

Goshen United Methodist Church

Possibilities are Fertile

CHURCH

WIDE

FAST

FEBRUARY

4-24

***“2019 Seeking
God Again for
the First Time”***

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...” Matthew 6:33a

19615 Goshen Rd, Gaithersburg, MD 20879

Rev. Eric W. King, Pastor

WELCOME

Greetings and grace to you in the life transforming name of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

So many people use this time in the New Year to resolve issues and reclaim discipline in our lives. For believers it is important faith guided and assisted by the Holy Spirit. Through this season of 21 days of prayer and fasting we invoke the presence and grace of God to transform our minds and hearts so that we can become more like Jesus Christ. We view fasting and prayer as a time to ‘give up something in order to take up more time in order to deepen our relationship with God.’

We are so excited that you have made a prayerful commitment to journey with us into a season of a “New You” in Jesus Christ. We look forward to hearing the testimonies of how the Spirit of the Lord is leading, empowering and changing lives.

We hope that the daily reflections will offer to you an opportunity to recall, recount and expectation for God to do something very specific in your life. I am thankful to our Lay Servant Ministry and others specially selected to be a part of the writing team. Special thanks to Rev. Dr. First Lady Janae Moore King for guiding and editing the writing process.

Please receive this as personal encouragement as you begin this journey together: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

Harambe, (Let’s do this together)

Love and Light,

Pastor Eric Wellington King

WHAT IS FASTING?

Biblical fasting involves “Giving up something to take up more time with God for spiritual purposes.” The Bible emphasizes giving up food or drink. However, you may choose to fast for other purposes, including social, financial and even technology.

For some it may be surprising to learn that it is not required for Christians to fast. The Bible does, however support fasting. In the Old Testament leaders fasted during challenging times. (Jeremiah 26:9) In the New Testament Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness. Jesus expected His followers to fast, and He said that God rewards fasting. (Matthew 4) In the Book of Acts, the early Christians fasted and prayed for guidance.

Fasting is a time to develop a deeper discipline and to grow in grace and relationship with Jesus Christ. Food is not all that can be given up or limited during a fast. Christians can choose to abstain from anything that diverts or distracts us from our relationship with God.

How to Fast

Prior to beginning a fast, a Believer should give prayerful consideration to the reason for the fast. There should be a time of mental, spiritual and physical preparation. Fasting is not a biblical “diet plan” but a determined desire to become closer to God. All participants should consult with their physician before beginning the fast. It is encouraged that you purchase appropriate food and even determine and prepare meal menu in advance.

Keep in mind that fasting is to “Give up something in order to take up more time with God.” During a regular time that you might eat or watch television, replace that time with prayer or reading scripture.

If you break your fast by accident, don’t become overwhelmed by it, but get back to it. The aim is not to be perfect but to be transformed.



Day 1: God is Faithful to Forgive

The LORD is kind and merciful. He is patient and full of love. He does not always criticize. He does not stay angry with us forever. We sinned against Him, but He didn't give us the punishment we deserved. His love for His followers is as high above us as heaven is above the earth. And He has taken our sins as far away from us as the east is from the west.

— **Psalm 103:8-12 (ERV)**

Reflection

Pee Wee is my younger brother and I love him even though he transitioned on May 12, 2009. He stood six feet and two inches tall but was given his nickname because our brother Paul, who was born a year later, had grown faster than he as a toddler. Pee Wee never caught up. He was handsome, athletic and charming, especially with the ladies. In early 20th century terminology, he was “a lady killer.” His wife was patient, independent and a woman of God. When he became terminally ill, she forgave him and near the end of his life, she faithfully and lovingly cared for him at the expense of her own health. After his second stroke, care for Pee Wee had become more than my sister-in-law and my mother could manage. I was retired by then and could go home to help. We took turns sitting with him and I usually took the night shift. When he lay awake at night I would sing or read to him as I had done when we were children. To help him find peace, I searched out scriptures of God’s amazing forgiveness and unfailing love. David’s song of praise in Psalm 103 has always been one of my favorites and it went straight to a place in my own soul—a place where it still remains today. Psalm 103 was a balm for my brother’s spirit *and* it was life changing for me. In the pre-dawn hours when Pee Wee slept, I could unearth the wrongs I had done and remember those I had not forgiven. I could pray for help to forgive others and for God to forgive me. While I prayed for forgiveness and guidance to live a more Christ-like life, I drew comfort from knowing more of how much God cares for us. My efforts to help my brother die peacefully helped me also to come closer to the God of Eternity—the God from whom we can all expect mercy and to have cause to live with hope. Pee Wee found this hope, just as he came to know and accept God’s mercy prior to his transition. I will always be grateful for my wee hour times with him and how Psalm 103 nurtured and fed us both.

Prayer: Loving God, Father of us all, I thank You for being who You are. Your love and faithfulness is greater than we can comprehend. Help us, Your children, to be more like You. In the matchless Name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Journal



Day 2: He's Always Been There

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made: without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

— John 1:1-5 (NIV)

Reflection

The first five verses of John 1 is one of my favorite passages of scripture. It's concise. It's the same creation story of Genesis 1, but it's more profound! It shows and says a lot about Jesus and Him being an active part of the Trinity (the Triune God). He coexists with God. Also, He was and is in fellowship with God. The Genesis account shows that there was a plurality of Persons that are included in the One God we worship. Look at Genesis 1:26 that says, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..." See, Jesus was there in the creation process. Jesus is the Word. He coexists with God because He was with God. Why is Jesus called (or referred to) the Word? Like our words explain our mindset to others, Jesus was sent to reveal God's mind to the world. Jesus also is the Life, and it is His life that becomes the "Life" (illumination) of men. It means that the "Life" began to be "the Life of men" in the past, and continues to be so in the present time. I remember years ago it would bother me sometime when folks would ignore or became very negative if I would mention anything about Jesus, God or the Holy Spirit. Then I realized and could apply verse five of the scripture above to the reactions/responses I received. The unfortunate reality is that "darkness" is opposed to the truth. There are always folks who keep their hearts and minds closed to the light. Jesus is the source and essence of all life itself. So, when we encounter folks who are caught in the web of darkness, let's help them to see that the best place to look for redemption is the source of all Life: Jesus. Why? Because He has always been there.

Prayer: Father, open our hearts and minds to focus and keep looking to You as the "Light of Life." Open our eyes to behold this "Light" that we may walk in it. You and only You offer love, peace, and Your fellowship in everlasting life. Help us to not turn our backs on the "Light" for it leads to "Life." In Jesus' name, Amen.

