

Introduction

The purpose of fasting is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things. -Ole Kristian O. Hallesby

Fasting is important, more important perhaps, than many of us have supposed,... when exercised with a pure heart and a right motive, fasting may provide us with a key to unlock doors where other keys have failed; a window opening up new horizons in the unseen world; a spiritual weapon of God's provision, mighty, to the pulling down of strongholds. (God's Chosen Fast) -Arthur Wallis

Welcome to the 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting! *Christ Wesleyan has followed the pattern of a 40 Day fast, twice a year, for more than 15 years. God has blessed us in exceptional ways and I believe that much of His blessing is directly connected to our times of prayer and fasting. Our hope is that each 40 Day period, spring and fall, will draw you closer to the Lord in a fresh new way. Although it may be impossible to sustain these disciplines on a regular basis, it is my hope that it will lift you to a new level in your walk with Christ and that you will continue stronger in your journey after it is over.*

The 40 Day period is meant for you to draw near to God by building in some new routines and by deleting something from your life that will cause you to think of God more. Fasting is not an attempt to twist God's arm to make Him do something He doesn't want to do; but rather an opportunity to heighten your intensity in prayer and to draw you closer to Him so that your desires are His desires! I pray that you will discover new ways during this 40 Day period to renew your devotion to the Master.

You might consider giving up something for the 40 Days, or you might give up something different each week during the 6 weeks. You might add some special time-alone-with-God times, some fresh challenges to your faith, or some new goals. Be as creative as possible in how you will approach this 40 Days! Whatever you fast... whether it is food, gum, coffee, sweets, desserts, movies, video games, reading, music or any number of new ideas that God brings to mind... you always need to let the fasting item be a prompt for you to remember to pray. When you set aside food, it is your desire to pray during that time and to focus your heart on the God given goals for this time.

The first two days of the devotional will guide you in some thoughts as to types of fasts and the challenges you may need to take. The rest of the devotionals are all about Heroes of Faith. I have asked each of the pastors to take a Bible character and to write a devotional for six days about this individual. You will get to know the Bible hero in new ways, as well as get to know the pastor a little better, too. I have asked each of them to focus on something of faith in the lives of each character so it is our hope that you will be strengthened in your faith during this 40 Days.

I have a number of ways I am believing God to work in my life! It is my prayer that God will supply the resources to move forward in Phase One! (That is a big one!) I also have a few other miracles for God to accomplish. Got some miracles for God to do? Join us in seeking God, building faith, and believing in the God of miracles to do something that is absolutely incredible during this 40 Days!

*Serving Him Together,
Pastor Arlie*

“Discovering my Purpose for Fasting”

The passage in Isaiah 58 actually gives us 9 biblical purposes for fasting! As you think about the purpose for your own personal fast... consider each of these to discover if they fit any of the circumstances for which you are praying.

1. **To break an addiction**
2. To solve problems
3. **To win someone to Christ**
4. To break crippling fears
5. **To provide for the needy**
6. To provide insight for decision making
7. **To provide healing**
8. To have his power on my life and testimony
9. **To protect from evil**

Each of these are powerful ways to see God working through your life. The biblical instruction from the Gospel of Matthew for fasting is not “if” you fast, but “when” you fast! Jesus is assuming His disciples will fast. So... it is understood that all Christians should practice some form of fasting. Understood, there are some who medically cannot fast! There are additional ways to fast other than abstinence from food. That just happens to be one of the more obvious!

The type of fast that we are doing is both a corporate (the entire body of Christ is asked to fast together) and a personal fast (a time where God draws your heart to fast for a personal reason.) Some have misunderstood Jesus’ words in Matthew in the sense that you couldn’t tell anyone if you were fasting. If Jesus had meant for all fasting to be in secret, then he would have meant for all giving and all praying to be done in secret, too, as that is the context of the passage. Instead, he meant for us to fast for the right motive and not to seek to draw attention to ourselves. If our motive has been to draw attention to ourselves then we have received the only reward we will get.

