind; faith. A Faith that trusts Him explicitly for the knowledge of what is good and what is evil. A faith that depends on God for what is right and what is wrong. We were never created to have this ingrained distinction. God was simply stating 'in this garden, you don't need to know right from wrong. I know right from wrong and I will never lead you astray. Do you trust me?'

Evil entered into human nature when Adam and Eve displaced their trust in God. They believed the deception that God is a liar; He does not have their best interest in mind; He is simply untrustworthy and must have an ulterior motive. Evil is not the presence of the devil, it is the absence of a trusting faith in God. Therefore, to dissolve the power of evil in the world we live in, takes a people full of faith in Christ. This is why the devil hates the church and attacks it at every turn. It is full of people who trust God.

But the church has nothing to fear. For Christ declared that "on this rock [faith in Christ] I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Mat. 16:18)

Day Nineteen = Hard Headed

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor. 6:2)

Looking further at the armor of the roman soldier, Paul referenced the helmet: “and take the helmet of salvation” (Eph 6:17a). Uncannily, that is all Paul says about it. He doesn’t add much description about the helmet. He doesn’t need to. Everybody knew that a helmet saves, and to go into battle without one is a deaths sentence.

The Roman helmet, like helmets today, protected the head from the attacks of the enemy. Our minds are a first attack point for the devil. This is why we are exhorted to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). This involves having God's laws written in our minds and meditating on them so we can better follow them (Hebrews 10:16; Psalm 119:97-99).

Paul, referencing the helmet in another place said “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” (1 Thessalonians 5:8-10) God does not desire for any to perish, but there is coming a day of perishing. A day of reckoning when all accounts will be settled and those with the salvation of the Lord will be lifted up to Glory and all others to damnation. At the last battle, when Jesus rides on the white horse and with a sword out of His mouth, anyone without the helmet will lose their life.

But for those of us who are among the saved don’t have anything to worry about. With the helmet securely fastened, we can have the same confidence that Paul did that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). We, hard headed believers, understand that it doesn't matter what happens to us now. No matter what trials we face, we know that at the end of it all waits God's Kingdom and an eternity with Him—and what could be better than that?

Day Twenty = Testimony Time

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. (Rev. 12:11)

In finishing up describing the armor of God, Paul points to the sword. He calls it “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17) Another scripture similarly describes it this way: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12)

Evangelist Perry Stone explains that the one edge is the published Word of God. It is that written word which He, through the Holy Spirit, has spoken to the prophets and apostles and all those who penned the Holy Scriptures that we now have and can read. This is also known in the original Greek as Logos. There is another Greek word translated as “spoken word”. This is the Rhema. The Rhema is the Word of God that you and I today speak in faith knowing that God will fulfill it. This makes up the other edge of the sword. (Stone)

The Spirit gives to us both the Rhema and the Logos (see 2 Peter 1:21). As we speak the words of God in the power of the Spirit, we cause action in the spiritual realm.

It took a roman centurion, a soldier wearing the armor, to illustrate this principle of the power of the spoken word transcendent to physical objects. The centurion knew several facts:

1. He knew that his servants’ suffering was the cause of spiritual warfare and not just physical elements.
2. He knew that Jesus had power in the spiritual realm; a power which he and others lacked.
3. He knew that all it took was the spoken words of Christ to bring the deliverance he sought.

The Sword: Speaking the Words of God by the Spirit of God.
It’s Testimony Time!



POWER IN PRAYER



For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:4)

SUPERNATURAL INTERACTION

I would like to begin by sharing a true story about an on-fire preacher and pastor for God named John Harding. John wasn't always a Christian and emblazoned for the Gospel of Christ. He was initially a career army man. He came out of the army and was living a sinful and wretched life. John's mother however, was a Pentecostal woman attending a little old church in their town; and she would pray, and pray, and pray for her son John. One day John got rip roaring drunk and took a notion to go down to that little old church. Now, this country church had those old fashioned swinging doors that when you push they swing both ways. He walked into the church and saw his mama sitting on the 2nd row not wanting to disturb anything he just slipped into the back row unseen. The preacher started preaching and something started messing with him on the inside. He knew that if he didn't get out of the church right then, he would never get out. So he got up and ran for the door. He pushed those twin doors and when he did, his testimony goes, that it was like hitting a sheet of concrete. They wouldn't open. John stepped back and came at the doors again and again they would not open, no one was standing behind them and he knew that they opened both ways. By this time people in the back rows were watching him. John went to approach the doors the third time and that's when he heard the voice of the Holy Ghost say to him; 'John if you push that door this time they're going to open'.

In the third test and trial of Christ's temptations, the devil challenged Jesus in His relationship with the Father and all of Heaven. He was tempted to pray and call upon the angels to perform supernatural feats of divine protection. Throughout the forty days, Christ spent many hours in prayerful communication with the Father. And although, Christ knew that the Word did decree for his protection; He also knew, that everything lawful to Him may not necessarily be profitable (see 1 Cor. 6:12). This revelatory knowledge came from interaction with his 'Abba Father'. Dr. Raymond Culpepper, General

Overseer of the Church of God Cleveland TN, once wrote “*prayer is more than communicating with the Father, it is interacting with Him.*” (Culpepper) Christ’s interaction with His Father during fasting was far greater than interaction with all of heaven and its angels in time of testing.

One of the greatest lessons that Christ gave to his disciples on the matter of prayer was where he taught that prayer was a means of interacting with Him. Jesus said “And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Luke 11:9). There are three means of interaction with the Lord through prayer; To ask, To seek, and To Knock.