Journal



Day 3: Constantly Covered

He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

— Psalm 91: 4 NIV

Reflection

I don't know about you but I have never been covered by wings, let alone close enough to a bird with a wing span to cover me. However, I know what it feels like to walk under an awning to protect me from the rain—the comfort I feel knowing that I no longer have to be wet. I am a visual learner and for me to see what God is saying He usually shows me by way of illustration and that very principle applies to this scripture. While under that awning the rain has yet to stop and depending on the day, the wind may blow a little rain under that hits me. In that very moment I see God in His faithfulness: chaos is all around me, yet I am covered. I was reminded of that covering by a dear friend of mine today. She said, “I’m amazed to see how you and your sister were able to navigate through life, with low impact of abandonment issues.” Many know that God allowed us to be born in a family of women who understood what sacrifice meant: a mother who knew she could no longer care for her twin girls but always felt the hand of God over our lives; a paternal grandmother who knew the only way for us to thrive was to permanently make her home our home without hesitation. In the midst of our life circumstances, my twin and I were constantly being covered by God. Yet another illustration of God’s love for His children that is an invaluable lesson from this scripture for me is that of a bird swooping down and keeping her children safe from harm or danger under the cover of her wings. *Deuteronomy 31:6* reminds us God will never leave us or forsake us. When I look back over my life I can recall moment after moment where God has covered me. Even when I thought I was not worthy of THIS covering due to my choices—going left when He said go right—He was still there. Can you see it? Can you see Him right in the midst of that thing you believe is the hardest to overcome? Do you trust Him at His word? Remain faithful to Him my brother, my sister and He will always be faithful to you. Covered time after time—day by day--protected by His wing span!!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for allowing me to see You, even in those areas of doubt and uncertainty. How magnificent You are by covering me and keeping me safe while chaos is all around me. I know to live this life I'll have challenges, some harder than others but as long as I fix my spirit and mind on You, You will not leave me uncovered and for THAT I thank You. I praise Your name Father for the rest of my life I will praise Your name. Amen.

Journal

Sister Shawn P. Clarke



Day 4: Washed by the Word

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit....

— Titus 3:5

Reflection

I remember during my youth hearing this Voice, but I could never see anyone. The Voice spoke to me about my present state and even gave me some visuals of things to come. However, I could not touch Him, or even produce the right response to what I was hearing. As I became an adult, I believe that God read my heart and knew I had a desire to both commune and relate to Him. However, I still didn't know this Person, couldn't see this Person, but I could still clearly hear His Voice speaking to me. The beginning of our relationship took place on a winter night, nearly 20 years ago. I had parked in a restaurant parking lot and while sitting in my car, I broke out in praise with my hands lifted high. I began to shout, "Thank You, Lord!", repeatedly, as I cried. Afterward, I phoned my mother and expressed to her that I had just made a choice that night to give my life, fully to Christ. She asked me where was I. She wanted to send my stepfather to pick me up, because she could not fully understand what I was saying through the crying and yelling. I expressed to my mom that I didn't need anyone to come and get me. I was ok. Soon afterward, I was able to calm down. At this time, I simply asked the Lord, "Where do we start?" The Lord replied to me, "With My Word! Our relationship will begin with My Word and the washing of your spirit will come through My Word." Immediately, I ascended into two to three Bible studies a week and became knowledgeable of His Word which allowed me to finally know who it was who had been speaking to me, all of my youth. Later, I was able to both obtain and share His cleansing word with others, which included my wife, especially Ephesians 5:26: "to sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word." In conclusion, my relationship with God began with the Word. That Holy and Divine Word has set me apart and cleansed me as I have walked through this filthy, corrupt world.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for creating me and calling me out of darkness and into Your marvelous light. God, I am truly grateful that You set me apart for Your own use and cleansed me with Your word and empowered me with Your spirit. Amen.

Journal

Brother Sean M. Smith

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING

Day 5: Kingdom Living Disciples Trust God

If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think He'll attend to you, take pride in you, do His best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way He works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how He works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

— Matthew 6:30 - 33 (MSG)

Reflection

My experiences keep teaching me not to worry, but to trust God and to not make decisions without consulting Him. For me, the antidote to worry and fear over my future is trust in and obedience to God as written in Proverbs 3:5: "Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own." And then in verses 9-10: "Honor GOD with everything you own; give Him the first and the best. Your barns will burst, your wine vats will brim over." These scriptures along with the one above in Matthew 6 help keep me from worrying and getting caught up in the hype and drama of the world. They also help me to learn the meaning of God's provisions as written in Psalms 23:1: "The Lord is my Shepard, I shall not want." Today I know and believe what God has for me is for me as written in Jeremy 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." Growing up I moved around a lot and was raised mostly by a single mother in the inner city. When I was young, I was determined that I would not be a projected statistic of society's negative characteristics of my neighborhood or the school I attended—that my life's beginning & ending would not be determined by my zip code, ethnicity or gender. So, I worked long and hard and sacrificed time and relationships with family and friends. I spent little time enjoying life's journey, and then one day I looked up and I was 40. Professionally it could be said I was successful. I obtained positions and increases in salary affording me material things. However, I lacked an awareness of my God-given talents and purpose. I was spiritually malnourished and deprived as well as stressed out and depressed. I had little meaningful life markers to show for all my efforts until I surrendered and allowed God His rightful position in my life as Lord and Savior. Now, scripture helps to prioritize my actions and to focus my time, thoughts and energy as I put and keep God first. My priorities are now God's will, concerns for eternity and saving souls over worldly concerns. Trusting God gives me peace of mind and allows me to live by faith which honors and pleases God. And, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, I have come to learn that trusting God is what true living—Kingdom living—is all about.

Prayer: Lord forgive me for my lack of faith and trust in You. Lord my desire is to know You and please You only. I desire to always depend on You to meet my needs and give me the desires of my heart according to Your will for my life. Increase my trust and faith so that I continually seek You and Your righteousness. As Your disciple help me to serve You, keep my mind stayed on Kingdom living and to live a life obeying Your word and ways. Amen.