Pastor Arlie Davis

“Is fasting ever a bribe to get God to pay more attention to the petitions? No, a thousand times no. It is simply a way to make clear that we sufficiently reverence the amazing opportunity to ask help from the everlasting God, the Creator of the universe, to choose to put everything else aside and concentrate on worshiping, asking forgiveness, and making our requests known—considering His help more important than anything we could do ourselves in our own strength and with our own ideas.” Edith Schaeffer L’Abri

Meditation: Lord, Help me to understand the significance of fasting and to fully grasp the meaning of seeing my desire be your will on earth!

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“To Fast or Not to Fast!”

During this 40 Day period we are encouraging each of you to spend additional time in prayer and fasting! The purpose of fasting is to intensify our prayers and to build into our lives additional disciplines. Fasting is one of those disciplines that has transference. In other words, if we build self-control into our lives through fasting, we have a greater capability of having self-control in other areas of our lives as well. Self-control is necessary in all areas of the Christian life as moderation is one of our greatest challenges. A recent study showed that self-control is contagious.

“When you restrain from scarfing down unhealthy foods or hold back on that extra drink, others may deserve some of the credit. Self-control is contagious, a new study suggests. In a series of studies in a lab setting, researchers found that watching, or even thinking about someone with good self-control, makes others more likely show the same restraint. And they found the opposite also holds true – people with lousy self-control influence others negatively. The effect is so powerful, in fact, that just seeing the name of someone with good or bad self-control flashing on a screen for 10 milliseconds changed the behavior of volunteers. ‘The take-home message of this study is that picking social influences that are positive can improve your self-control,’ said lead author Michelle VanDellen, a psychology professor at the University of Georgia. ‘And by exhibiting self-control, you’re helping others around you do the same.’”
-LiveScience Staff

Wouldn’t it be great to think that if the Christian community demonstrated better self-control, it might have a greater impact on our world!

As you read over the passages of Scripture for today you will find several consistent thoughts. **One**, Jesus fasted! Jesus practiced the discipline of fasting. **Two**, Jesus gave instruction to us as to how we should fast. **Three**, Jesus gave directions to us as to when we would fast. **Four**, the early church in the Book of Acts practiced fasting.

So, why not ask God to guide you in how you should fast, why you should fast, and when you should fast during this **40 Days of Prayer and Fasting**? God has some great things ahead for us during this 40 Days... don’t miss being a part of seeing those come to our lives!

Pastor Arlie Davis

“We tend to think of fasting as going without food. But we can fast from anything. If we love music and decide to miss a concert in order to spend time with God, that is fasting. It is helpful to think of the parallel of human friendship. When friends need to be together, they will cancel all other activities in order to make that possible. There’s nothing magical about fasting. It’s just one way of telling God that your priority at that moment is to be alone with him, sorting out whatever is necessary, and you have cancelled the meal, party, concert, or whatever else you had planned to do in order to fulfill that priority.” -James I (J. I.) Packer

Meditation: Dear Lord, guide me in the direction for this 40 Days! Help me have the faith to believe that you can do greater things through me than I have ever imagined! “Greater things are yet to come, and greater things are still to be done in this city!”

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“Who Me?”
(Part One)

What is the first question that comes to your mind when God calls you to do something for Him? Well, it could very well be the title of our devotional for this day. “Who, Me?” Whenever God puts a challenge before us, the enemy is a master at putting all the reasons why we aren’t qualified and why we just can’t do it. As you read our passage of Scripture for the day, it doesn’t seem like much has changed over the past couple of thousand years.

Gideon was approached by the angel of the Lord in Judges 6:12 with the reassurance “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” Gideon’s first response was rather typical, “But sir, if the Lord is still with us, why has all this happened to us?” Somehow all of us face the questions of “Why”. Why does God allow difficult times for those who are trying to follow Him? Why does God permit challenges for those who are trying to do their best? If God says He is with us, then why don’t things go our way? These are the questions we all face. Gideon’s response reveals the same sad condition of our hearts that we somehow expect not only His presence, but his presents as well. We not only want God, we want all He can give me as well, to fill all my needs. But, each of us must come to the place of understanding in our life where, God is enough!

