FASTING DEVOTIONAL

by Hope Church

DAYS OF

PRAYER & FASTING

DAY 1

SEEK HIM

BY CHARITY HERRMANN

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

-Matthew 6:33

DEVOTIONAL

A few years ago, during a move, I stumbled on an old notebook that I used to journal my thoughts and prayers as an early teenager. Oh, the gems I found among those pages, but one, in particular, caught my eye and had me laughing out loud, quite literally. "Lord, I know You hear my prayers, and I ask You to respect them." Wow. I clearly thought I had the formula all figured out. But upon thinking on it further, haven't we all had some version of that thought, even subconsciously? Lord, I've sought You on this, and You said...now, where's it at?? Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all of these things will be added to you." The problem, often, is that our focus is on "all of these things" and what comes as a result of our seeking instead of the beauty of what we're seeking - His love, His joy, His peace, His presence. I love how the Passion Translation puts it, "Chase after the realm of God's kingdom and the righteousness that proceeds from Him. Then all these less important things will be given to you abundantly." The things are less important. The kingdom fruit of the seeking is the true prize.

PRAYER

Jesus, I thank you that every fruit of Your kingdom is accessible to me if I simply seek after it. I thank you that if I ask to know more of Your righteousness, peace, and joy, I receive righteousness, peace, and joy. I thank You that in Your love, you are removing a "vending machine" mentality from my heart and replacing it with a hunger and thirst for You and You alone, and I thank You that all of the things that are necessary for my life are also added to me as a result.

APPLICATION

Make seeking Him a daily activity. When you wake up, when you drive to work, when you go shopping, look for him. Where is He is moving? What is He doing? Find yourself only looking for Him, and you will find yourself exactly where you are supposed to be with exactly what you need.

JOURNAL PROMPT

For today, instead of journaling like I did when I was 13 and listing all of the things you want or even think you need, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal where more right thinking, peace, or joy is needed and invite Him into those places with you and show you His way in these specific circumstances.

FAITHFUL FATHER

BY GARY HAY

"For the Lord will not forsake His people; He will not abandon His heritage…"

-Psalm 94:14

DEVOTIONAL

This iron-clad promise is found in a larger passage contrasting the plight of foolish people who ignore the Lord versus those who accept His guidance. Clearly, these verses contrast a clash of kingdoms. They speak of a sinful, fallen world persisting in its struggle against God's kingdom in much the same way that darkness opposes light. However, this psalm powerfully reminds us that regardless of how it may appear from day to day, the Lord is not ambivalent to the challenges we face. His resounding promise declares that those who trust and follow His ways will receive His everlasting protection and support.

The writer of this psalm is writing from a perspective many of us can relate to. It is obvious that a great number of his fellow citizens appear to have been wickedly oppressive and abusive to those who choose to follow the Lord. This psalmist seems to leave an impression that he sees them getting away with their wicked behavior. But in the end, he is reminded of God's ultimate control and promise, and is encouraged. We should be powerfully reminded that nothing escapes the notice of God's ever-searching eye and that His promise of justice and care for His people will never be abandoned!

PRAYER

Lord, let me forever remember that the faithfulness of your love will see me through every trial.

APPLICATION

Let's learn to turn our thoughts constantly to God's promises and refuse to be dominated by the actions of our oppressors!

JOURNAL PROMPT

How should I respond to my oppressors since their future is so bleak?

How should I "manage" my attitudes to what is going on in the world around me?

DAY 3

OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

BY KATIE LEVELL

"And in the last days it shall be; God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams..."

-Acts 2:17

DEVOTIONAL

The upper room—a gathering of like hearts who repeatedly chose mystery over mastery as they followed Jesus and encountered the unseen realm daily; a place where the invisible became visible, igniting hearts to the reality of God's promise to pour out on all flesh through the Holy Spirit.

You have a living flame inside you already burning with desire to catch the wind of your heavenly Father's breath. An intimate invitation into the mysteries of God awaits those who have open hands and willing hearts.