Journal

Sis. Pamela Dunston, Lay Leader



Day 6: As God Is Working On Me, He Is Working On Them

Train up a child in the way that he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

— Proverbs 22:6 (KJV)

Reflection

As I think about this text it brings me back to when I was a child. I remember how I was taught to carry myself respectfully and to take care of my responsibilities. It reminds me of how my father use to tell me not to do something and I would wait for my opportunity to defy him—respectfully, of course—although knowing the repercussions of my actions. Or, how my mother would have a deep conversation with me about how life is, which seemed discouraging at first. She would say things like, “That’s just how it is”; or, “That’s life.” Also, those “check yo’ self-moments” I would have with my dad that, as a child, I couldn’t understand that it was all for my good. I didn’t always grow up in church; however, as a child I had so many questions about things and my curiosity would wonder. Most times the adults around me did not always have the answers to my questions. Then, I discovered who Jesus Christ is, especially how He died for my sins. I never thought that someone other than family or friends would be willing to risk their lives for me. It took some years to understand this and during this time I realized it must mean something to me personally: not just a general statement; not something I just thought about when I attended church--but that feeling I would get in knowing that He would love me that much to die for me, and for all those around me. I now have children of my own. They are young and I know, as with me and my parents, there are many things around them that may distract them from the things I teach them. Therefore, any moment I get to remind them of who Jesus is, what sacrifices He has made, and that every day is a blessing, it helps me to grow in my relationship with God as well. I pray that I can continue this journey in learning about God while teaching my children about Him so they will teach their children too. I have grown so much in my relationship that I seek to stay away from childish things and turn to Him when I feel discouraged, sad, lost and even overjoyed and filled with thankfulness. I can see that my faith has already made an impact on my children. Soon they will be teenagers writing their own stories just as I have had to write my own. Everything in my life is not perfect since the Lord and I have created this relationship with one another. There are still many times where my faith has been tested; my Joy has been stolen; and, I have felt like giving up on life. But then I remember my reason for being here: to live and make disciples for Jesus Christ. If He was willing to sacrifice His life for me, I can’t give up. I must do His work in this world and keep my heart and mind focused on him. So, during this fasting season, what is keeping my motivation is my dedication to God and allowing Him to use me, especially through my children. I am grateful to know that as the Lord is working on me, He’s also working on them through me and also others, for it takes a village to raise children and to support adults as well. It is in this reciprocal process of relationship with God, my children, my church and my community that I will increase my faith and become more of who I am while fulfilling what God has planned for my life and my children’s lives too.

Prayer: Father God, I just come before You right now, to say thank You. Thank You for our children who are our future and our blessings from You. God, I ask that You continue to use me to touch the lives of my children and any children I may cross paths with along my journey. Please give me the strength and wisdom to know the difference between what You would have me do and that which You do not call me to. God, You are wonderful and excellent! You are my light in the dark times and my doctor in my sick times, just as You are my deliverer in my weak times. Please do not give up on us for we all fall short of Your glory. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



Journal

[illegible]

Sister Jaleesa Cowan



Day 7: My Armor and Protection

He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with His wings. His faithful Promises are your armor and protection. Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day.

— **Psalms 91:4-5 (NLT)**

Reflection

Father God I thank You for Your protection and guidance. Though I may think I'm not worthy of Your Protection, You've always been there for me. Thank You, God for I have placed myself in several dangerous situations and You always pulled me through and protected me. Praise You, God! Even with all my military armor and training for deployments from Counternarcotic Drug Interventions on the Border, to include Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Operation Restore Hope in Somalia and Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom, I would reflect on Psalms 23:4 which says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." This verse was all I needed to concentrate on my mission. God, thank You for Your mercy. You've covered me with Your feathers and I've been sheltered with Your wings on many occasions. Praise You, God; You have helped me to stay focused and because of You, I feel no fear about my well-being. I know that as long as I have You on my side, I don't have to have any fears. My mission has changed in life, which is knowing You more on a personal basis and praising You daily. I still call on You God for Your protection. I'm humbled knowing others were not as fortunate as I was to make it back home to family and friends. Thank You God; thank You.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, even with all my sins You've protected me in my time of need. Thank You for grace and mercy and I pray You continue to guide and protect me in my journey of life.

Journal

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Day 8: Use the Gifts God Has Given You

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

— Romans 12: 4-8 (NIV)

Reflection

As I thought about the above scripture, I was reminded of a class I took over a year ago about all the Spiritual gifts God has assigned to us Christians. I realize that although we are individual in Christ, we are still one body of Christ with multipliable parts and these parts are Spiritual gifts. These different gifts are assigned to do the same functions which is to become a better and stronger disciple in Christ and encourage and help others to become disciples of Christ also. I witnessed the different Spiritual gifts that God assigns to us when I participated in my church's Women's Retreat; however, during the retreat I didn't understand that these were Spiritual gifts from God. When I could identify my gifts, I was able to express them freely, whether it was within the church wall, out in society or driving in my car. I learned that in order for me to experience these gifts of God I had to be patient and pray and sometimes just be still in order to hear from Him. I also learned not to be afraid of my Spiritual gifts and not to fear what others were thinking about me as I expressed my love for Jesus in my praise, singing and in my testimonies. Whatever God has for you, it's for you and you alone. But when we as Christians can come together and share these beautiful gifts through prayer, praise and worship by sharing His holy words and testifying of what He has done for us in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then we are anointed, healed and blessed. And, we can rejoice because we have blessed Him as well.

Prayer: Father God I say thank You for being in my life. I ask that You give me the strength to endure whatever You have for me to do in Your holy name. Continue to teach and show me how to honor You through reading and understanding Your words. Let my light shine so that others that are lost can find their way back to You, Jesus and I bless and praise Your name. Amen.

Journal

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING

Day 9: My Secret Place

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide in the shadow of the almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my strength, my God in Him will I trust." . . . He shall cover thee with His feathers and His truth shall be thy shield and buckler... For He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.

