

**21 DAYS
OF
PRAYER
AND
FASTING**

2021



Introduction

As we begin 2021, it is our desire for the entire BRCC family to join together in a season of seeking God through prayer, worship, Scripture reading and fasting. To that end, I have written this 21 day devotional to help encourage you as we take some time and intentionally look to God's Word as we begin the new year. This season of church wide prayer and fasting is an annual tradition at BRCC that means a great deal to many in the our community.* Over the last decade, we have seen God dramatically answer our prayers and change our perspective on our circumstances and we look forward to what God will do in the future.

I have high expectations for what God will do in our church over the next 21 days. While I cannot guarantee what any one individual or family will experience over the next three weeks, I agree with Pastor Hubert who always said, "You will get out of it, what you put into it." To me this echoes what we read in Jeremiah 29:13, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart." We can't control God, but when we intentionally set aside time to worship God by spending time in prayer and reading the Bible, God usually reveals Himself to us in a fresh new way. I look forward to hearing how God is going to work in your life!

I will be praying for all of you!

Pastor Andy

**For some of you, fasting for an extended period of time sounds like a new and scary idea. To give you some additional ideas about how you could participate and prepare for fasting, check out the appendix at the back of the devotional.*

ACTS 16:16-40

It is in the difficult circumstances of life where others are able to see just how much faith we actually have in God. It is easy to worship God when things are going well, but how will we respond when things begin to get rough? In Acts 16:25 we read about one of the greatest testimonies of faith we will ever witness. Despite being unjustly (and illegally) put in prison, Paul and Silas continue to trust God. Even though they had been beaten earlier in the day and had every reason to feel sorry for themselves (and perhaps doubt their calling), these men began worshipping God by singing hymns of praise!

Paul and Silas are incredible role models for us when we are facing challenging situations. Even though their situation seemed very bleak, they continued to trust that God knew what He was doing. Their behavior wouldn't have been all that remarkable if they had waited to worship God until after the earthquake which freed them, but it is truly amazing that they were worshipping God before their deliverance! No one ever enjoys seasons of hardship, but our attitude can be more like Paul and Silas if we are willing to commit to worshipping and praising God even before we understand why He is allowing us to endure suffering. As we think about our challenging situations we must remind ourselves that if Paul and Silas could turn a prison cell into a temple of praise, we can do it too!

Questions: Is there something difficult in your life that you are going through right now? What would it look like for you to imitate the example of Paul and Silas and worship God before God answers your prayer? What will you be praying about during these 21 days? In the space below, consider writing down the things you are asking God to do and take some time to worship God as you meditate on His ability to answer your prayers.

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ROMANS 12:1-8

Sometimes we can get sucked into wishing that we were different. Sometimes we look to people in the “world” and long for what they have; at other times we see other Christians and contemplate how much better of a person we would be if we had their spiritual gifts and abilities. Either way, there is something deep inside us that longs to be more like somebody else. In this passage about worship in Romans 12, the apostle Paul tells us that we should not desire to be someone else; in fact, he says that God designed us just the way we are. “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” Of course, this doesn’t mean that we don’t have sins that we need to get rid of or that there aren’t habits we should change, but we should remember that God made us just the way He intended. He has a plan for us. We ought not conform to the pattern of this world, but we also shouldn’t be jealous of the gifts of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. As we worship God and focus on being living sacrifices for His glory, we will come to understand that we were created as a unique part of Christ’s body and our goal shouldn’t be to mimic someone else; it ought to be to become more like the person God created us to be!

Questions: Do you ever struggle with wishing that God had made you differently? What do you think is the connection between our worship and recognizing that God has a specific plan for our lives?

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JONAH 1

Would you rather be comfortable and outside of God's will or uncomfortable and inside of it? This is the question we must ask ourselves when we read the story of Jonah. As Christians we often ask God to make His will for our lives clear to us, but how will we respond if He asks us to do something difficult? Jonah knew exactly what God wanted him to do, but simply didn't want to do it.