The first means of interaction with God through prayer is to “ask and it will be given to you”. We find in James “...you have not, because you ask not” (James 4:2). This initial means of interaction is not to be thought of as a despised or prideful level of communication with God. This interaction should not be confused with a ‘give me, give me’ mentality. This form of interaction is appropriate as Paul instructed us to “Let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). The first thing a baby is taught as they learn how to speak is to ask for things. As we learn how to interact with God, we first must come to understand that “whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do” (John 14:13 KJV) Asking is a part of receiving, and receiving involves interaction.

The second means of interaction with God through prayer is to “seek, and you will find”. Some things cannot be apprehended by asking alone. Some things you have to search for. The world’s greatest treasures, like gold and diamonds, have to be discovered in the caves and river beds. Likewise, the greatest treasures of His glory cannot just be asked for “But seek ye first the kingdom of God...and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Mat. 6:33 KJV) In seeking after Him, we receive things we would otherwise never be able to receive. For after all, “He rewards those who seek Him.” (Heb. 11:6) We can interact with God by seeking Him.

The third means of interaction with God through prayer is to “knock, and it will be opened to you”. In the spirit, we do not knock on windows or walls; we knock on the door, which is Christ (see John 10:9). This means of interaction is assuredly the highest and most ultimate place of communication with God. It is at this level of interaction, where one enters into the presence of God. When we knock, we will be invited in to the place where God is, where his plans are revealed, where his purposes are understood, where his praises are heard. When you come to this final means of interaction with God and you enter through the door by your secret place of prayer coming in to His presence; in that moment asking for something just doesn’t seem appropriate, seeking and looking around appears futile, in that place where everything else is insignificant the only interacting that is done is God’s people basking in His beauty and grace; “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

The purpose of prayer and fasting is not just to communicate better with God and His Spirit, but it is to interact with Him for the purposes of the Spirit in the world in which we live.

When drunken and sin-infested John approached that door for the third time, and he heard the voice of the Holy Ghost speak audibly to him, he turned himself around on his heels and ran to the altar of that little country church. He got saved and filled with the Holy Ghost (Franklin). John is now preaching the Pentecostal Message in a church today, all because one mama interacted with God through prayer and together witnessed a lasting miracle.

Have you interacted with God today?

Day Twenty-one = Gaining His Favor

And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? (Luke 18:7)

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus shares a parable about a widow, her case and a judge. The widow demonstrates the power of persistent, insistent and focused prayer. The widow finally got justice from the unrighteous judge because she continually kept her case before him. When we pray, the One we are coming to is the Righteous Judge. How much more will He give His favor to those who are persistent, insistent, and focused in prayer?

Persistence is defined as continuing especially against an obstacle. Insistence is defined as “persistently calling for, or compelling attention” (Encarta Dictionary) Focus is the ability to stay on point.

Let’s take a minute to explore the possibilities if we take these three descriptive words and turn them into actions. Persistence by definition requires an obstacle. Look into your life and identify what the obstacle is. Maybe it is sticking to the fast without cheating, or maybe it is a health concern, relationship, or job woe. Whatever the obstacle in your life, it cannot be overcome without persistence, and conversely persistence cannot be present without the obstacle. Enter Insistence. This descriptive word comes into action when we begin to practice our faith. The definition of insistence calls for us to perform a task persistently or in the face of the obstacle. That is what prayer is, crying out to God believing that He will hear us no matter how big the problem. And thirdly we have our focus; which requires us to keep our eyes on the Lord every day. Moving our eyes off of Him for even just one day will change our focus and cause us to stumble. If we persistently insist upon keeping our eyes on Christ through close relationship facilitated through prayer, then our righteous judge will hear us, love us and provide answers to all of our troubles or obstacles in his perfect timing.

Day Twenty-two = Getting Sleepy

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Mark 14:38)

Have you ever attended a prayer service? I mean a service where there was nothing but prayer; no singing, no teaching, no video presentation, absolutely nothing but prayer? If yes, do you remember how many were there? My guess is not that many. The largest Christian crowds are not found in the prayer service, they are found in the concerts of the latest musicians and singers, or at the conference of the greatest evangelists, or maybe at the social gathering of the newest church club; but not at the prayer service.

Now, it is not as though I am suggesting that any of the aforementioned events are in any way bad, but rather I am seeking to bring to light the reality that prayer service is not popular. They are long, perhaps boring, we don't always know what to say, or pray for. After half an hour we are all out of things to say. We are not the only Christians who struggle to keep the prayer service a priority. Even the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane found it difficult to remain awake and pray. (See Mark 14)

The disciples were Jesus' closest friends. In the prayer service of a life time, just before Christ was crucified, when he was clearly distressed; even then his closest loved ones were unable to remain awake. We are not servants of an unreasonable, irrational, unrealistic God who seeks to fatigue us with boring unimportant traditions. Jesus wanted to teach his disciples that prayer was a tool that they needed to stay in communion with Him after he was resurrected and no longer with them in the flesh. He is looking for that communion with us today. Without communication relationship is not possible. Prayer is the tool necessary in order to keep communication with God. If we avoid prayer we avoid relationship with God. So remember, make prayer a priority today; and continue to build your relationship with God.

Day Twenty-three = This Is Impossible

What is impossible with man is possible with God. (Luke 18:27)

Impossible is what the friends of Jesus were saying to each other after Jesus arrived four days late. Lazarus was supposed to be Jesus' good personal friend. He was informed of his friend's sickness in ample time, why then did he wait? Why didn't he immediately get up and go to his side. It was well known in that time that Jesus had the power necessary to heal the sick. He had done it many times before, so why would he let his good close personal friend die? The situation had gone from not so great, to pretty bad, to impossible by the time Jesus arrived on scene. (See John 11)

Our lives often seem to form a similar line to this situation. Something bad happens, and we pray to God for help or for an answer. Instead of getting better it seems that the situation gets worse. We remind ourselves that God hears our prayers and we ask him a second time for help, this time giving it extra gusto. Maybe we say pretty please, this time or even go so far as to add the cherry on top! Still the problem seems to worsen. We feel alone, desperate, and frustrated. Pretty soon our situation gets all the way there. We find ourselves in the category of impossible. Nothing left to do but lie down and die right alongside Lazarus. Just then Jesus finally makes His way around to us and says ok I am here. All we can say to Him is what took you so long? It is impossible now!