PRAYER

Father, consume my body and soul with your love. Holy Spirit, baptize me in fire and ignite the flame inside so I can see you rightly. Reveal every lie that has tried to tell me I'm not worthy to receive the full manifestation of our union, including speaking in other tongues. Fill my mouth with fire so that every word that passes my lips would be filled with the mysteries of heaven and ignite faith in me and around me.

APPLICATION

Go back and read all of Acts chapter two. Place your hands on your heart and declare, "Father, I am in you, and you are in me. Breathe life and truth into my imagination and make it a safe place to experience your Kingdom realm."

JOURNAL PROMPT

Ask the Father to reveal any lies you've believed and show you the truth about the Holy Spirit. Write down the first things that come to mind.

DAY 4

FREEDOM *BY CALEB AGEE*

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

-Galatians 5:1 & 13

DEVOTIONAL

There are two kinds of freedom, let's call them earthly freedom and Kingdom freedom.

We find earthly freedom in our ability to choose (within reason) to do whatever we want to do. It's a beautiful thing that should be available to all. People have fought and died for it throughout history—living without oppression, tyranny, or slavery.

This earthly freedom was tainted when sin entered the world. Our own choices became what enslaved us. We needed freedom, but not just one found on earth—something that can only come from the kingdom of Heaven. We needed Kingdom freedom.

We have to start by remembering: His kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. The first are last, you must die (to your old self) to find life, and freedom is found only in surrender. This freedom isn't choosing what we want. It's choosing to lay down our lives—surrendering our broken way and recognizing that we need Christ to really be free from the greatest slavery: sin.

Sin's slavery was abolished more than 2000 years ago! The work was finished on the cross. So, when we find ourselves stuck—caught in cycles, enslaved, we begin by taking our eyes off the problem and setting our focus on the Solution. Then, we repent—turning 180 degrees. And we surrender. Giving up control is the only way to truly be free.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for the freedom you gave me through your sacrifice. If there are any places in me that aren't completely yours, please reveal them to me. I give them to you so I can be wholly surrendered to you.

APPLICATION

Today, remember the things Jesus has redeemed you from—express your thankfulness.

JOURNAL PROMPT

Now that we're a little way into the fast, how has fasting helped you find freedom? How can you use your freedom to "serve one another in love?"

HEALTH

BY KRISTI THOMPSON

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

-Psalm 103:1-5

DEVOTIONAL

Taking care of what God has given us is a scriptural mandate—that includes our bodies. We make choices every day that either help or hinder our health. Be encouraged. God wants to help you be healthy in your mind, body, soul, and spirit. Let's partner with Him this year to live in whole health.

PRAYER

Proverbs 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine.

Pray for the health of our church family; pray that our minds would be renewed; pray that bodies would increase in health; pray that we'd experience whole health in our minds, emotions and bodies, and that our souls would find rest in God. (Ps. 62:5)

APPLICATION

Ask God how he sees you and journal about it. What are some areas where you don't feel you are at your healthiest and journal what He says to you about those things— switching out lies for His truth about you so that you can walk in health.

What are some practical ways that you will walk out health this year? Switch out your soda for water? Walk 10 minutes a day outside? Celebrate your progress and take it beyond this month.

JOURNAL PROMPT

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

Take time to sit with God and dream about what your life looks healthy in this new year. What goals will you and the Holy Spirit make as you begin steps to whole health? And continue to grow as you learn to value health.

DAY 6

THE CHURCH

BY JOSH THOMPSON

"...that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy..."

-Colossians 1:9-11

DEVOTIONAL

Have you ever just felt like you didn't have the wisdom or understanding that you needed? Has it seemed in a particular season of life that you lacked the knowledge or the inner strength to move forward in what God was calling you into? One of the greatest places of strength is not in having it all together but actually recognizing our need for God. And one of the central ways we actually recognize our need for Him is through prayer. The Apostle Paul knew that the emerging Church wouldn't have it all together. Throughout his letters, he offered up prayers for them. He knew that if they were going to live a life that was pleasing to the Lord and walk out their God-given assignments, they would need supernatural wisdom, understanding, and power at work in them and through them. The same is true for you and me.