It can be easy when we read Jonah to think about how stubborn and foolish Jonah was to disobey God; however, as we reflect on the story, we should try to personalize it and think about what kind of mission God is calling us to go on. Jonah was called to go to the people of Ninevah even though he didn't like them. Are there people in our lives that we don't like very much to whom God may be calling us to go and share? Jonah ran away from God. Is there any area of your life where you are running away from God? God was willing to do almost anything to get Jonah's attention; will you wait until God has to do something drastic to get your attention?

Questions: Can you think of any area where God wants you to step outside of your comfort zone? During this season of prayer make a commitment (in advance) that no matter what God asks you to do you will choose to obey. Ask God to show you (and then write down) one specific person you believe He has called you to talk with about Jesus (or serve) and promise God that you will take steps to do it before this season of prayer is finished.

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MATTHEW 6:9-15

One of the most fascinating things Jesus did when He taught His disciples to pray was warn them of the importance of forgiving those who had sinned against them. In verses 14-15 Jesus told the disciples that if they did not forgive others, God would not forgive them. This is a promise that we need to remember. If we hold on to a hurt we have against another person, we are literally cutting off our access to God's forgiveness. It might seem easy to come to God in worship by singing a song of praise, but if we want God to answer our prayers we must make a conscious decision to forgive the people who have wounded us, even if (perhaps especially if) they don't deserve it. We may think that by not forgiving someone we are punishing them, but the truth is we are actually hurting ourselves as we wallow in our own bitterness.

When we don't forgive, we construct a prison for ourselves made out of our own hurt, and if you build that prison, you should know that you are the only one who can free yourself. God loves you, but He can't help you out of your own prison because, in denying forgiveness to another, you have denied God access to that area of your life. It isn't easy, but Jesus on the cross is our model. As the pain (and sin) of the world pressed upon Him he cried out, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." If we want to be sincere worshippers of Jesus we must follow His example!

Questions: Is there anyone you are holding a grudge towards? Is there anyone in your life that you have deliberately chosen not to forgive? If you answered yes to either of those questions, how do you reconcile your decision, in light of the Lord's Prayer? As you participate in this intentional time of prayer and worship make an intentional choice to take heed of Jesus' warning and extend forgiveness to those who have hurt you.

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PSALM 23

Psalm 23 is one of the best known passages of Scripture in the entire Bible. These words of praise to God were written by David, a man who truly understood what it meant to have a heart of worship. It can be easy as you read this familiar psalm to simply gloss over the words without really thinking about them. To avoid this pitfall, read the psalm 2 or 3 times and personalize it by changing the words "me" and "my" to your name. Read the psalm slowly claiming each verse as you go.

What we believe about the Lord will affect the way we live our lives. During these 21 days, as you pray about specific issues, take time to think about the ways your Shepherd has promised to take care of you. Sheep depend upon their shepherd to take care of them. Are you depending on your Shepherd or are you trying to be your own shepherd? Ask God to help you learn what it means to depend on Him for everything in your life.

Questions: Do you believe the Lord is your shepherd? Are you letting the Lord lead you? Do you believe that he refreshes your soul? Do you believe that because of his presence in your life, you do not have to fear any evil?

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JOHN 14:1-21

On the night that Jesus was to be betrayed, He gathered his disciples together to tell them about what was going to happen in the future. Paradoxically, He told them that even though He was going to be leaving them, they would accomplish even greater things than He had accomplished while He was on earth. As we think about Jesus' words in this passage it is important to remember that His promises never fail. He didn't promise us that we would do even greater things than He had done just to make us feel better, He really meant it!

In verses 15 and 21, Jesus makes a connection between our obedience and our love for him. Genuine worship is the link between these ideas. If we are a wholehearted follower of Jesus, the way we demonstrate our love for Jesus is by doing the things He did and obeying the things He commanded us to do. Ask the Holy Spirit (who is our Counselor) to show you if there are any areas of your life where you need to make some changes so that you can do a better job of showing your love for Jesus by obeying Him.

Questions: Jesus said in John 14:12 "anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to my Father." Do you believe those words apply to you? What are some of the greater things God has done in your life in the past? Take some time to thank God for these blessings. As you participate in these 21 days of prayer what are some of the greater things you are praying that God would do in your life? (Take some time to pray about these things or ask God to show you two or three things you can pray about for the rest of the 21 days of prayer.)