— Psalm 91:1-2,4,11 (KJV)

Reflection

As a young child growing up and being the youngest of six siblings, and even still, being four years younger than the next youngest sister, I had the privilege of sitting on my mother's knee while she read the Bible or read Bible stories to me. Even though I realized years later this was a wonderful experience, a time of spiritual learning, I remember the joy she had in talking about her favorite scripture, Psalm 91. My mother would say, "He's all I need if I trust and believe in Him." Then, she would sing the age-old song, "I Need Thee Every Hour." She would explain it to me just like she knew that at six years old I would understand. Later in my life as I continued to study the Bible and learn scripture, Psalm 91 became one of my favorites as well. I came to realize my mother had a "secret place"—a place where constant prayer, faith and hope went up and out in times of spiritual or physical challenge and conditions of sickness, not only for herself, but for others, because it was her secret place of refuge and strength. In everyone's life there comes times of trials and difficult situations. We are confronted daily to be able to make changes through times of death, sickness, family matters, Federal shut downs, government unrest, joblessness, church challenges, community problems and many others. Do we have answers to these? Do we ponder or expect answers to come sooner rather than later? Can we overcome these adversities of life on our own? Why do they happen? Where is your secret place to overcome these adversities? Is your secret place where you hide from your friends, love ones and family or keep your secrets buried or is it where you go just to get away from it all for peace of mind? Sometimes the "Do, Can or Why" questions cannot be answered by friends, counseling, sermons, quick Bible verses or songs. Sometimes such questions can only be answered in a "secret place." A "secret place" in this Psalm is a prayerful, faithful, trusting, and committed place exclaimed by a believer who knows that God provides everything we need. In our secret place we are able to exercise this simple method we call prayer. Through prayer, God protects, guides, comforts, delivers and is ever faithful to us. He's our Most High, Almighty, Lord, God, and above all He loves us. The song writer says, "Your toils He does richly repay, if you trust and obey." A secret place is a place where no one is there but you and God and God and you. Where I am, God is. God speaks to me; I speak to God. When we make Him our dwelling place through gratitude and trust, the more He protects us and delivers us in times of trouble. He gives angels charge to watch over us unaware; He lifts you up in times of trial. (I was approached by someone I didn't know who never met me, who had never seen me before and who did not know my situation. Yet, she anointed me with a spirit of peace by saying, "Everything is going to be alright.") God blesses those who faithfully and earnestly call upon Him, and He delights to answer. (Prayer of Jabez, I Chronicles 4:10) As an Elder in the church, I encourage you today to find your secret place. There's nothing to compare to being safe and secure in the presence of God.

Prayer: Holy and Wonderful God, pour Your blessing upon me that I might serve You all the days of my life and make me a blessing to someone today. Amen.



Journal

[illegible]

Elder Jean E. Prather



Day 10: Power Left Me

Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart daughter”, He said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

— Matthew 9:22 (NIV)

Reflection

For as long as I can remember I grew up hearing the story in church of the woman with the issue of blood. When I was a young girl, I recall that I could not digest the end of this story—when Jesus spoke to the woman telling her that “your faith has healed you.” I was perplexed. How could she live with a sickness for so long and how come no one could figure out what was wrong with her? How did she walk around every day for twelve years living out her life? No answers, no explanations, nothing—I just had to deal with this alone. Then, as I got older, I found myself constantly drawn to this miracle. Honestly, trying to figure out how I could have helped her if she were my friend? I saw myself as her friend. Jesus had done many miracles, why was this so different for my heart when the words and images would replay like a movie in my head each time I heard it? At the tender age of 17, I embarked on a journey I wasn’t prepared to handle. I had placed my first child for adoption and the pain that entered my soul wouldn’t leave me for the next EIGHTEEN years. In 2004 my twin and I learned a duet created by musical genius Kirk Franklin called, “Let Me Touch You.” There is a verse I sing referencing “touching the hem of His garment.” The revelation that God showed me while learning that song was mind blowing! The way those words jumped off the page, made that story come alive because I could see me. I no longer saw the woman in the Bible; I saw Dawn. I heard He was coming into town; I had to get to Him—yes, I knew of the miracles. I traveled to Him, to be where He was. I saw Him; I locked in on Jesus, pushing through the pain, the depression, the loneliness and the disappointments in people, which I had encountered for eighteen long years. I could see me reaching for Him. I touched Him and then I felt power enter into me. Jesus turned to me and looked at me with love and compassion and told me, “Take heart daughter, your faith has healed you.” Imagine that! It all made sense. God was preparing me for my healing in my adoption journey. He was showing me if He could do it for the woman, He was going to do it for me. All we need is to have faith of a tiny mustard seed and healing in that moment can occur. Is that possible? Yes, it is. I am a living testimony to that Power.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for Your power in us and to us. Heal us where there are pains & groans that this world has caused. Give us wisdom to remember to seek You and know that Your word tells us that You will never forsake us or leave us during these trials. Father, we feel Your compassion and love towards us while we journey on in life. And we thank You for that love. Keep us close to You. Amen.

Journal

Sister Dawn Smith



Day 11: Wants Us to Ask

Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

— Matthew 6:8

Reflection

When my daughters were babies, I would constantly repeat to them what I believe is my job as their father: P-P-G-L – Protect, Provide, Guide and, most importantly, Love. I would constantly repeat it to them over and over again. Protect, Provide, Guide and, most importantly, Love. It has always been important to me that my girls know what the role of their father is. They didn't have to do anything to be eligible for their "father benefit", and there is nothing they can do to lose it. Additionally, I encourage them to hold me accountable for providing these benefits. They are my children. I want them to feel they are able to share what is on their hearts without fear. They should be able to boldly ask for the desires of their hearts without limits. However, I am but a man. While my heart wants to provide them with what is best for them without limits (time/love/opportunity), there are limits to the "father benefit" I'm able to provide. At times my girls have courageously reminded me of what is most important: "...most important is Love." It's not providing, being a task master or making sure school work is done. It is love. My love for them is why I watch over them so closely, to try and protect and preserve them. My love for them is why at times I have not considered it robbery to work two full time jobs, and go without so they can have. It is love that compels me to gently guide them, understanding that they have free will and may choose something I don't approve of. But that same love compels me to be prepared with open arms for reconciliations. It is love that compels me to position myself to be ready to give them what they need, even before they ask. That is why I love God so. I love God for the "Father Benefit" that is promised to me as His child. I am but a simple man who loves his children. How much more then is the Almighty God ready and able to do for me because He loves me? He has been so good to me! As I sit here writing this reflection, I am becoming full thinking of how good God has been to me. How many times have I asked Him for help, deliverance, or unmerited favor, only to be given exceedingly abundantly above and beyond what I asked or thought to ask (Ephesians 3:20). He is ready. All I need do is ask in His name.

Prayer: God, please forgive me for demonstrating lack of faith at times when I am slow to seek Your face. How foolish of me to allow my fears to keep me from Your promises. Thank You, most gracious God, for Your love and Your patience.

Journal

Brother Mendel Holt



Day 12: You're Not in the Driver's Seat

Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. "Anyone who intends to come with Me has to let Me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow Me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, My way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?"