The verse above reminds us that impossible is right where God wants us to be. Impossible is God's favorite place. Anyone can do the possible things but the impossible things can only be done by our great and awesome God. Everyone in Jesus' day knew that he could heal the sick; they had seen it with their own eyes. They had witnessed Jesus opening the eyes of the blind and causing the lame to walk, but death that was impossible.

Paul reminds us in his writings that being crucified in the flesh, or rather dead is necessary so that we might let Christ live in us. (See Galatians 2:20) Jesus resurrected Lazarus from

the dead in an impossible feat of victory so that all might see the power of the almighty God. In that same light Paul reminded the church that being dead in flesh was necessary that Christ's power might be seen.

As we find ourselves just over the hump of half way through our 40 day fast. You may find yourself saying the word impossible, but be encouraged today. Impossible is the realm in which God lives. Impossible is right where you need to be in order to see that mighty victory. Don't give up yet. Don't throw in the towel hold on because when you have reached impossible God will be there to intervene.

Day Twenty-four = Removing The Junk

“But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place, unless you repent.” (Rev. 2:4-5)

Perhaps one of my favorite worship songs is The Heart of Worship. The song talks about getting back to the true meaning of worship which is Jesus Christ. It references fading away music, taking out religious traditions and coming plainly before the thorn room of heaven. It even goes so far as to apologize for taking the true focus of worship away from Christ in the first place.

Our lives have become literally littered with stuff. We have numerous shows on several TV networks chronicling the lives of hoarders, messy house owners and junk collectors. We have found ourselves placing emotional attachment to physical items. I was amazed as I watched a program in which a woman experienced actual physical ailments which were impeding her ability to de-clutter her overwhelming filthy house. Panic attacks, shortness of breath, nausea. If one didn't know any better you would have thought she was having a heart attack, but no she was simply cleaning her house!

Our scripture today reminds us to come back to our first love. John while writing his revelations cautioned the church not to be caught up with the clutter that is life. Even in doing good things we can over clutter our schedules, even in purchasing necessities we can lose sight of what is truly a need. It is easy to lose focus. Clutter piles up fast and it seems that the first thing to suffer is our relationship with God. Make sure your true love is not of life and its clutter, be certain that your worship is stripped of everything and contains only a plain sincere relationship with God!

Day Twenty-five= The Heart's Intention

"I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." (Luke 18:12)

The scenario playing out in Luke chapter 18 is a parable Jesus told between a Pharisee and a tax collector. In this time period, civilized society considered the Pharisee to be refined and spiritual; whereas the tax collector was thought of as crooked or dishonest. The statement we read in our scripture above is made by the Pharisee. Through prayer he is attempting to bring to God's recognition the fact that by comparison the tax collector falls far short of the righteous bar set by his amazingly perfect religious constitution. In essence it seems that the Pharisee is chanting to God like a child in the school yard..."I am better than he is.... I am better than he is!

On the other hand if we read farther down into the passage we see the tax collector also in prayer. He has his eyes cast downward unwilling to even look towards the heavens. He is not concerned with what other people are doing in the temple. His only concern is repentance to God. He recognizes that he is a vile sinner and that Only God can cleanse him. He understands that no amount of "works" whether it be through tithes, or fasting, or scripture memorizing, or church attendance can atone for the sinful nature his flesh has succumb to.

Both men see the importance of the temple. Both men recognize the importance of prayer. So what is the difference between them? It seems that the moral of the story being conveyed lies in the men's true intentions. The Pharisee sought to perform the "works" of the Lord solely for the purpose of being recognized, and congratulated; however the tax collector was so grief stricken by his flesh that he literally beat his chest and cried for forgiveness. Repentance was his only concern!

It is easy to become "proud" of ourselves for a job well done. If you have made it to day 25 without falling off the fasting bandwagon, then a certain amount of pride in your own success is natural. In fact God is proud of you too. He is your heavenly father, He wants you to succeed. The trouble didn't come for the

Pharisee in being proud of his own accomplishments, but rather it came when his intentions changed from performing religious traditions in an attempt to be closer to God; to performing religious traditions in an attempt to receive praise for them.

Watch out! The devil will use any tactic to try and distract us from our true purpose. Don't be sidetracked. Keep your intentions for this 40 day fast pure. Pride in your success is ok; but success in an attempt to feed your pride is where you will surly fall.

Day Twenty-six = Heavenly Architect

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20)

In the very beginning of all creation the Holy Ghost was at work; "...and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." (Gen 1:2) As the creative force of the godhead, the Holy Spirit was actively involved as the world, in all of its complexities and design, was formed and established (see Job 26:13, Psalm 104:30).

The same work of creativity went into the making of mankind; "Let us make man in our image" (vs 26). Through use of the pronoun "us" we gather that the entire trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost collaborated together in the process of man coming into being and being made in the image of God. The creative work of the Spirit also became the life-giving work in man as God breathed into the lifeless body (see Gen 2:7, Job 33:4).

The Holy Ghost is not only an exterior builder but is also an interior designer. We are instructed in this by Paul: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?", "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19 KJV) His work on the inside aims at transforming a life of foolishness to one of faithfulness; "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." (Ezekiel 36:27; see also John 16:8)

As you pray today, listen and allow the Holy Ghost to convict, challenge and create a more faith-filled you.