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PSALM 46

If a fire is denied oxygen it will eventually stop burning. Similarly, if the fire that burns in the hearts of Christians lacks spiritual oxygen it too will eventually die out. One of the biggest threats to this spiritual oxygen is a life that is so busy there remains no room for God. In such a situation, the believer very rarely makes a conscious choice to reject God; instead the pace of their life has simply left them with no time for Him. Throughout the history of the church one of the best ways Christians have found to counteract the tendency toward a life that is too busy is to take a regular Sabbath.

During the original creation week, God created for six days and then on the seventh day God rested. This day of rest, or Sabbath, was something that God institutionalized for all of Israel. The Jewish Sabbath was unique in the ancient world; there were no other cultures or civilizations that took a weekly day of rest. For Israel, the Sabbath represented a gift from God so that they could enjoy the world He created. They weren't supposed to work, but this wasn't a burden; it was a gift and an opportunity for them to trust that God would provide for them. They had to have faith that God would make up for the day they were resting when everyone else around them was working. Ultimately, the point of the Sabbath wasn't to focus on the fact that you weren't working; it was to focus on God, the gift of the world around us and the gift of a day of rest to enjoy it.

Questions: In Psalm 46:10 the Psalmist is challenging us to build time for something like a Sabbath into our own lives. When you read this verse how do you receive it? Does it feel like one more thing you have to get done? Remember we all need to spiritually breathe, to rest in God's presence. God isn't trying to guilt you into something, He intends to give you a gift. Take some time today and allow yourself to "be still"; it might feel awkward or forced, but as you slow your pace and focus on Him, this time of rest will be spiritual oxygen for your soul. Have faith that God will provide for you and make up for the time you aren't working!

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1 JOHN 1

After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden they hid themselves from God. This is still our tendency today. When we sin we have a tendency to run and hide from God. Because of our feelings of shame we try to conceal ourselves in the darkness and stay out of the light. John wants us to avoid this pattern of behavior. John recognizes that genuine worship does not mean that we will live lives of moral perfection. We will all struggle with sin, and John wants us to be honest about our struggles. At the same time, he wants us to recognize that God's forgiveness is available to us. We might not feel like stepping into the light and letting God see everything in our hearts, but as we worship him (as imperfect as we are) God's forgiveness overwhelms all of the faults we expose to him. His forgiveness isn't based on how good we are: it is based on his desire to purify us and to have a relationship with us. Furthermore, we must remember that according to this passage there is a very real danger when we do not repent: we make ourselves unable to be homes for the word of God, the gospel! ("If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.") As we spend focused time in prayer it is important that we take time to confess our sins before the Lord and claim the forgiveness he offers.

Questions: Can you relate to Adam and Eve when they hid from God after they sinned? When you sin do you struggle with coming back to God in worship? How does 1 John 1:9 speak to you?

(As an act of confession and repentance, consider writing down on a piece of paper any sin God brings to your mind. Be specific and sincerely ask God to forgive you of each sin. When you are finished, destroy your list in a symbolic act of what God has done for you. Thank God for purifying you from all unrighteousness.)

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PSALM 40

When a person is struggling with a specific sin, they can appreciate what David meant when he said he felt as if he was mired in a slimy pit waiting for God to set his feet upon the rock. It sometimes feels as if they will never gain victory in this area and they might even occasionally wonder if they deserve to be swallowed up in their own shame and guilt. In moments like these when a Christian is feeling spiritually defeated, it is important to notice something from David's example in this psalm. Even though he acknowledged his struggle with sin, he continued to meet with other believers in the great assembly to celebrate the love and faithfulness of God.

If a believer is going to be delivered from a particular sin they must remember that fellowship and worship with other Christians are essential to their recovery. When Christians isolate themselves they allow Satan the chance to create a narrative for their lives. As the Father of Lies he is gifted in crafting a narrative that is easy to believe, but it is always a story that ends with the believer's destruction and defeat. Godly fellowship and genuine worship provide a powerful antidote to the schemes of the Enemy. For Christians today, the great assembly might look like a church service, a small group meeting or a gathering of a Christian recovery group, but it is crucial that followers of Jesus join together with each other so as to remind themselves of God's story for their lives which is the gospel of Jesus!