PRAYER

Father, we ask that the Church would be filled with the knowledge of your will and that we would be in step with you; that we would be filled with all wisdom and all spiritual understanding necessary to move forward in walking in your way, Jesus. I pray that we would live our lives in such a way that we would please you and bear fruit in everything. Show us what you are doing, so we can do it with you. I pray your Church would be strengthened to walk with you over the long haul—full of power to endure through all things with great joy!

APPLICATION

Take time to pray this passage over specific people/ groups / leadership at Hope Church.

JOURNAL PROMPT

Take a few minutes to remember times when God filled you with knowledge, wisdom, or understanding that you needed but did not have. Write down areas of your life that are pleasing to the Lord, areas where you are bearing fruit.

DAY 7

HEALING OUR LAND

BY DREW WILLIAMS

"...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

-2 Chronicles 7:14

DEVOTIONAL

It can be overwhelming trying to 'solve' the myriad of current cultural and societal issues in 'our land.' The problems seem overwhelming. Good news: God is not surprised by 2021 in America, and His will is to bring healing to Springfield and the greater world. In our processing of the problem, we can and should look through the lens of 'What role does God play?' and 'What role do I play?'

The Bible makes it clear – It is our responsibility to (1) humble ourselves, (2) pray and seek God's face, and (3) repent of our sin. When we do that, we invite God to come and do what only He can do – (1) Speak from heaven, (2) forgive our sins, and (3) heal our land.

PRAYER

Father – You are still on the throne. You are God, and I am not. Help me to maintain a posture of humility. When the weight of the world is on my shoulders, help me to transfer that weight to your shoulders in prayer. Help me to seek your face. Help me to partner with you as you heal and restore my 'land' and establish your Kingdom on earth.

APPLICATION

Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight areas of your heart where pride has taken root and find ways to humble yourself. Redirect the energy you've spent on worry to time spent in prayer. Remind yourself of how small the problems are in comparison to the power of our God. Look for areas of your life where repentance is overdue and make the change to reorient your heart and your hands to the Jesus way.

JOURNAL PROMPT

What is the difference between 'humbling yourself' and 'being humbled'?
What role does repentance plan in the healing of our land?

COMMUNITY LEADERS

BY CHRIS BRYANT

"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

-1 Timothy 2:1-2

DEVOTIONAL

A vital component to living a peace-filled, godly, and holy life is praying for the leaders of our community. Numerous places in Scripture remind us of the centrality of prayer to enjoying God's peace (Is 26:3; Phil 4:6). In this passage, Paul reminds the reader that praying for your leaders is essential to that peace, for those in authority have been installed by God as instruments of his divine will (Proverbs 21:1; Rom 13:1-2; 1 Pet 3:13).

PRAYER

Father, I know that no man holds authority unless it is given by you (Jn 19:11). Thank you that you are in charge of our leaders. I pray that you would bless them and draw them into a relationship with you through faith in Jesus, for no man or woman is beyond your ability to save. Fill them with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to serve and administer according to your good plan. May your kingdom come through our leaders, and may your will be done. Let me never grumble against our leaders, but give me a mind to pray for them, and show me how I can be a blessing to our community.

APPLICATION

Choose one of the city leaders to write a letter to thank them for their service. Let them know how you are praying for them. Mail or hand-deliver the letter, and consider adding a small treat to bless them for their work.

JOURNAL PROMPT

Look up the mayor, police chief, and fire chief in your city, and write out a prayer in your journal for each of them.

DAY 9

MISSIONS *BY BRANDON COTTEY*

"He said to the, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."
-Mark 16:15

DEVOTIONAL

I had a conversation about God with someone a long time ago. In this conversation, she simply said, "How can you believe your God is the right one with so many different gods in the world? The word God is an ethereal idea." I sat there for a moment. She was right. How can I be sure that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not an ethereal idea? The only way I can be sure is if what Jesus said in John 14:7 is true. "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on, you know Him and have seen Him."