Day Twenty-seven = Please be my Friend

“A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24

Have you ever filled out an application for something that required a character reference? It wouldn't make sense to choose someone who has different moral values than you. Further choosing someone who barely knows you would be absurd right? If I am choosing the best possible person to represent my character I would choose someone I am really close to. Someone who knows what I believe in and what my life is like.

Did you realize that the most important Character reference we will ever receive is going to come from Jesus Christ? He came to this earth as the “lamb who was slain” for our sins. (Rev 5:12) He is the reason a relationship with God is available to us. He is our intercessor between this wicked world that we navigate through and the Almighty God. (See Hebrews 7:25) He took on our sin at Calvary so that we would be able to receive grace and forgiveness for our sins. The book of revelations tells us that unless our name is written in the Lambs book of life we will be cast into hell. (See rev 20)

Since our eternal life depends on our name being written in the great book come judgment day, how do we get on the list? The answer is relationship. God has desired right relationship with his creation since the beginning of time. Try to think of the Lambs book of life as an address book for all of Jesus' closest friends. If he knows you in a personal relationship then you are in the book. If you don't spend time with Him, talking to Him, learning about Him and worshipping Him then He doesn't know you as a personal friend so... why would He write you in His book? As you continue through your fast remember that the main reason for self sacrifice is in an attempt to get closer to God. He wants nothing more than to know you personally and write your name on his friends list, the lamb's book of life. So take the time to talk to God every day He will prove to be your closest friend.

Day Twenty-eight = The Agreement

If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:19)

We have heard it said many times that there is strength in numbers. We have seen the power of the numerous strength many times. The larger army wins the battle, the larger protest gets its cause heard, and the larger stores make bigger profits. We usually associate bigger as being better. Even in simple stuff this principle is true. Look at the eyes of a child on Christmas morning one or two small packages... sure that's enough to cause some excitement, but bring out a giant box and it almost doesn't matter what is inside. For the most part bigger just seems to be better.

God wants us to realize this principle in our prayer lives as well. We can see it clearly in the physical world. Husbands walk their wives and children to the dark car because bigger stronger man equals safer..... we work harder to get that next big promotion because bigger paycheck equals better summer vacation..... Even our dinner is better ordered supersized and our dessert is better ordered a la mode. In the natural world we understand this principle, but God asks us to explore the possibilities of the strength in numbers principle in our prayer life.

We are encouraged to confess our sins one to the other and pray for each other that we may be healed. (See James 5:16) This is not because God wants someone to have a dirty little secret to hold over our heads. It is because of the numbers principle. More people praying equals more hearts seeking God's face which equals more relationships with Christ which equals answered prayers. Numbers equal power. Looking to ??? we see that one person can put a thousand devils to flight but two people or three people or four people how much more effective our prayers will be against every devil in hell! (see ??) Look to your fasting partner regularly, pray for one another and send those devils fleeing.

Day Twenty-nine = Fill Her Up

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19)

Life in the world we live in seems to be so fast paced. There is always somewhere we need to be, or something we are supposed to be doing. In fact taking an afternoon nap seems well... downright lazy. We work so hard to maintain our lifestyles that we go for weeks on end without even considering slowing down. Even our vacations seem to be filled up. Have you ever heard the expression I need a vacation to rest up from my vacation? Busy, busy, busy seems to be our way of life. The trouble with this lifestyle is that so many things get taken for granted. It is not until we are without them that we realize how much we needed them.

Take for example your car. You drive it every day to get to work or school, to drop the kids off, or to pick up the groceries. Everyone knows that gas in the car is of the utmost importance. We watch our gas gauges closely, and whenever that needle gets close to the big E we stop in the nearest gas station and fill her up! Now imagine for a moment that suddenly the gas gauge in your vehicle isn't working properly. It says it is at the full line but you have been driving all week without one single fill up. Surely it needs more fuel by now? All of the sudden you hear a chug chug chug and a clunk! There you are on the side of the road waiting for a rescue, and maybe appreciating the importance of the gas gauge just a little more.

In our Christian walk with the Lord we often treat our prayer time the same way. We know we should do it. We talk about doing it, but when it comes down to it we often find our prayer lives empty. Prayer is the fuel our spiritual gas tank requires in order to see the Power of God truly manifested. Make sure you are taking the time that is necessary with God to maintain that full unbroken gas gauge. Just like the verse in Philippians says, it is through this prayer that the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is revealed.

Day Thirty = A Little Help Please

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings to deep for words” (Romans 8:26)

Awkward silence, we have all experienced it in some way. Maybe you have gone to dinner with someone you don't know very well, or perhaps as a teenager or young adult you found yourself lacking in the art of conversation on a first date. Your mind is racing trying to come up with a funny anecdote or interesting tidbit to pull that awkward silence out of the air. Alas, you come up empty; and there in the silence you sit staring at your dinner plate.

It is interesting to note that those awkward moments generally occur with people we don't know very well, someone with whom we are not totally comfortable around. You see, when we are in the presence of close family and friends; we generally know how they will react to our jokes. We know their lives enough to discuss issues they may be facing, or subjects found in common; but to the guest or stranger we know none of this....Enter the awkward silence. When we are in close relationship, those moments of awkward silence are much fewer. Those closest to us, like our spouses or children; often know exactly what we will be thinking or what we will say.

The verse above tells us that the Holy Spirit knows His people so well that when we find ourselves in our prayer time and we can't think of what to say He will intercede to our heavenly Father on our behalf. He has the perfect words to express what we are thinking or feeling even if we cannot come up with them on our own.

So as you spend time in prayer this week ask yourself this question: Do I know the Holy Spirit? Am I in relationship with Him? Don't remain in that awkward silence of the unfamiliar relationship. Get to know the Holy Spirit, in doing so he will be like your closest family; loving and understanding you even when you are at a loss for words!