Even on your worst day our God is still faithful! Even if you are so discouraged by your sin that you have forgotten this, it is still true. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your sin, make sure that you don't allow your guilt to keep you from meeting with other Christians. As you gather together to focus on God's love and faithfulness, it gives your heart and mind the special opportunity to receive God's grace and be washed by the Holy Spirit. As you meet, your God will turn your "great assembly" into "a firm place to stand."

Questions: Have you ever had friends that you trusted enough to share your struggles with? Do you have friends like that right now? What do you think it is about Christian community that can change our perspective on our struggles with sin?

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LUKE 15:11-32

When we read this parable we tend to focus on the prodigal son who left home and wasted his life in wild living, but one of the fascinating things about this story is that at different points both of the Father's sons leave home and refuse to come in and be with him. While it might not be as dramatic, in verse 28 the older (we might say "well behaved") brother chooses to stay outside the home because he is angry about how well his father is treating his younger brother. The parable ends before the older brother comes home leaving us to wonder what happened to him.

In this story Jesus is very intentional in pointing out that although His ministry has primarily been about reaching out to the outcasts (in Mark 2:17 Jesus says He didn't come for the healthy, but the sick), many of those who "seem" to have their lives together actually need Him too! The Pharisees were good, moral people but they rejected Jesus and as a result they missed out on fellowship with their heavenly Father. Their good behavior wasn't enough; they needed a personal relationship with Jesus where they delighted in being around Him and were interested in what was on His heart! As we read this story it is easy to focus on people we know who need Jesus, but it is important for us to examine our lives and recognize that we need Him too!

Questions: Based on your life experience, which of the characters in Jesus' parable do you most relate to? What would it look like for you to come back into the presence of your Father in Heaven?

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LUKE 18:1-8

Unanswered prayer is one of the great difficulties of the Christian life. Why doesn't God answer all of our requests? In the face of unanswered prayer, some Christians have struggled with the idea that praying for something more than once indicates a lack of faith in God. However in Luke 18, Jesus taught His disciples about the importance of persistent prayer. In the passage, Jesus shares a parable about a widow who would not give up seeking justice and compared it to how we ought to be in prayer. During this season of prayer and fasting we need to remember this parable and continue to pray for the things that are on our hearts and not give up just because we haven't received the answer we were initially seeking. While this parable doesn't give an explanation for why God sometimes delays answering our prayers, it is clear that persistence in prayer is what God desires. If you have been praying about an issue for a long time and God hasn't answered your prayer, follow the example of the persistent widow and don't give up!

Questions: Do you struggle with why God sometimes doesn't answer your prayers in the way that you are asking? What do you think might be some of the reasons why God doesn't always answer our prayers the way we want? As we reach the half-way point of these 21 days of prayer, go back to the prayer requests you wrote down on day one and take them back to God, seeking His answer like the persistent widow did in Jesus' parable.

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PSALM 91

Part of what makes Psalm 91 so powerful is that it was clearly written during a season of great turmoil and struggle. Despite the storm raging all around, the author is steadfast. He has chosen to place his trust in God and he will not be shaken no matter what happens. This is why when he writes about "the shelter of the Most High," it is unlikely he was referring to a physical structure like the temple or the tabernacle. Instead, he was metaphorically describing something far greater: God's presence. It is a staggering and yet comforting thought that, as Christians, no matter where we are on the planet (or beyond) we can take shelter in God's presence. We can literally worship God anywhere! This means that the modernist distinctions between a sacred and a secular space are almost amusing in their smallness. Our God is bigger than church buildings, office parks, and school campuses. He is everywhere! He reigns over the entire universe, and whether or not He is acknowledged, He is present. Wherever we are, we can run to Him when we are struggling and "rest in the shadow of the Almighty."

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." (vs 1, NIV)

Questions: Are there specific places where you consistently sense the presence of God? Are there specific places where you consistently struggle to sense the presence of God? Take some time and reread verses 1-2 of Psalm 91 out loud. Quote these words over and over until you feel them beginning to gain traction in your heart and mind. Throughout the day, come back to these verses and remind yourself that you don't have to be at church to experience God's presence. As you are driving in your car, sitting at your desk, running on the treadmill, shopping at the store, or surfing the web, the Most High is with you. Whether you are alone or in a group, He is nearby and He wants to spend time with you.