— Matthew 16:24-26 (The Message)

Reflection

While riding the bus to work, as is my daily routine, I opened up the Bible App on my phone and began reading the verse of the day. On this particular day the reading was from Matthew 16. (I chuckled to myself because in preparation for the Rock 2019 Youth Retreat, the selected verse is from Matthew 16.) While reading the chapter, the Holy Spirit directed me to the above two verses from the Message translation. Before reading the chapter, I was gazing out the window of the bus contemplating and having a private dialogue with the Lord: "Lord, I need to hear from You. I need answers. My job is ending in March. The past year and this year have been exhausting, it has been a roller coaster of emotions year full of death, uncertainties turmoil and disappointment. Lord I am tired! I try to do the right thing but...." (I had completely blocked out the birth of a new grandbaby and other victories in my life). (Yes, I was complaining) I glanced back at my phone and these verses jumped out at me: **"Then Jesus went to work on His disciples. "Anyone who intends to come with Me has to let Me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am."** I knew in that moment that the Lord was speaking directly to me. Most importantly, I was assured that He heard my prayer and supplication. He went to work on me as His disciple. This walk is a journey, oftentimes, we do not know the next step. Jesus said: **"Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow Me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, My way, to finding yourself, your true Self."** Praise God that He came to work on me as His disciple to remind me and let me know that I am not in the driver's seat, only He is.

Prayer: Lord, I don't know, but You know the way. You made the supreme sacrifice. It is not easy but I embrace You in this time of suffering. You know my journey and I commit to follow You as You lead me to my true Self. I confess that I am not in the driver's seat for You are the navigator through every season of my journey. You are the keeper and guardian of my soul and I am so, so very grateful. Amen.

Journal



Day 13: Love Never Fails

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

— 1 John 4:21 (NIV)

Reflection

This love command is simple, yet hard. I believe this scripture is relative to every generation; however, we are living in a time where so many things are changing and we are getting away from what society deems the “norm,” to include love. Many people who identify as Christians are seen routinely protesting or denouncing changes that we see in society, changes that occur as a result of us not being loving as Jesus requires. When I look at the history of this nation, this has always been the case—whether it be segregation and inequality (racial, gender, sexuality) or terrorism and authority—there is a consistent push in one direction or the other with Christians often at the forefront showing a lack of compassion and strong fits of rage, rather than love. When did our emotions learn to react faster than our hearts? Too often our first reaction to something that feels out of place is anger. Too often our first reaction to change is negative. Do the people that we seek to correct, teach or simply have a conversation with feel that we love them? When I read this scripture and think about everyday situations, I can’t help but to think that God is teaching us a very simple lesson with this. If I, for example, know I’m correct about a point that I’m trying to make to my wife but try to convey my point by yelling and belittling her, she is only hearing my rage and not my facts. And, I open the door for her to respond to me the same way. In the end nothing positive has been accomplished. If I speak to her out of love and am peaceful and seek to hear her as well, I’m much more likely to get my point across, and she’ll see that once again, I’m right—well, you get the point. 🌟 We can’t minister to people who feel ridiculed by us. We can’t teach those who have conditioned themselves to block out the sound of our voices because we have failed to connect with who they are, failed to hear their story and succeeded, instead, in judging them for what we think they are, all at arm’s length. In Matthew 12:25 Jesus says, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.” We find ways to divide in our world, in our nations, on our jobs, within our families and, even in our churches. Read John 3:16. God loves and He gives. We can play Christian in every facet of life, do what looks good on the outside, but if we don’t Love unconditionally, we’ve completely missed the core of what God has called us to be: Love. Why? Because Love never fails.

Prayer: Gracious and eternal loving Lord God, help us to follow Your example of love. Help us to understand that we can’t move in the wrong direction if we’re acting out of love, because it never fails! Help us in our discernment of our own thoughts and actions so that our emotions don’t separate us from You. Amen.



Journal

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Brother Jeremy Smith



Day 14: Using His Path

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.

— Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

Reflection

This scripture resonates with me as I travel through life and all my “plans” have not come to fruition. We all had dreams of what our lives and future would look like. But then, for example, we did not get that promotion we knew was ours, or there was a furlough and our pay checks stopped. Our relationships that were supposed to be forever—marriage, partnerships, friendships—ended. Our children took the unbeaten path and did not live up to our expectations. So, we feel “topsy-turvy” and unbalanced. We feel like failures and depression and anxiety set in. The devil starts to play mind tricks on us. But then, in the midst of my own life plans that do not always work out as anticipated, I remember this scripture and know that whatever my plans were, God already has a plan and a purpose for my life. Whatever did not work out my way, is ok, because it is His way that I should be following. So, when you cannot understand why things are not as you had hoped, lean on His word and let His grace and mercy see you through. His path for you may not be easy, but let Him be a comforter and healer when you feel lost and He will keep you on His path and lead you to greater blessings than you ever had imagined.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, clear my mind of any negative self-talk and doubt. Lord, let me open my heart and mind to hear Your guidance and follow Your path and not my own. Lord, help me to let go of control and let Your grace and mercy lead me. Lord, I surrender all unto You as I know that You will bless me and keep me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Journal

[illegible]



Day 15: What Say You? Silence is Not an Option!

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows, but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.

— Esther 4:14 (NIV)

Reflection

We live in a time and age where there is an incessant amount of noise, sounds, or vibrations emitting around us all the time, nonstop. So much so that even when we manage to have a few moments of relative “quiet time”, it can be fairly difficult to really enjoy it because our mind is still thinking on the next list of things to do or what we haven't done yet. Some people tend to become restless after a short period of silence. While for others, having being accustomed to the constant noise & chatter that permeate our day, will become suspicious when it's too quiet. I think it's fair to say that sound is always being made by us or around us in nature. While I would love to delve into the science of sound, I'm writing more about how using our voices to speak up or how failing to speak out can have dire consequences. I am writing to you about how being silent at the wrong time can be detrimental to not only your peace of mind, your well being or your station in life, but also to those around you for generations to come. World history has displayed vividly both of these messages. Biblical history has shown us what proverbs 18:21 states: “Life and death are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat its fruits.” So many people remain silent out of fear or selfishness under the delusion that what is happening in their world is not their problem to solve nor voice—possibly wondering who am I to say anything? Or, is it perhaps, we've become a part of the problem and issues that erode the quality of life? Will we allow injustice to reign in our communities or turn a blind eye to the suffering of our children because they aren't “our children”; or, allow the erosion of values & liberties because it may offend someone to say enough is enough!? In the text, Esther is presented with a dilemma: does she risk her life to save that of her people? Does she have enough nerve to move on behalf of a despised people, a chosen people to speak to a king whose mind and heart was set on annihilation? Does she have enough Faith in her God to move as Mordecai had instructed her to do? Does she have enough sense of urgency to know that it is **always** the right time to do the right thing. Thanks be to the Most High she chose to not remain silent and understood that she was placed in her royal position, not to gain a title, but to save a people. Generations were spared because she spoke up. A future and promise to a people were delivered because she understood that “for such a time as this have I been appointed.” As Mordecai spoke to Esther's sensibilities, I will end with this: What say you? What say you in using your voice to bring about change? Why? Because silence is not an option!