POWER IN WORSHIP



For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:4)

IN A MOMENT OF TIME

Three friends decided to go deer hunting together. One was a lawyer, one a doctor, and the other a preacher. As they were walking, along came a big buck. The three of them shot simultaneously, at the same exact moment. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and all three rushed up to see how big it actually was. Upon reaching it they found out that it was dead but had only one bullet hole. Thus a debate followed concerning whose buck it was. A few minutes later a game officer came by and asked what the problem was. The doctor told him their reason for the debate. The officer told them he would take a look and tell them who shot it. Within a few seconds the game officer said with much confidence, "The pastor shot the buck!" They all wondered how he knew that so quickly. The officer said, "Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other." (Sherman)

During the time of temptation in the wilderness, Satan came to Jesus with an opportunity to be worshipped and glorified by the entire earth. Satan currently held the dominions of all the worlds and he was handing over to Jesus the authority and glory of them all. Luke exclaims that all the kingdoms of the world were shown before the eyes of Christ "in a moment of time". It is interesting that the word here is the same which Paul used describing the great gathering of his saints in the last days at the last trump "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52a). This word moment can also signify a mathematical point, like the end of the line or a point in time. The Roman Emperor Antonius used this same word when he said "the time of human life, and the whole present time, is but a point". Doctors and scholars may disagree as to the actual numerical length of a moment, but no matter which time length you choose, I can guarantee its short.

Christ's reply to the Prince of the power of the air was that man should worship the Lord God Only. Fasting should increase our desire and passion for God alone, taking our eyes off ourselves

and focusing our attention on Him; realizing that it is not about us but all about Him. Fame, fortune, and fatness are what our human nature lusts after. Only in denying the infatuation for these fleshly laurels can one break the stronghold of them. The lust of the eyes is a powerful adversary but in fasting Jesus overcame.

In the days of King Ahab of Israel, the people worshipped the idol, Baal. It was a god that they could see, Baal was a physical calf made out of gold. Elijah called all the people to the top of a mountain and there, in a showdown of worship proved in fantastical fashion, that the invisible Almighty Lord of the universe is God who jealously yearns for their worship. Still today, the enemy of the church flashes before our eyes physical idols which he calls us to bow down and worship. The enemy will bring before us all the earthly goods and idea's, in "a moment of time". You don't have to wait to understand the philosophies of this world; you don't have to deny yourself instant gratification of whatever is the next hot thing. The enemy will simply bring it right to you when you forsake God and worship him.

But the church has a secret power in which to call upon even in the short moments of time. Our power is the quickening strength of the Holy Ghost; "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." (Is. 59:19) You don't have to bow down under pressure; you don't need what is being offered you by the world. In Christ and through the Spirit, you already have the authority over all things.

Like the preacher, we have to trigger these momentous calls of false worship to go in one ear and out the other. Keep your eyes on what God has in store for you and not on what is going on in the moment. God's timing is always more perfect than our own. And at this point in time, God is not interested in all the earthly things that we can present before him but He is waiting for the moment of time "when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23).

Day Thirty-one = A Matter of Opinion

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

Worship in the church is sometimes thought of as a matter of opinion. Even worship styles are considered a matter of opinion. One church worships very lively while another might worship more leisurely. But one thing is definitely not a matter of opinion; that we must worship Him.

So much of the church's operation is up for debate. The traditional congregation only wants hymns from a hymn book and pews rather than chairs, and of course skirts no pants ladies please! On the other end of the spectrum many contemporary congregations seek out loud exciting new music with lyrics streamed across a big screen for easy reading. As for the pews, the answer is no way! Comfortable stadium seating with soft padded chairs and ample leg room is the only way to go. The dress code is comfort, whatever that means to you. Jeans and a tee shirt are equally accepted alongside the couple with the full 3 piece suit and a long skirt. As Christians we often put so much emphasis on the details of the operation itself that we lose sight of what is truly important... Worship to the one true God!

In the time of Elijah the people couldn't even decide which god to worship. Talk about a church splitter! Back and forth they went today we worship Baal tomorrow the one true God. Fed up with the nonsense Elijah finally stood up and said enough. Worship was not the struggle of that day. Elijah did not have a problem getting the people to perform worship. The struggle was in the details, it was in the differences of opinion. The struggle was in the operation of church. Elijah had had enough! He knew that other gods were an abomination to the Lord. So he told them to pick one. Pick a side. Worship must be performed but God doesn't accept our worship if it is divided.

What we can learn from Elijah's circumstance is that true worship is a necessity. Our difference of opinions in the Christian church today may not be as severe as the one in the time of Elijah. We may not be arguing over which god to worship, however we do at times lose our focus on worship. We do occasionally get caught up in the detail of the operation and forget to perform that true worship that God so lovingly desires from us.

As we begin the last set of 10, in our 40 day fast. As we start the countdown to its completion; remember to spend time each day in true worship. The song isn't important; the setting is of little consequence. Whether you prefer Hymns of the Spirit or Christian Rock, whether you are in your snugly p.j.'s or your work uniform take time to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. (See John 4:23)

Day Thirty-two = Mis-placed Passion

And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention. (1 Kings 18:28-29)

Passion is a great thing. To love something and do it with your whole heart can be a fulfilling endeavor. The people we read about in 1 Kings were very passionate. Certainly if ever there was an award given for passion these people would take home the trophy. And the Grammy for most passionate display goes to... The prophets of Baal! They tried everything they could think of to get their god to respond to them. They were turned inside out, they were bent over backwards, they were at the end of their rope, and they were all out of sacrificial options.