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NUMBERS 13:17-14:9

After their exodus from Egypt, the nation of Israel traveled to Canaan, the land God had promised to their forefathers. Before entering into the land, God instructed Moses to send 12 spies into Canaan. Moses gave these men the responsibility of exploring the region and reporting back to the people what they had seen. Over a period of 40 days each of the men saw the goodness of the land and they all witnessed the size of the Canaanites who were already living there. Beyond their experiences in Canaan, all of the spies had recently experienced God's incredible power when He delivered them out of Egypt.

It is important to note that all of the spies had access to the same information. But despite the fact that they all had seen the same things, there was a big difference in how they interpreted the facts. Ten of the spies came to a very negative conclusion. They said, *"The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size...we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."* vs. 13:32b-33 In contrast to the pessimism of the majority, two spies (Joshua and Caleb) were hopeful. They told the people, *"Do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."* vs. 14:9b

Joshua and Caleb did not ignore the negative facts that the other ten spies were worried about, but they made an intentional decision to focus on the fact that God was with them. Because God was with them, they didn't have to be afraid. We can learn a lesson from them in how they responded to a fear producing challenge. When we begin to feel anxious because of a problem we face, we must remember that our God is with us and *"If God is for us, who can stand against us?"* Romans 8:31

Questions: What do you think was the difference between Joshua and Caleb and the other ten spies? In your own life, have you faced circumstances where you could relate to the challenge of focusing on

God as you looked out the "giants" in front of you? How did you handle it? How can Joshua and Caleb encourage you in those seasons of life?

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EXODUS 14

Throughout the Old Testament we see a pattern emerge in the nation of Israel, which many of us can relate to today. God would miraculously demonstrate His power in some way (for instance, the 10 plagues in Egypt) and the people would be amazed. For a brief period of time they would trust God to take care of them and all would be well until the next crisis hit (for instance, Pharaoh's armies chasing after them). As their fears increased, the Israelites would somehow forget all that God had provided in the past and begin to doubt God (they would usually blame their leaders too, often with almost comical complaints...see Exodus 14:11-12).

Unfortunately, many of us can relate to this sort of struggle. Even though we have seen God work in our past, somehow our current fears cause us to have "spiritual amnesia" and we begin to doubt God will take care of us in the future. The cure for this sort of chronic forgetfulness is to frequently remind ourselves of what God has done for us. The old hymn was right, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done." When we remember what God has done in the past, it has a way of putting our current situation into perspective. Perhaps it is this dynamic which Jesus was thinking of when He told His disciples at the Last Supper to remember the meaning of the bread and the wine. No matter what kind of predicament they were going through, Jesus wanted them to be reminded of just how committed He was to delivering them. He was willing to give His body and His blood. As you go through today, consider pausing before every meal and instead of your usual prayer of thankfulness for your food ask everyone at the table to share one way God has provided for them in the past. As you bring to mind stories of God's faithfulness it will encourage you that our God has a great track record when it comes to taking care of His children!

Questions: When you see God accomplish something great in your life how does it impact your level of faith? In the midst of your present challenges, do you ever struggle with forgetting what God has done in

your life in the past? How does intentionally taking time to remember God's faithfulness in the past help us avoid "spiritual amnesia?"

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ZEPHANIAH 3:9-20

Can you imagine ignoring the Bible and its standards for purity for such a long time that you eventually forgot what God's standards were or that the Bible even existed? According to 2 Kings 22 (which takes place during the same era Zephaniah was a prophet) that was basically what happened to the people of Judah. Despite their incredible heritage, they had disobeyed God for so long that they had literally lost the Book of the Law which God had passed down to them through Moses. Fortunately, some workers at the temple stumbled across an old copy of the book when they were renovating a part of the temple. The book was brought to King Josiah and he ordered that it be publicly read to all the people and he committed the nation to once again live pure lives follow the one true God.