Prayer: Almighty God, open our hearts to see you as the beginning and ending of all that is, was and will be. Teach us how to discern the times to know when to act and when to be still. Show us our purpose and keep it at the forefront of our minds until it is completed. Thank you for preserving our lives and providing all we need. Give us strength each day. Amen.



Journal

Sister Danielle McDonald-Thompson



Day 16: Seeking God Anew At Ground Zero

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!

— **Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)**

Reflection

As I reflect upon what this Scripture means in my life, my sister Karen comes to mind. My sister and I were the two oldest of four children and we were close throughout our lives. This Scripture was a favorite of hers. Karen became sick at the age of eighteen and from that time on she was in and out of the hospital for different operations. After each operation she would give praise to God for bringing her through it once again! Her faith in God made my faith grow stronger. Here was a girl who was so sick at times but she never gave up hope. She knew that God would see her through it all. No matter what she went through she would quote this Scripture with a smile on her face and continue on with her life! I took her to the hospital one time and we talked about how God had a plan for her and that He was going to give her an assignment: to go forth and tell her story. My sister, in all her pain, also told me that God was getting her ready to come home and that I must prepare myself for when that time came. For me, this is just another example of the strength she had. Christ gave my sister so much strength that when it was time for her to go *home*, she was dancing throughout the house giving Him praise and eating grill cheese sandwiches! Karen was scheduled to go through one more operation, one we all thought would cure her. Little did we know that this would be our last time seeing her alive! God took Karen home fourteen days after her 50th birthday in 2008. (*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*) My sister believed this and lived it; so can I! For me, this Scripture means seeking God anew, to include even when you're at ground zero.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank You for the strength to continue to do all that You ask of me. Thank You, most of all, for a sister like Karen who changed our family and those whose lives she touched. Even when she was in pain and suffering most of the time, she continued to praise You for the strength You gave her to see each day anew. I honor and praise Your name. I pray this prayer in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Journal

[illegible]

Brother Craig Cross

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING

Day 17: Finding Strength and Blessing from Seeking, Believing and Waiting on the LORD

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

— Psalm 27: 1, 8, 10, 13-14 (KJV)

Reflection

Although I don't always find it easy to do, as I reflect back over my life, I see how God has worked with me to help me learn, as these verses indicate, that my life is better as I grow in my ability to seek God's will for me, to trust in His provision for me, and to wait patiently on Him for all of the good He has promised to me to materialize. With God's help, I am learning to seek deep, personal connection with Him through "seeking His face" in prayer and studying His Word. In a recent example, I had been pursuing a path that the LORD gave me to return to graduate school, when suddenly, a two-week window of opportunity opened for me to make a decision about relocating to reduce my commute by 7.5 hours per week—a savings that would help make the pursuit of full-time work and full-time study much more likely to succeed. Discerning this particular "God-nudge" in my life caused me tremendous angst that fell just short of panic! The mere possibility of making a decision to leave my comfortable home and familiar routines on such quick timing produced a barrage of fearful thoughts like, "LORD, there's absolutely no way I can do this! You know me, my home is my oasis! I don't have the strength, courage or energy to make this sweeping change! I just don't make these kinds of 'snap' decisions!" Thankfully, the LORD knew what my reaction would be and had already placed me in a Bible study that was chronicling David's pathway to becoming Israel's king in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. As we studied about David's intermittent ability to seek God's wisdom along his path and the consequences of his choices, the LORD was showing me how my fear and panic moments subsided and how I made much better decisions as I asked Him for direction in prayer, trusting and believing that He would provide it and then obeying His commands! Despite a myriad of hurdles, as I sought God's wisdom in prayer and chose to believe in His ability to take up my cause and care for me better than any parent could, I stepped out of my "comfort zone" to obey Him. God provided me with everything I needed to accomplish His will and plan for my life—and all conveniently packaged in the "bite-sized, baby steps" He knew I could handle! As a result, in less than two weeks I made the decision to relocate with peace and confidence. I found a new home that accomplishes all of my goals, set a move-in date that perfectly aligns with my employer's Spring break (giving me time off to pack!), and have even been gifted with all of the moving boxes I am likely to need! God is so good! In this example, God provided strength, blessing, courage and complete provisions for everything I needed to accomplish His will and I, like the Psalmist, can truly say, *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ... When Thou saidst, Seek Ye my face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek... When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up... I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."*



Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You and You alone are LORD over all things. You are the Source of Light and Salvation not only for my life, but also for the whole world. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to save me from my sins. By Your Holy Spirit, please help me to recognize and repent of my sin of unbelief (lack of trust and faith in You) in every area that it manifests itself in my life. Help me to seek Your face with my whole being and to obey Your commands. Thank You for keeping me from fainting –literally falling out and falling away from You - due to the pressures of the world. Help me to be strong and courageous and to wait patiently as You continue to manifest Your goodness, grace, and mercy in my life and in the world around me. In Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen.

Journal

[illegible]

Sister Tamara Hull



Day 18: Mmmm Mmmm Good: You Just Gotta' Taste and See!

O taste and see that the Lord [our God] is good; how blessed [fortunate, prosperous and favored by God] is the one who takes refuge in Him.