Covered in self inflicted wounds they stood before the altar bursting with sacrifices, and still their god did not hear them. Elijah was standing there the whole time, patiently waiting for the prophets of Baal to conclude their worship service. When the worship activity for Baal calmed down Elijah must have looked around as if to say: everyone done now... Any last offerings... No... nothing? With a calm but firm stride Elijah approached the altar, calling for assistance as he carefully rebuilt the altar of the Lord. Once everything was in place Elijah looked to the heavens and asked God to reveal Himself. Instantly the prayer was answered. God consumed the entire altar wood, water, sacrifice and all with fire streaming down from the heavens.

Sometimes our passions can be misplaced. Think of the things you are passionate about. What is on the top of your list? The things we are passionate about can very easily become idols to worship. Don't be like the prophets of Baal wasting your precious time passionately worshipping the wrong things in your life. Place your passion, and your worship first with the Almighty God and he will open the heavens and stream powerful fire into your life!

Day Thirty-three = The Missing Altar

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (Rev. 22:17)

When it came Elijah's turn to offer up a sacrifice he had to call for an altar to be built. "Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down." (1 Kings 18:30) Why wasn't an altar already there? Could it be that the altar of the Lord designed to offer true honor and worship to the almighty God was toppled over by the carelessness of the Israelite nation? Sure and steady was the climb of mediocrity that seeped into the pores of the Israelites everyday life. One moral twist here, and another bend over there; mixing their faith, religion, and traditions with those of the cultures around them. It appears as though they tore down that altar one compromising brick after another.

Today in many homes the family altar is missing. Just like the Israelites we erected the altar once. We had good intentions but somehow life got in the way. We don't pray together, sing together, or read scripture together as a family anymore. We compromised the family altar away one brick at a time in the name of convenience. Susie likes to do her devotions at 5 A.M. and Billy doesn't like the devotion book we were using, and dad won't even consider listening to the new contemporary worship music, so..... Everyone goes their separate ways.

Ever heard of the phrase divide and conquer? Satan loves to use this tactic to separate God's people from Him. It is easy to slip in compromises, justifications, and excuses when there is no accountability. This is what happened to the Israelites. They allowed the religions of the cultures around them to seep in and compromise the purity of their faith. Bring back the unity in your family. Bring back the family altar. In order to effect change, in order for the power of God to be revealed Elijah first had to rebuild the altar. The altar is the place of change. It is

time for us to change; it is time for us to repair the altar of the Lord!

Day Thirty-four = Put Your Back Into It

“And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed.” (1 Kings 18:32)

All the way around the newly built altar Elijah dug a trench. With either crude ancient tools, or, bare hands; the Israelites and Elijah bent over and began to clear the dirt away from the base of the altar. I can almost hear Elijah say as he notices the hour getting late “come on men put your backs into it”.

Elijah had to prepare the people, prepare the altar, and prepare the sacrifice before he could even consider offering worship up to the Lord. Today worship is reduced to a 2 fast songs 2 slow songs music set sang by the worship leader on a Sunday morning. Often as Christians we waltz into our local church body on any given Sunday morning sing a few songs, (hopefully ones we actually like this time) and go home feeling as though we have met our worship quota for the week. No preparation necessary right?

This attitude towards worship is the exact opposite of what genuine worship actually is. True worship takes preparation. Just as Elijah first prepared the people, we have to first prepare ourselves by placing our mind into an attitude of worship. If we come to a worship service and allow our minds to wander to questions of how long is this going take or distaste for the chosen song then our mind is not prepared for worship. We haven't prepared ourselves. We must take our focus off of our surroundings, away from any song or time constraint and place it on God in order to have our minds prepared for worship.

Secondly Just as Elijah prepared the physical altar at Mt. Carmel, we must prepare our hearts which is our altar unto the Lord. We must take time to search our hearts and clean out the sin in order to prepare our altar for worship. How can we go to the Lord with true worship and contain sin in our hearts? This is impossible. We cannot be in the presence of God with sin. The bible tells us that sin separates us from God. (See Hebrews

7:26) How dare we attempt to come into His presence without first preparing our hearts?

Thirdly and Finally Just as Elijah prepared the sacrifice which was the bull, we must also prepare a sacrificial offering of worship. We are to offer our life as a living sacrifice, that we might die in the flesh but live eternally with Christ Jesus in the Spirit. Take time today to offer genuine worship unto God. Prepare yourself and give God your heart, your mind, and your soul. He delights in your praises!

Day Thirty-five = Cut Me Open

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

Everyone was watching as Elijah took the sacrifice, cut it into pieces, and placed it on the altar. What was going to happen? The prophets of Baal had spent more than half of the day appealing to their gods, with no results. Would Elijah have a better response? Would the God that Elijah prayed to be any different?

“And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood.” (1Kings 18:33a)

Look carefully at the words used to describe the preparation of the sacrifice. Elijah cut the bull into pieces. Why was this important? Wouldn't it be easier to simply heap the animal up on the altar and let God set fire? Why did it need to be in pieces?

God cares far less about our outward appearance of worship, but rather is most concerned with the worship that takes place in your inner most thoughts, and heart. Most of us Associate worship with outward expressions such as raising hands, or singing songs; but these actions are not the worship in and of themselves. They are simply the *expressions* our physical body displays as a result of our worship unto the Lord.

Just as Elijah broke open the sacrifice Christ wants us to be broken, He wants us to take all of the pieces of our heart and lay them out in worship unto Him. Furthermore this cutting or breaking open of the sacrifice implies complete and total surrender. Elijah did not just physically kill the sacrifice but he also broke it into pieces. Christ wants this kind of worship sacrifice of His people. He wants us to not only put to death that which is of the flesh but He further requires total surrender of every piece of our heart to Him, holding nothing back for ourselves.