As we consider this story, we must remember that the people of Judah weren't violently opposed to God and His standards, after all they continued to worship Him and they were still offering sacrifices and maintain the temple as if nothing was wrong. The problem was that they were "double minded" as they were also worshipping the idols of the nations around them. God's response to their sin is interesting. Even though the book of Zephaniah is filled with proclamations of God's judgment (not just against Israel, but also against the nations around them), God announces in verse nine a word of grace, "I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call" on His name. Even when we have been faithless, God is faithful and is willing to extend grace to us if we will repent from our sin and impurity. Be sure to thank the Lord today for his graciousness!

Questions: As you read about the people of God being double minded, can you relate to their sin? You may still be worshipping God, but are you truly wholehearted or are there idols in your life? As you move into the last week of these 21 days of prayer and worship, ask the Lord to reveal to you if there are any areas of "double-mindedness" in your life.

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REVELATION 3:14-22

Unlike some of the other churches addressed in Revelation 2-3, the church in Laodicea wasn't struggling with any particular sin. They weren't worshipping the emperor, they weren't giving in to false doctrine, and they weren't living lives of sexual sin. But despite the fact they have avoided these "big" sins, it is evident that this church has problems. According to Jesus the church is not living up to its calling. In fact, perhaps the harshest words to any of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 are delivered to the church in Laodicea.

Jesus tells them in verses 15 & 16 that He wishes they would either be hot or cold, but their lukewarm commitment frustrates and angers Him. Jesus was telling the church in Laodicea their indifference to God was rendering them ineffective and unproductive as Christians. Despite these severe words, we should not think that Jesus has given up on the Laodiceans. Jesus goes on to say in verse 19, *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent."*

Keep in mind, the opposite of being "lukewarm" is not trying harder to be a better Christian. Jesus is NOT asking you to frantically do more to impress Him. The answer is to fall more deeply in love with Jesus. He wants to have a relationship with us. Jesus wants to spend time with you and He offers us His resources as the antidote to being lukewarm. As He says in verse 20 *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*

Questions: As you have participated in this season of prayer, are there any areas where you sense God has rebuked you and you need to repent? How can you respond to this prompting from a place that focuses on how much God loves you instead of feeling shame and condemnation?

Notes [click below to type in notes](#)

JOHN 15:18-25

If someone asked you if becoming a Christian would make their lives better, how would you respond? Of course, you would likely focus on the reality that Jesus saves our souls and because of what He accomplished on the cross we can avoid hell and spend forever with God in heaven. And yet, focusing on eternity when it comes to our lives being "better" as followers of Jesus seems like it is an incomplete version of the Gospel. When people say that being a Christian makes everything better it depends on what you mean by better.

Think about what Jesus says to the disciples in our passage today in verses 20, *"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."* As Americans we don't often think about persecution, but if we were talking with people in China or India or in parts of the Middle East they would immediately recognize that becoming a Christian involves taking a risk that things in our lives will be impacted negatively. And yet, there is more to the Christian life than just receiving blessings and answered prayers from God. As followers of Jesus, we are taking a risk that even if we are mistreated and rejected like Jesus was, our lives will be better off in the end. Furthermore, we have faith that God's goodness won't just be better for us someday in heaven. Even in the midst of persecution, we are choosing to trust that our lives will be better off if we honor God in every area of our lives. This is the essence of what it means to have faith in Jesus.

Questions: Does your relationship with God ever "cost" you something? Do the people in your sphere of influence at work or school know that you are a Christian? As you go through the day make a commitment that you will pray for Christians around the world experiencing persecution. Also, ask God to show you if there are any areas of your life right now where you need to be bolder in your faith, even if it means you might experience some persecution.

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MARK 10:17-31

The story of the rich young ruler is the story of a would be disciple of Jesus "counting the cost" and deciding that following Jesus is not "worth it" to him. He understood what true worship would cost him and he wasn't willing to pay the price. We have a tendency to look down at him, but the reality is that all of Jesus' disciples suffered because of their commitment to follow Jesus. If we compare the "quality" of their lives to that of the rich young ruler many people would prefer to be like the rich young ruler instead of the disciples.

Sometimes the biggest obstacles keeping us from a closer relationship with Jesus are things that we deeply value and enjoy. (Often we even consider them to be blessings from God!) For the rich young ruler the most significant barrier between him and becoming a disciple of Jesus was his money, but for another person it could have just as easily been their career or even their family. None of these things are "sinful" and yet this story reminds us that many people eventually walk away from Jesus because He is asking them to give up everything.