I think about this conversation when I read Mark 16:15. With all the different narratives of our day trying to win truth over people's minds and hearts, is the gospel I'm proclaiming an ethereal idea, or is it proclaiming the revelation of who Jesus is? What we spend the most time meditating on is the gospel we'll proclaim. Are we proclaiming the gospel of the American dream, the gospel of leadership, the gospel of our favorite social media influencers, or are we proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The gospel of Jesus is found in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We should meditate on these. I want to encourage you that time spent with the man, Jesus, is how we'll know that the gospel we're proclaiming is not an ethereal idea but something we can all touch, feel, and find wholeness in. Making time to abide, then sharing the best news, that's not an ethereal idea, but instead the man, Jesus! We'll intimately be connected to Him, as he talks about in John 15. This is something that we can experience today! In abiding with Jesus, we will know God and see God.

PRAYER

Jesus, help me abide with you so I can intimately know you. I ask that you reform the hours of my day. Give me boldness and the grace to share the gospel with all of those around me.

APPLICATION

Think about what time of the day works for you to abide with Jesus in prayer, worship, reading the bible, and meditating. Be encouraged to wake up early. He often asks for those early morning hours.

JOURNAL PROMPT

Who's gospel are you proclaiming? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal this to you.
When you think about proclaiming the gospel to all of creation, who comes to mind?

DAY 10

OUR CITY *BY PAUL HARRIS*

"Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

-Matthew 9:37-38

DEVOTIONAL

As we look all around, we can see opportunities for Jesus to impact our city. I think it's important to remember that an awareness of all that needs to be done can become a distraction from actually doing anything. Often, we are looking for the laborers to harvest, and we forget that we are the sent ones; WE are the laborers. When we become aware of an opportunity to impact our city for the kingdom of Heaven, when we become aware of a strategy that can be used to contribute to the harvest, it's important that we, as followers of Jesus, get to it rather than waiting for laborers to show up. We must move from just "hearers" to "doers." You are the laborer. The harvest is ready.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father. Thank you for using us to lead people to you. Help us to have your heart for everyone we encounter. Help us to see "harvest opportunities." Let us not be distracted or overwhelmed by the need, but help us to have your heart so that we can see as you see, hear as you hear, and love as you love. We pray for the strategy of Heaven so we can be the exact representation of your kingdom in our home, our neighborhood, and our city. Help us to have more than an awareness that the "fields are ready" but empower us to be the laborers we are called to be. In Jesus' name.

APPLICATION

In your prayer time, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight ways that you can be used to be light in your home, neighborhood, and city. Ask how the Holy Spirit wants to use you to be an ambassador of the kingdom of Heaven in your town. Don't wait for someone else. Don't wait for a pastor. You have been called; you have been equipped to be a laborer.

JOURNAL PROMPT

What's an area that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you when it comes to a need you can meet in your city? What's one way you can take the first step in moving from a "hearer" to a "doer" in your city?

DAY 11

THE POOR & HOMELESS

BY DENÉE FAY

"The King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me..."

-Matthew 25:40

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus set the example for serving the least of these. He brought the Kingdom by reaching out in compassion to touch the leper without fear of being labeled unclean (Mt. 8:3). We often move past the poor, the outcast, and the homeless without saying a word or even making eye contact. However, these simple acts of compassion embody the heart of the Father so deeply that He regards them as serving Christ: giving food to the hungry, welcoming strangers, giving clothing to the poor, visiting the sick or imprisoned. Jesus sees and commends your acts of compassion.

PRAYER

I ask to carry Your heart for the poor and homeless. Move me with compassion. I want to be Your hands, feet, and mouthpiece to all who are lost.

APPLICATION

We are charged with the responsibility to serve as Jesus' hands and feet and establish a relationship with those lost so we can share the good news! Serving builds a bridge to relationship. Here are a few simple ways to serve:

- Elevate Lives: mentor the working poor or renovate a home
- Salvation Army: donate canned food and volunteer to serve a meal
- Connecting Grounds: serve the homeless with clothing and supplies
- Nominate a family for the Dollar Club at hopechurch.net/outreach.

JOURNAL PROMPT

How can I foster a heart of compassion towards the poor and homeless?

Write down what you think Jesus would say to someone in this scenario who came across His path.

DAY 12

OUR NEIGHBORS

BY PAUL HARRIS

"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."