— Psalm 34:8 (Amplified)

Reflection

I absolutely love the oxymoron that Psalm 34:8 is! I love the notion of being able *to see* as a result of *tasting* something and what better thing to taste and then see than the goodness of the Lord! For me, this scripture bespeaks just how divinely paradoxical our God is—how His thoughts are not like our thoughts and how His ways are not like our ways (Isaiah 55:8); and, indeed, how His Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). So, what exactly is it that we are able to taste that lets us see God's goodness? First and foremost, it is imperative that we allow ourselves to taste God's Love—God's agape Love for us—so we can see just how incredibly good God's Love is: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This is such an important *tasting* for those of us who are the unloved of society; those of us who are the hunted, haunted and harmed because of the failure of others to love and honor the image and likeness of God that we all are. Jesus clearly had a special Love, a redemptive and healing Love for the oppressed, downcast and outcast of society. Thus, no matter how unloving others are toward us, and even how unloving we can be of ourselves, tasting God's unconditional Love for us enables us to see His goodness and, because we are made in His image and likeness, to recognize that we are created to reflect His goodness, i.e., His Love, as well. Another thing we should taste so we can see God's goodness is God's Mercy for God extends new mercies to us each and every day (Lamentations 3:22-23). God is so good His Mercy is inexhaustible and seeing the extent of His compassion for us helps us to cope in a society that is too often merciless. Then, there is the delicious tasting of God's Justice. As we are faced with more and more racial, economic, educational, employment, medical, housing and political injustices in our society, knowing that God is a God of Justice helps us *to see* how to keep hope alive as we keep fighting for Justice, even as the worldly odds seem to be against us. We do so because we know that God's Justice ultimately shall prevail. And while there are endless ways we can taste and see God's goodness (especially the very intimate and personal ways He attends to us), I will call attention last to the importance of tasting and seeing the Good News that Jesus is: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come" (Luke 4:18-19). Once we are able to see that God's goodness, through Christ Jesus, permeates and saturates all of Life, ourselves included, then we will know how to have the abundance of Life that Jesus has already made possible for us (John 10:10). It is by tasting and seeing God's goodness that we can trust taking refuge in Him for "blessed [fortunate, prosperous and favored by God]" are we when we do. This is why, my beloved brothers and sisters, you just gotta' taste and see that our God truly is *mmmm mmmm good!*

Prayer: Beloved Lord God, I so pray that You will take the bitter and deadly taste of the world out of our mouths along with the blinding, fleshly scales from our eyes so we can truly taste and see Your awesome goodness. Teach us the spiritual paradox of tasting and seeing so that we will keep seeing Your Kingdom anew every time You bless us to taste just how good You truly are. Keep adjusting our vision and leave us smacking our lips as our mouths ceaselessly water for a new taste of You each and every day. Amen.



Journal

[illegible]

Rev. Dr. Janae Moore King



Day 19: Blessed Assurance

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil to give you an expected end.

— Jeremiah 29:11 (KJV)

Reflection

So many things come to mind when I think on how good the Almighty God has been toward me and my family. While my life has been far from easy, I can testify to the fact that He has been with me through it all: the good, the bad, the indifferent and the ugly! This scripture speaks to my heart because in dealing with life's challenges, I am reminded to focus on the problem solver and not the problem. Life is a journey and can be extremely difficult without the right tools and perspective. It can be easy to fall into depression, anxiety or even low self-esteem, among many other things. If we're not careful we can begin to have pity parties with no real solutions because of all that life throws our way or because we know our flaws intimately. Guess what? God knows us intimately as well. So, even when we (or others) have a low opinion of ourselves, God still loves us completely. Our Creator knows us best as He can see past the layers of self-defense and brokenness right to our essence—our innermost being. After all, we are Fearfully and Wonderfully created (Psalm 139:14). We were created in His image and likeness. In this scripture God is speaking to the Israelites as a nation to remind them that no matter what storms, trials or tribulations they will face in life, they can still have peace. We can have the same peace because He wants what is best for us! Knowing we have a blessed assurance when we trust in Him, we shouldn't feel the need to run from our troubles; instead, we should learn how to get through them. We need to learn how to bloom where we are planted and how, with God, all things are possible. Therefore, we need to be encouraged in God's word and rest on His promises, especially in a world that does everything in its power to tear us down and tries to make us forget our identity. Jeremiah didn't think he was equipped for the task of being God's messenger because he was young; but God! God told him, "before I formed you in the womb I knew you." So, if God knows us this intimately, who are we to count ourselves out? I was nine years old when I had to assist in the care of my Grandmother. A woman who always took great care of others, fell ill and needed care herself with the day to day tasks. I appreciate the instruction & wisdom she gave me and the strength and dignity she showed me while fighting her greatest battle. I sat at her feet learning to prepare meals for the house, order necessary medicine and, more importantly, how to pray. Through prayer and study, I've learned how to have peace in the midst of a storm; how to lean on God's everlasting arm; and, how He is my present help in time of trouble. My Grandmother showed me how, although physically she may have lost the battle against her illness, she still desired "a closer walk with Thee." Grandma Mary showed me God was her strength and that her sickness was no reflection on Him. She never lost her hope nor her praise. Witnessing that at such a young age shaped me to always keep the Faith. As the Most High spoke through and to Jeremiah to remind a people to see a future beyond themselves, so shall we see miracles and a hope beyond our present circumstances **because God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. He plans for us to prosper, to have a hope and a future from generation to generation!** We are His children so He wants what is best for us. 1 Corinthians 2:9 states: "But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." And if God says it, I believe it!

Prayer: Almighty God our Creator, the Beginning and the End, help us to see how You see and love how You love. Teach us to be content with Your goodness and how to strive to become more like You. Amen.



Journal

[illegible]

Sister Danielle McDonald-Thompson



Day 20: Come Meet the Soul-Thirst-Quencher!

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, my God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