Once the sacrifice was fully prepared Elijah prayed for the fire of God to come down from heaven. It wasn't something that required a long drawn out appeal. It was a short simple prayer, and then an immediate response. Fire fell from heaven that day because Elijah knew how to present genuine worship unto God. That same divine fire is available to all of us today. We simply need to offer up to God true genuine worship from our broken and cut open hearts.

Day Thirty-six = Thirsty Much

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. (Psalm 42:1)

At the time of this ‘fiery’ encounter on Mount Carmel, there had been a drought in the land for over three years. By now, water was scarce and drinking any was most likely limited to certain meals and special occasions. The water poured over the altar and into the trenches by Elijah meant more than first realized. Rev. L.E. Heil explains that “The word in the original Hebrew text is *mayim* (fresh water), not *yam* (sea water). It is identical to the word used in chapter 17:10 where the implication is clearly *drinking water*.” (Heil)

Elijah called for that which was extremely precious and poured it out as though it was plenteous. Likewise, the Holy Ghost is exceedingly precious in our churches today. Thirsty believers must be drawn to the altars to wait “*until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high*.” (Isaiah 32:15 KJV). During the Feast of Tabernacles, ceremonially the priests of Gods house would carry up the temple mount, buckets of fresh water drawn from the wells of Ophel, to empty over the temple altar. {sound familiar?} One year Jesus, while standing in the crowd observing the ritual, shouted: “*He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:38)

In all your fiery encounters, when feeling dry and empty, Christ is standing nearby saying: ‘Come and take a drink from my river of life. My Spirit can quench that longing thirst of yours. Draw from my overflowing wells and satisfy your souls.’ Let your worship always include the panting cry; “God, I’m Thirsty!”

Day Thirty-seven = Short and Sweet

O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back. (1 Kings 18:36-37)

Elijah's prayer was short and sweet. In fact, the prayer was not for him or for God. Elijah already knew that God was going to answer by fire as did God. No, this prayer was for the people standing around watching; waiting to see the celebratory show which might ensue. What a disappointment; no cutting or slicing, no dancing or chanting. Elijah's prayer consisted of just three appeals:

- Let it be known this day that you are God
- That I have done all these things at your word
- That this people may know that you, O Lord, are God

Our worship does not have to be long and drawn out either. It should through the Spirit:

- Reveal God
- Be done according to His Word.
- Turn the attention of others towards Him and away from you.

An old chorus summarizes best the short and sweet of it:

“I love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you. O my soul, Rejoice! Take joy, my King, in what you hear; let it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.” (Klein)

Day Thirty-eight = Revival Fires Fall

And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them, distributed among them, and rested (Acts 2:3)

Fire! Fire! Fire! Screamed the little boy as he pushed his fire truck around the living room floor. Mom enters the room and lovingly quiets the child. “Shhh little Johnny you are going to wake the baby!” “But momma there’s a huge fire!” replies the boy as he continues to play. We are taught from a young age that fire is hot. It will burn us, it will consume everything in its path. Elijah was counting on those very same truths as he prepared to call upon the all consuming fire of the Lord.

Fire is powerful. It has the ability to spread almost instantaneously. It has the ability to leave lasting effects on anyone or anything in its path. Fire is all consuming, all encompassing pure power. If a fire grows big enough, hot enough, and strong enough, not even water will be able to quench it. It is because of these qualities that fire makes a perfect example of the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Looking at Elijah as he prepared the altar, and sacrifice on top of Mount Carmel. We see him digging a trench and filling it with water. Elijah knew that there would be no amount of water that could quench, stop, or put out the fire of the Holy Spirit; however he still called for the water to be brought. He wanted the Holy Spirit’s power to be clear. He wanted no possible doubters, debaters, or disbelievers.

The Holy Spirit is longing to consume our lives with His fire. He wants to burn so hot within us that no one around us would be able to refute his existence. As you worship the Lord this week allow the all consuming fire of the Holy Spirit to grow and burn within you. Seek to be so filled by its power that the blaze can be seen by everyone you come in contact with. Let it leave a lasting effect on your life, and consume every part of you.

Day Thirty-nine = Down to the River

“And Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.” And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.” (1Kings 18:40)

Often as Christians we hear references to the living water. Jesus while speaking to the woman at the well said that she could drink from the rivers of the Living water and never be thirsty again. (See John 4) The living water that Jesus was speaking of was Himself. He continued later in the same chapter to explain to her that should she choose to forsake the water of the world and choose the living water that she would be a true worshipper.

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”

The woman at the well was a blatant sinner. She had according to her own admission not one but 5 husbands revealing that she was a promiscuous woman. When she came to the well that day seeking physical water Jesus knew she was internally seeking spiritual water, so he took the opportunity to explain salvation to her. Water in the physical world is a required item. The human body cannot live without it. Jesus equated a relationship with Himself to the human necessity for water. In other words without the living water or salvation, we cannot live eternal life; in the same sense that without water in the physical world, our bodies cannot maintain life. After explaining salvation Jesus further revealed to the woman that by putting to death false worship or love of the world, she would then be able to participate in true worship with our Heavenly Father.

Looking back into the account of Elijah It seems a little harsh that immediately following Gods revealing fire consuming the altar Elijah called for all of the Prophets of Baal to be brought down to the river and be killed. The reason this seemingly gruesome act was necessary was that after the revelation of the

one true God had come, all of the false worship had to be completely forsaken. The false worship, which was performed by the false prophets; had to be brought to the “water” (remembering that living water is referencing God) which in this case was the river Kishon and completely removed from the lives of the Israelites. The woman at the well brought with her all her past transgressions when she met Jesus, the living water; at the well. Elijah brought the prophets of Baal, which represented Israel’s broken covenant to the water (river Kishon) to face its death.