-Romans 12:10

DEVOTIONAL

As I meditated on this verse, in the context of my neighbor, I thought about all of the literal neighbors I have had in my life. I have had those who are older than me and those who were younger. I have had those who were also followers of Jesus and others who were not. There were times when I was "devoted in love" and "honored them about myself," and at other times, I acted or reacted in the exact opposite way that this scripture instructs. I have come to understand that it's often the people who we wind up in closest proximity to us are those who the Father, in His mercy, has given us the opportunity to live this verse out with. Sometimes it's our literal neighbor. Sometimes it's the person serving us food. Sometimes it's the person who cuts us off in traffic. The verse doesn't give much direction on what we should require from "our neighbor" but seems pretty clear on how we should interact with those around us.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father. Thank you for giving me opportunities to practice being more like you. Thank you for how intentional you are when it comes to those you place in my path. Help me to be like you in every encounter. Help me to be devoted to everyone in love. Help me to honor everyone above myself. Whether my actual neighbor or the person in closest proximity to me, help me represent you in love, honor, and humility, in Jesus' name.

APPLICATION

Go out of your way to be considerate, caring, and honoring to people you encounter. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to love with the heart, see with the eyes and hear with the ears of the Father. Remember, it's easy to love those who are loving, but what about those who act in a way that seems less deserving.

JOURNAL PROMPT

What's one way you can love and honor your actual neighbors in your neighborhood? How can you be intentional when it comes to loving and honoring those that the Lord puts in your path, whether they look, think, or believe like you or not?

DAY 13

FINANCIAL BREAKTHROUGH

BY TYLER BATTEN

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

-Jeremiah 29:11

DEVOTIONAL

So many things in our life with Jesus come down to trust. How do we learn to trust him more? What areas are we not trusting Him? In relationships, the longer we know someone, the more trust we build in them. The same is true with the Lord. As each day passes, we can see His goodness and faithfulness in each area of our life if we train ourselves to intentionally look for it. Even though Jeremiah talks to the Israelites in this passage, we know that these words are still true today. God holds our future. God has a plan for us, and when we trust Him, we can see that unfold. One of the hardest places to let go of control is our finances. As Americans, we are taught to make things happen for ourselves and to control our own destiny. But in the Kingdom of God, things are often upside down. The last becomes first. The weak are made strong. "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer: another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want." (Proverbs 11:24) Let us be people who freely give our money without fear of going without. In this new year, let's look for ways to be more generous with all of our resources and walk into the freedom that God has for us.

PRAYER

Lord, I want to trust you in everything I have. In my finances, my job, and my relationships. Show me where I am holding on too tightly. Teach me how to trust you more in my finances and show me how to build your Kingdom and not my own.

APPLICATION

Think of ways you can be generous with your treasure, time, and talents this year. Is there someone you know personally that you could bless in any of these ways?

JOURNAL PROMPT

Remembering what God has done builds our faith and trust in Him for the future! Write down three times in your past where God has provided financial breakthrough for you and/or your family.

DAY 14

MIRACLES

BY BETSY JACOBS

"Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise."

-Jeremiah 17:14

DEVOTIONAL

We live in a see-it-to-believe-it world, but the people of God know something so many often don't—to first believe is actually to see. And while cynicism and disbelief vie for our attention, when we set our sights on Jesus, our eyes open to His possibilities, making way for Heaven's reality to invade ours. It's from this God-given advantage that Believers can declare amid sickness, "Heal me, Lord!" and we expect to see healing; in times of uncertainty, we faithfully cry out, "Save me, Jesus!" and we know we will see salvation. Believing that there is no impossibility found within God opens us up to see His kingdom come and His will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven-- empowering believers, against all odds, to proclaim in praise, "You are the God who works miracles!"

PRAYER

Father, you are the God of the impossible, and I want to see your Kingdom come, and your will be done in every life area. I open my heart and am expectant to see the fullness of your reality manifested in my life because you are the God who works miracles!

APPLICATION

You are God's walking miracle, His sign & wonder, a living testament of His mercy and goodness. Seek out someone facing what seems to be an impossible situation and ask to pray over them. Believe in a big way for them! If they need healing, pray for it. If they need breakthrough, declare it over them. Invite them into an encounter with our Waymaker—Jesus Christ!