— Psalm 42:1-2

Reflection

I love this Scripture for it is one of my many favorites that expresses my soul's insatiable yearning, desire and need for God. I love the inner-image it evokes of a thirsty deer, panting as it desperately needs and searches for streams of water, water that will quench its thirst and bring its panting and searching to an end, if only but for a little while. Metaphorically, the deer's temporary thirst release is exactly what happens to us when we seek to first have our soul's yearnings and desires satiated by any *thing* or any *one* other than God. Yes, we might receive some shallow satisfaction, experience some instant relief or have some need surfacely gratified in a moment—with some moments lasting longer than others. However, it is only a matter of inevitable time before that inner thirst-alert has prompted us yet again to be on the search for that something *more*. Our souls know what is needed and can't be, nor won't be satiated or satisfied with that which is counterfeit or contrary to what will quench this ancient, internal and eternal thirst. For me, it has taken years, decades even, of me wrongly, foolishly and yes, sinfully, thinking this inner thirst for *more* needed to be found outside of my Self, to include with other people, places and things. Oh, but thank God that He did not leave me nor forsake me to this lost and wayward state of worldly ignorance and sin, searching and seeking in all the wrong places for that which could never quench my soul's thirst! Our soul's deep inner longing and thirst can only be quenched by the One Who created it: "God, the living God." And, our souls will perpetually desire and ask when consciously out of God's Presence: "When can I go and meet with God?" God, in His fearfully wonderful design of us (Psalm 139:14), has made it so that our ultimate desire and yearning is for Him, to include placing His Spirit (Genesis 2:7) and His Kingdom within us (Luke 17:21). It is from the creative act of God making us both, male and female, in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:27) that we all "live, move and have our Being in Him" (Acts 17:28). Hence, no one and no *thing* can ever satisfy or satiate our primary and ultimate thirst-need for God, but God: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all else [that we need and rightly thirst for] will be given to [us]" (Matthew 6:33). A blessed result of God sending Jesus in to the world to save us by dying, resurrecting and ascending back to the Father to atone for our sin (John 3:16), is our ability to now be in God's Presence without the guilt or death-stain of sin keeping us from having our thirst-need for Him, met by Him. While nothing and no one other than water can satiate the thirst of a panting deer, this is not true for us as humans. Scripturally, this is clearly evidenced by the socially and culturally forbidden exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well around noontime when she, as Jesus knew, purposely chose this time to avoid the townspeople because she is yet with another man "who is not her husband" and one who, despite her soul yearning, cannot quench or satiate her thirst (John 4:4-26). Ironically, Jesus begins dealing with her thirst-need by asking her, "Will you give Me a drink?" (v. 7). The Samaritan woman responds in awe that Jesus, a Jew, is even speaking to her and asking for a drink because at that time, Jews considered it disgraceful to even associate with Samaritans. Jesus replies, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water. . . . Everyone who drinks this [well] water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (vv. 10, 13-14). As the Samaritan woman believes that Jesus is the Messiah, the living water of the Lord



wells up in her quenching a soul thirst within her that she didn't even fully know, nor could she comprehend that it existed within her (This same ignorant state exists within us as well until we are made conscious of our soul's true need by the Holy Spirit). Consequently, she is no longer sin-shamed, but instead is liberated to run to, rather than run from, the townspeople to tell them about Jesus. They, in turn, come to meet Jesus for themselves to have their own inner soul-thirst needs quenched with His living water as they too believe that He is the Savior of the world (vv. 28-30, 39-42). Yes, I love Psalm 42:1-2 because it reminds me that my soul and all souls can only be satiated and satisfied as we meet with the living God and receive the living water that only He can give—water that will eternally quench our otherwise unquenchable thirst. Oh, won't you come and meet with God, the Soul-Thirst-Quencher of us all, and have your soul's thirst need quenched, once and for all?!

Prayer: Beloved Lord God, thank You so much for creating us in such a way that our deep soul yearnings and needs can only be met, first and foremost, by You. Lord, stop our vain searching and seeking externally for the things of this world that are guaranteed to rot and rust and erode away. Still us, as well, from pursuing ungodly relationships that will only leave us empty, hurt, bruised and battered and possibly even dead. Teach and guide us, Holy Spirit, as You lead us in the Way of Truth—the Truth that You, God, and You only are our Soul-Thirst-Quencher for only You can quench the deep inner thirst needs and longings of our souls. Amen.

Journal

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Rev. Dr. Janae Moore



Day 21: How Can We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?

For there [by the rivers of Babylon] those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

— Psalm 137:3-4 (NKJV)

Reflection

Life can really be strange at times. I am an optimist by nature. My demeanor is most often upbeat and positive. I had no idea that some of life's experiences would include feeling like you are going through without God. Even while doing all the so-called *right things*, the experience felt strangely empty, unfulfilling. I was involved with God's people and I still felt empty. To pray was unsatisfying. Reading scripture was neither inspiring nor fulfilling. While preaching and worshipping, I would observe others' excitement but I would be numb. I am learning about being in strange, unsatisfying phases in life. One, a strange place is a place of transition. Two, a strange place is a place to call on and believe in what you already know about the goodness and faithfulness of God even when you aren't feeling it. It is also a time to learn about the Grace of the Lord in a new and deeper way. When God and you are ready, Spiritual energy will begin and be renewed. The point of this sharing is simply this: our relationship and journey with the Lord is not always a shout, a praise, but a grind. There will be delays and detours, but God is always in full effect. And until the unclear becomes clarity and your "son" returns, know that God's Grace is in full effect. "Wait on the Lord and be of good courage." In other words, don't give up on God. And if you continue to pursue, ponder, call out to the Lord or just cry, the Lord will hear you and His Grace will keep you. When life's living is strange, God's Grace is enough to keep you.

Prayer: Lord, even when life is strange, I am grateful and glad You are still the same faithful God. Help us to know that what is strange to us is the beginning of the “new and surprising” that You are preparing us for. Bring to our remembrance that which we have come to know as Truth about You and that it sustains us until change happens. Amen.

Journal

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A Bonus Reflection

Day 22: Nothing Can Separate Us from God’s Love

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, or depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus or Lord.

— **Romans 8:38-39 (NASB)**

Reflection

I refer to this scripture by Paul in Romans as the, “nothing can separate us from the love of God” scripture. This is one of a handful of scriptures that really speaks to me each time I read it. God’s love transcends any earthly situation; any purposeful barrier or restriction; even, “... any other created thing...” Nothing real or contrived can come between me and God’s love for me, not even death. The assurance and certainty this passage conveys, lifts my spirit. Nothing or no one has all authority, but God. It is comforting to know that God is always with me no matter what the circumstance or situation. In Matthew 20:28, Jesus tells us that He will be with us always, even until the end of the age. This passage also imparts *reassurance* – the removal of any doubt or concern that God’s love will ever fail us or be removed from us. This passage moves me particularly in this day and time as the actions (or inactions) of “principalities” are causing stress and strife in the lives of the faithful who are trying to care for themselves and their families with limited or dwindling resources. Lives are truly hanging in the balance as some are forced to choose between paying the mortgage and paying for medications. In Hebrews 13:5, God tells us that He will never leave us nor forsake us. It is especially important for us to cling to God’s promises not only in our joys, but especially in times of trial. He has shown us time and time again that He will see us through.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank You that I have the assurance that no matter what I do, where I am or what trial I may face, I am never separated from You. All creation is Yours O God, and there is nothing in heaven or in earth that You don’t have dominion over. I pray that You will draw me closer to You so that I may feel Your presence and power and be certain of Your never-ending love for me. I stand on Your promise that nothing can ever separate us. In Jesus’ name I pray. AMEN.

Journal