Worshipping Jesus sounds good, but when you see what it will cost you to follow Jesus are you willing to make the necessary commitment? You may be willing to give up the parts of your life which you think are "wicked," but are you willing to give up control over those parts of your life which you view as blessings from God? Jesus consistently calls us to make a hard choice. Are we willing to trust Jesus with everything? Are we willing to follow Him wherever He goes? Even to the cross? Like the rich young ruler, we must make a decision. In order to inherit eternal life we only lack one thing: we must leave everything behind and follow Jesus.

Questions: As Americans, are we willing to give up our big homes, our comfortable cars, and our secure futures to follow Jesus? What if He calls us to go into missions? What if He calls us to reduce our standard of living so that we can take care of those in need? It will be difficult

for us, but even more significantly are we willing to take a risk in how it will affect our children?

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MATTHEW 14:22-33

When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water they were afraid. They couldn't believe what Jesus was doing; they didn't think it was possible. Despite their disbelief, the disciples couldn't deny that Jesus was out on the water, but perhaps they rationalized that Jesus was so unique and holy that miracles involving Him were somehow possible. But then Jesus called for Peter to come and join Him on the water and suddenly the miracle was growing! As the disciples watched in amazement, it wasn't just Jesus on the water, it was one of them too!

This story serves as a pattern that can be repeated in our own lives. When we see where Jesus is working we begin to feel uncomfortable. He may be at work in an environment that doesn't feel "safe" to us and we begin to worry that Jesus will call us to join Him in what He is doing. We might feel called to share our faith with another person (a co-worker, a fellow student, or a relative), we might sense that Jesus wants us to begin working with people who come from a different socio-economic or ethnic background than we do, or perhaps we feel led to make some financial decisions that we know won't be easy and require genuine sacrifices. We are tempted to think that only God could do a miracle in that situation, but we forget that God wants to partner with us to do the miracle! We must remember Peter's example. He was an ordinary man, but because of Jesus an extraordinary thing happened!

If Jesus calls us to come onto the water, the key is to focus on Him. Don't look at the wind and the waves, don't worry about the things that are beyond your control. Get out of the boat and keep your attention on the one who is able to allow you to walk on water!

Questions: If you were to personalize this story for your own life, what kind of risk would Jesus ask you to take? What are the "wind and waves" that frighten you and keep you from taking a step of faith? Why do you think we are so hesitant to believe that God could do a miracle in our lives? What is Jesus asking you to do right now?

Notes [click below to type in notes](#)

PSALM 18

Eventually a time comes in all of our lives when we are no longer able to physically do the things that we once did (or at least not to the same extent or quality). In anticipation of those moments (before we begin to experience our physical limitations), we ought to reflect on what the legacy of our lives will be. In 2 Samuel 21, David was almost killed by a Philistine and his own men insisted, out of their love for him, that he no longer lead them into battle. Many scholars believe that Psalm 18 was written about this time in David's life (it is almost identical to 2 Samuel 22).

As David looked back at all the Lord had done for him, he remembered God's faithfulness. His God had delivered Goliath into his hands, rescued him from Saul, made him the King of Israel and forgiven him of his sins. It is interesting that in this context David begins the psalm (v. 1-2) by using the word "my" nine times each to describe what God means to him. David says the Lord is "my strength," "my rock," "my fortress," "my deliverer," "my God," "my shield," "my salvation," and "my stronghold." David had once again escaped death and as he thinks back, he remembers crying out to God for help to deliver him from foes who were too powerful for him. David then closes this psalm (v. 32-50) with words of praise as he acknowledges that God is the source of all his successes and God alone deserves all the glory.

Questions: As you pray today, consider what God means to you. If you were to say, "The Lord is my..." what would you say? Think about the situations that you are facing right now—are you crying out to God and depending on Him to deliver you? As you think about the past, spend some time praising God for all He has done for you.