JOURNAL PROMPT

Do you have an area of life that needs a miracle? Knowing that God sees it all and knows what you need, write down anything, big or small, that feels like an impossibility to you currently?

Next, take a moment with the Holy Spirit and visualize what it would look like to see His possibilities instead of the impossibility you've written down above. Then, ask the Holy Spirit how you can partner with His perspective in regards to what you've written down. Is there an action step you can take today that will help you step out in faith? Write what you discern, hear or see.

RELATIONSHIPS

BY SARAH OSTAPKO

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

-Matthew 7:12

DEVOTIONAL

Relationships can be messy, complicated, and at times frustrating. Why? In our humanity, we are selfish, self-seeking, and easily offended. So then, how do we overcome these natural tendencies and see our relationships and friendships through the eyes of grace, love, and compassion? By seeing others the way Jesus does. Each person is sacred. God uniquely creates each with different strengths, gifts, and personalities, and each of us bears his image. Abiding in him and deploying this heavenly lens equips us to care for each friendship and relationship.

PRAYER

Father, help me show love and grace to others the way you consistently do for me. Highlight specific examples in my own life where I can be a better friend and neighbor. With Your vision, Lord, give me eyes to view each person as your beloved, immensely valuable, and treasured to you.

APPLICATION

Loving others the way the Father does is not easy. It requires humility, discipline, and an exceeding amount of grace. Thankfully we're not alone in this, and the Holy Spirit freely empowers us to live out our lives with compassion, empathy, kindness, and love. Think of the relationships in your own life, ask yourself, are you caring for the people God's put in your path with love and intentionality? Now think of how you would want someone else to extend the same to you.

JOURNAL PROMPT

What am I most grateful for in a relationship? Who can you call today to encourage? What friend needs affirmation today? When was the last time you sacrificed comfort in order to provide something to help your friend in need?

DAY 16

FAMILIES *BY JONATHAN DISTAULO*

"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too difficult for Me?"

-Jeremiah 32:27

DEVOTIONAL

Among the many lessons taught within the context of family is the lesson of equipping our children to hear challenging words without feeling disconnected from us, to respond to teaching without turning a deaf ear. Within today's text is the story of how God chose to deal with the children of Israel in their persistent refusal to obey God's teaching and abuse his patience. This serious moment of discipline, leveled against the children of Israel, ends with a reminder that nothing is too difficult for God and that His commitment to them remains unbroken; God even promises to "restore their fortunes," so what does this tell us about family exactly? When you belong to a family, there needs to be an understanding of who is in charge. With that comes times of rebuke and times of encouragement, times of discipline, and times of reward. It's unpopular to talk about rebuke and encouragement, discipline and reward, yet God models this with his own children.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I am your child. I submit myself to your authority and choose this day to honor you in what I say and do. Open my ears to hear you better. Help me to lead my family well, to show grace where needed, and be approachable at all times. Amen.

APPLICATION

Try communicating a moment of A.W.E. with a family member.

A - here's something I appreciate about you.

W - here is something I want for our relationship

E - here's how I feel about you

JOURNAL PROMPT

Have I silenced God's voice of rebuke or his discipline in my life?

DAY 17

MARRIAGES *BY PETER OSTAPKO*

"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

-Mark 10:6-9

DEVOTIONAL

There's little on this side of heaven that will bring you as much joy as a thriving marriage. I know, it sounds too simple, but it's true. The passage in Mark tells us, "So they are no longer two but one flesh." The idea is we're no longer our own, that at the altar, when we exchange our vows, we've given ourselves away for the betterment and service of the one we love. Marriage is not transactional; it's not a give-and-get system or set of mutually understood agreements; it's a covenant commitment before God, testifying and declaring that no longer is my life about me. Our culture's perspective and subsequent evolution of marriage has watered down the beauty of what God intended for this all-important and foundational relationship. We've made it too easy to bow out and give up. If the scripture is true, we wouldn't so easily give up on ourselves, so why would we give up on each other?