Search your hearts today. Is there any false worship that needs to be brought to the living water and killed? In doing this we will become true worshippers.

Day Forty = I Hear a Sound

Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain. (1 Kings 18:41)

Mahesh Chavda wrote in his *40 Days of Prayer and Fasting* that “Fasting moves you from the natural realm into the supernatural realm, and that is the only place you can get supernatural revelation, authorization, and power from the Holy Spirit.” (Chavda)

When Elijah spoke to Ahab after the prophets of Baal were defeated he told him rain was coming. This must have sounded a little strange at the time considering there had been a drought in the land for quite some time.

If you look carefully at the entire story of Elijah and the Prophet’s of Baal you will see an interesting chronology of events that can be specifically applied in our life today. First there were the Israelites living in the land that God had given to them however not fully possessing it. Allowing the religions of the cultures around them to infiltrate the covenant relationship God had with His people.

As a result of this broken covenant a spiritual drought seeped into the land. In the natural realm a drought swept over the territory as well in a sort of mirroring effect between the physical and spiritual realm. By the time Elijah made it to the top of Mount Carmel spiritual desolation had ravished the Israelite community.

In the Midst of the drought Elijah invoked the mighty power of the Lord calling for precious water to poured over the broken sacrificial offering and then praying for the Lord to reveal his all consuming fire from the heavens. By the time the altar and sacrificed were consumed by the Lord not a dissenter could be found in the entire land.

After the mighty revelation of the one true God death of the false prophets was required in the physical world so that restoration of the right relationship in the spiritual realm could

be attained. Finally, after right relationship was restored God sent rain; spiritual rain or refreshment for the Israelites, and also physical rain which refreshed the ravaged land.

As we finish out the last day of our forty day fast, look to God for refreshing rain. We have weathered the drought and self sacrificed through this fast in an attempt to grow closer to Christ. We have sought the face of God through fasting and prayer; we have searched our hearts to remove impurity and false worship; seeking new revelations each and every day. Now we can look to the heavens because the Lord is ready to pour out his refreshing rain over our lives.

It will take nothing short of the supernatural to stem the tides of judgment devastating our land. I believe nothing else can compare with the supernatural power released when we fast and pray. ~ Bill Bright

APPENDIX

To make the matter complete, we would add that fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not only be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some spiritual purpose. ~ (Lloyd-Jones)

3 Steps to begin your fast

The fast each individual chooses to follow is a personal matter between you and God. There are many examples of fasts in the Bible from complete fasts, drinking only water for a period of time, to abstaining from one particular food or activity for a time. Take time to pray and seek God's guidance as you read and research to make your decision of the fast you choose to follow.

1. Choose Your Fast

First you must choose your fast. You can either choose between a full fast, a partial fast, or a type fast (*i.e. the Daniel fast*). You must also choose the length of your fast; open ended fasts, where you go until you can't go no more, are not good or as effective. Your chosen fast should be aligned with your desired spiritual objectives. Remember to choose your fast with consideration of your health, your daily activities and schedule, and your routine obligations. It is always advisable to consult with your physician with any questions or concerns on fasting and your health.

Full Fast: A full fast is where you go without any food for the entire length of the fast. This is probably the hardest fast but can also be very rewarding.

Partial Fast: For this fast you would decide on a particular regimen to consistently follow throughout the fast. You can choose a particular meal of the day or fast only certain days of the week. What you start off with should be continued throughout your fast.

Type Fast: With the type fast you would follow the outline for that fast being mindful of the objective of the fast. To begin a type fast you would need to decide which type you would follow. Some different type fasts are: Daniel fast, juice fast, vegetarian fast, etc.

Additional Option: Although fasting is mainly associated with food, there are many other things that can take time away and/or which could be a hindrance in your period of fasting. Items such as: TV, Radio, Computer and/or internet, Social Networks, books, newspaper or magazines, games, phone, working on the car, etc. It may be worthwhile to abstain from these as well so as to get the most out of your chosen fast.

Regardless of the fast chosen, it is important to remember that the time normally spent in eating or in other engaged activities should be replaced with prayer, bible reading, and worship.

2. Pick an Accountability Partner

An accountability partner is a person with whom, during the course of the fast, you can be in consistent communication with. It would be good if this person was also fasting at the same time as you. The purpose of the communication is to provide encouragement, inspiration and strength during your fast. Sharing what you are fasting for may also be helpful as your partner will be able to pray more specifically for you and your fast.

The method of communication can be varied and based on what is feasible between you and your partner however, the consistency of communication should be no less than weekly

for long fasts (more than 1 month) and daily for shorter fasts. Each contact should include a prayer for each other.

3. Record Your Journey

As you fast you will receive divine revelations, you will unravel biblical mysteries, and ultimately draw closer to the Spirit of God. Journaling is a tool that helps you log your journey through the fast and gives expression to thoughts, impressions and insights you would otherwise forget. You don't have to be a writer or concerned about spelling or grammar. It is a personal account for your purposes only, but it provides a rich record of your experiences with the Lord each day. In days to come you will enjoy looking back to reflect upon the prayers you wrote and rejoice in the answers to prayer you'll encounter.

Ways to record your journey are:

- * in a journal, notebook or diary
- * in your bibles margins or index pages
- * in a computer program such as MSWord or pages
- * in an online platform i.e. facebook, twitter, wordpress, typepad, etc.

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Thank You for taking

THE FORTY-DAY CHALLENGE

A Closing Prayer

Thank you Father for hearing our prayers and for seeing us through this time of sacrifice, brokenness, and discipline. May your love surround us and your grace embrace us, and may the empowering anointing of your Holy Ghost come upon each one who has taken this challenge and has committed to walk in your power and share your message. Amen.



For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:4)

Bethesda Church of God



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