Notes [click below to type in notes](#)

PSALM 42

Psalm 42 is a psalm about desperation. If your mental picture of the deer in Psalm 42 is a cute little Bambi like fawn casually taking a drink from a stream in the middle of a plush forest simply because he was a tad thirsty, you will miss the point of the psalm. In ancient Israel there were seasons when major sections of their land became overwhelmingly dry. The deer in the psalm is desperate because, without water, this deer is going to die.

As you think about your life with God, how desperate are you to grow? Many Christians in America claim they want to grow in their relationship with Jesus, but their behavior reveals that they really only want to grow if it doesn't cost them anything. They aren't desperate, they are content; and when we are content we become complacent. It is this tendency towards complacency which explains why we often grow best during times of difficulty. When things aren't comfortable, we begin to get desperate and look for ways to change our circumstances. God has always been available, but it is only when we become desperate that we begin to understand verse two in our passage, *"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"*

Questions: Most of us would say that we should grow, but how much do you really want to grow? How dissatisfied are you with the current condition of your life? What has God shown you over the past 21 days that you need to remember for the rest of 2021? How desperate are you to truly experience God? What would you be willing to do to get the kind of life with God that you want?

Notes [click below to type in notes](#)

Fasting Appendix

I recognize that some of you will not be able to fully participate in a 21 day fast, so I would ask you to pray about how you might consider participating in some other way. Perhaps you could fast one meal a day or fast from watching television. Whatever you feel the Lord is calling you to do, I believe that He will bless you in this endeavor.

Here are ten ways you & your family can participate in this fast:

(Please note that if you have had any recent health problems or are taking medications, you should consult your doctor before participating in an extended fast.)

1. All meals for 21 days
2. 2 meals a day for 21 days
3. 1 meal a day for 21 days
4. All meals 1 day a week for 3 weeks
5. A Daniel Fast *(Only eat nuts, grains, fruits, & vegetables for 21 days)*
6. Television for 21 days
7. Coffee or caffeine for 21 days
8. Video games for 21 days
9. Facebook or other social websites for 21 days
10. Desserts, sweets, soft drinks, or chocolate for 21 days

If you choose to do a 21 day fast, here are some steps you should take to prepare you for your fast:

- The week before you begin your fast you will want to gradually decrease the amount of caffeine, sugar, and processed foods you eat. Your body will actually go into withdrawal for those things during the first few days of the fast and it will be easier to manage if you have already begun to wean yourself off of them.
- Make sure you are drinking lots of water. Fasting has many



Fasting Appendix

wonderful health benefits, purifying us of the toxins that have accumulated in our bodies, but we need to be fully hydrated to realize the benefits of this.

- Most importantly set aside two or three goals you have for your fast. In addition to praying for God's direction and blessing for BRCC, what are you going to specifically pray for during this fast? Praying over these goals on a daily basis (if not hourly) will be an incredible blessing to you during your fast.

Once you have begun your fast here are some things to remember so as to help you get the most out of your fast. Unless you feel the Lord is specifically calling you to a water only fast, we recommend that you either do a "juice fast" or a "Daniel fast." In a juice fast you will not eat any food but will drink lots of fruit juice. You can drink any liquid that you like but I suggest avoiding drinks like milk, which have fat in them. (This is not for spiritual reasons, the fat in milk will actually make your stomach "feel" more hungry.) In a Daniel fast you can eat vegetables or salad and drink juice. Whichever fast you choose be sure to take plenty of juice with you to work or your various activities and drink as much as you need so as to keep up your energy levels.

Here are some other things to remember while you are fasting:

- The first few days of your fast will be the most difficult. Our enemy will try to convince you that you can't do it and that your body is shutting down without food. Don't believe him! You will initially experience some difficult physiological and psychological symptoms as your body gets used to going without food, but remember they will get better as you

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



Fasting Appendix

continue your fast. Many men and women in our congregation have successfully completed extended fasts and you can do it too!

- Jesus said "man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." During your fast be sure to read from the Bible on a daily basis. It will encourage you and will feed your soul spiritually.
- Fasting is not just about avoiding food, it is about drawing near to God. Use the time you would have spent eating to spend time with God. (Whether this be in prayer, singing Christian songs or reading the Bible or a devotional book.)
- Consider taking the money that you would have spent on your food (approximately \$3.50 per meal) and set it aside to feed those in our community who are in need.



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