PRAYER

God, thank you for the gift of marriage. Thank you for the gift of my spouse. Equip me to better understand how you've created him/her, and help me see him/her the way you do. Thank you for your perfect example of selfless love. Reveal to me the ways I've been selfish in my marriage, and thank you for your grace in forgiving me.

APPLICATION

Well then, how do we thrive in our marriage? We give ourselves away to our spouse each and every day. We intentionally lean into the beauty and uniqueness that God has created in our spouse. We pursue his/her heart so that we might better understand one other. We listen, not hear, but listen to each other. We extend grace, and we're quick to forgive and quicker to ask for forgiveness. We laugh, have fun, share in simple pleasures and recognize that marriage is God's gift to us in one another. We admit our mistakes, share our deepest pain, and daily welcome God's lavish grace over our relationship because we need it, and thankfully he gives it freely.

JOURNAL PROMPT

In what ways can I serve my spouse better? What would happen if I put the needs of my spouse above my own?

DAY 18

CHILDREN & TEENS

BY LAUREN EDWARDS

"But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

-Matthew 19:14

DEVOTIONAL

The Father's greatest gift to mankind was Jesus. He wasn't presented to the world as the grown man we all came to love through his life, death, and resurrection, but he came as a small, humble, and vulnerable infant. The greatest gift and the savior of the world was grafted into the bodily form as a child and released the kingdom of heaven on earth! Though he was small, he was mighty, and he beheld the image of God. The simplicity, purity, humility, creativity, trust, and playfulness of children literally encapsulate God in the flesh. Children possess qualities of God that we as adults often lose touch with, usually due to becoming weathered by the brokenness of the world. Jesus held the awareness that children hold pieces of God's DNA, that we as adults desperately need to awaken our senses to God's kingdom, purposes and revive our hearts to the likeness of God.

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of children. Thank you for designing an upside-down kingdom, where the small and lowly are honored and called "mighty." Help us understand your ways; in all the places, we often confuse, over-complicate and become distracted through the eyes of our children. We release control and acknowledge that Your ways are higher than ours. We surrender and open our hearts to the simplicity, purity, humility, creativity, trust, and playfulness found in who You are and how these characteristics manifest through our children. Revive the childlike heart in us today, Amen!

APPLICATION

Whether you are a parent, daycare provider, teacher, pastor, medical/mental health professional, entrepreneur, businessman or woman, volunteer, sibling, aunt/uncle, grandparent, or cousin, you likely have some influence or direct contact with at least (1) child.

Take time from your busy mind and life to ask the Lord to show Himself through the eyes, mouth, and actions of a child. Try at least 30 minutes of your day to rest, listen, watch, play, engage, ask questions, or create with a child. Take the opportunity to call out the "gold" in them in a very specific and meaningful way. My hope is that this becomes a regular practice, as you embrace these moments to notice how the Lord will use children to awaken your senses to His kingdom, purposes, and revival in a new way than before!

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YOUNG ADULTS

BY AARON EDWARDS

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity."

-1 Timothy 4:12

DEVOTIONAL

There is a rising generation of young adults who are passionate about Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and following his voice. Within this generation lies a hunger for the truth and an exploration of their identity as Saints of the Kingdom. As the Church, we are invited into the story of their lives with discipleship and a cultivation of their hearts, dreams, and gifts. Our invitation includes championing their perspective on the future church and its place in culture!

PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for the generations! What a joy it is to partner with the unique perspectives and stages of life that make up your Church. Father, I ask that you would open my heart and ears to the perspective of young adults. Holy Spirit, lead me with compassion to encourage and champion the gifts and desires of the younger generation. I pray that you would bring to me opportunities to show your love and grace to those younger than me!

APPLICATION

Go! Take action on what you're about to write about on the next page and who the Father is leading you to! The younger generation craves your wisdom and your compassion for their lives. Be intentional and be relentless in your connection! Contact youngadults@hopechurch.net for ways to be involved and partner in this amazing ministry!

JOURNAL PROMPT

Take a few moments to write down 5 young adults that you personally know. If you don't know that many, ask the Lord to bring people into your life that match the description. Write down intentional steps to connect and invite these people into your life. Write down questions you wish to ask them so you can better understand them in order to help propel their lives to look more like Jesus!

RECONCILIATION

BY CHARIS MUSICK

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

-Colossians 3:13

DEVOTIONAL

According to Merriam-Webster, reconciliation means, (1) the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement and (2) the process of finding a way to make two different ideas, facts, etc., exist or be true at the same time. Can you think of a time in the recent past where you've seen what this looks like when done well, when done poorly, and when not done at all? It's tempting to feel like we must be right or win, and less so to naturally feel the need to take a step back to consider another's perspective, sacrificing our need to be the victor.

In this passage of Scripture, Paul is speaking to the people of the church at Colossae—to Believers—about needing to recalibrate themselves to their new selves in Christ. After all, we are the ones who are to set the example for what this is supposed to look like, which includes reconciliation—the way of the Kingdom! God the Father sent God the Son—Jesus—to reconcile humanity to Himself after sin's disruption. This is the example of reconciliation we are to mirror in being Believers, lovers of Jesus, to everyone around us.

PRAYER

Father, you have instructed me to forgive as you have forgiven me. Thank you for all the times You have forgiven me when I've done wrong, in word, action, or heart posture. I repent for the times I have withheld forgiveness from those who have wronged me and the times I've allowed pride and the desire to be right get in the way of reconciling with my neighbor. Father, please heal my heart where I've been wounded, help me extend forgiveness, and show me what reconciliation looks like. Holy Spirit, please guide me in the way of love, humility, and holiness. Amen.

APPLICATION

Referring to the definition above, to reconcile is not to attempt to make a lie true, nor is it to make wrong done against you right. It is to practice forgiveness and humility (you may be wrong, or you may both be right) to reconcile for the sake of harmony—even if that means harmoniously living separate lives without hostility in future interactions. We won't always get this right, but Colossians tells us the 'How' starts with going back to the Word. Practice paying closer attention to what you're "putting on"; choose humility, forgive quickly, and follow through with reconciliation.

JOURNAL PROMPT

Take a moment to read Colossians 3:1-17. Verses 1-4 are telling us 'Why'; 5-11 are telling us 'What' needs to be removed and corrected (put off); 12-15 are telling us 'What' needs to replace them (put on), and 16-17 tell us 'How.' So, we are going to course correct! Forgiveness and reconciliation are just part of a whole. Understanding your 'Why,' ask the Holy Spirit to shine light on what needs to be "put off" and "put on." Write which characteristics you need to "put off." Write which ones you need to "put on." Write out anyone with whom you need to forgive or seek reconciliation.

CELEBRATION

BY KRISTI THOMPSON

"Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, And I will tell of Your greatness. They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and merciful..."

-Psalm 145:6–8

DEVOTIONAL

The Bible is full of verses celebrating the goodness of God. When we position our hearts and minds on all that He has done for us, we begin to transform our thinking and begin to see the life-changing activity of God going on in our day-to-day life. Thinking on His goodness daily opens our eyes to all that Heaven is doing around us. Remembering is a big part of this, and it's a big part of this fast. Remember what He has done for your family and celebrate that. Remember when He saved you and celebrate that. And how do you celebrate? Sometimes it is sharing what He has done; maybe a testimony, writing a song about it and writing it in your journal for the ones coming up behind you to read one day.

PRAYER

Psalm 147:1 — Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! Find a place for yourself or gather your people and reflect on His goodness. You can have worship playing or not. We will leave this place for you to cultivate a prayer of thanksgiving; He has been so good to us.

"God, you have been so good to our family (me, my friends), and I just want to thank you for what you have done in me during this fast."

APPLICATION

Isaiah 63:7 — I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us. SHARE your testimony. SHARE about His goodness. SHARE about His faithfulness. Let others know because when you share what He has done, it increases faith in them.

JOURNAL PROMPT

Psalm 100:5 — For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. We hope you have made a note of all the little things that God has done during this Fast. If not, now is a great time to "take inventory" so that you can build upon it year after year. Write what He has done and date it so that you can "remember" and reflect each year.