John Ortberg shares, "Sometimes, when all the props and crutches in your life get stripped away and you find you have only God, you discover that God is enough. Sometimes, when your worst fears of inadequacy are confirmed and you discover that you really are out of your league, you experience the liberation of realizing that it is okay to be inadequate and that God wants his power to flow through your weakness."

Gideon is about to go on a process of removing the props and crutches in his life. A removal of every semblance of help from anyone but God! I have faced many times in my life when I questioned why God would allow certain circumstances to take place. When those times come, I don’t get an answer but I do get the reassurance that He will be with me! My trust can’t be in what I see or it is no faith at all. You see, “God is enough!”

Pastor Arlie Davis

Dear God, Help me to realize that I only need to depend on you. You are enough to fill the emptiness of my heart. You are enough to fill the longings I feel. You are enough to be all I need! You are enough to make me complete and whole. I only need you.
God is enough!

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“Who Me?”
(Part Two)

The scene: God calls you to do something that is way out of your league! Something that you just can’t imagine happening!

The response: All the reasons why I can’t do this!

When God came to Gideon through the angel of the Lord and told him that He was going to send Gideon to save the nation of Israel out of the enemy’s hands, what was Gideon’s response? “But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

Gideon’s response was so human! But Lord, there are so many better qualified people to do this than I! There are those with more talent, more education, better personalities, better minds, better resources, better family backgrounds, and the list of excuses continues. Gideon built a pretty good case for why not! “My clan is the weakest” and “I am the least in my family!” Why does God often choose those who are the least of the least to accomplish great things? Why does God use the foolish things of this world?

“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’” I Corinthians 1:27-31

I believe God is calling us to do something that is out of our league. I believe God is calling us to accomplish things that would be impossible for us to do on our own. I believe God has “greater things that are yet to be done” and He is calling each of us to be part of that call!

What is God calling you to do that fill these criteria? What is God asking of you! Make sure you don’t use any of the excuses... just remember that God gives these two promises... “The Lord is with you!” and “The Lord is sending you!”
And go do great things!

Pastor Arlie Davis

Lord, help me to look beyond myself and my weaknesses and see the mighty power that You have. Help me to remember that you know what you are doing when you asked me to serve you and equip me with all I need to see your will happen!

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February 27th, 2010

Judges 6: 31-40

“Are You Sure?”

Has God ever given you a task that was obviously bigger than you are? Have you ever felt that your skills or your training never prepared you for this? Well, God's call on Gideon was very clear. He sent the angel of the Lord to give him the message. Gideon wasn't unwilling to fulfill God's call... just uncertain that it was God calling him. In verse 17, Gideon asked the stranger to give him a sign that it really was God talking to him. When Gideon had offered his sacrifice, the stranger took the staff, ignited fire from the rock and then disappeared. It was at that moment that Gideon fully realized who he had just met with... an angel of the Lord!

It seems that Gideon struggled with uncertainty on other occasions as well. In today's passage he was now preparing to lead the battle to fight the enemy. Now remember that Gideon was the least of the least... but God had called him to lead. Once again, Gideon was uncertain, not unwilling, of God's direction. So he put out a fleece to see God's confirmation. He asked God to make the fleece wet and the ground dry to give him confirmation. Sure enough... God did it! Once again, Gideon asked God for one more request, asking for the fleece to be dry and the ground to be wet! And, once again... God did it!

Gideon was not unwilling... just uncertain. God was patient with Gideon as Gideon tried to seek out God's leading. God punishes disobedience but is always patient with us as we seek to bring clarity to His will and leadership! I don't have difficulty doing God's will when I know God's will. It is the knowing of God's will where I face the challenge. If I am convinced that this is God leading and this is what God wants me to do... I am willing to take the risk and willing to move forward.

I am convinced that Phase One is our next step of obedience at Christ Wesleyan. I am willing to take the steps necessary to see that fulfilled and ask you to join me in praying for his provision as we move forward. God's spirit continues to confirm his leadership. What is God calling you to do? What do you need for him to make certain in your life? God punishes disobedience but is patient to provide leadership to His children! Don't be afraid to ask God for confirmation... He wants to show you!

“The will of God will never take you to where the grace of God will not protect you” – Unknown

Pastor Arlie Davis

Dear God, help me to see your path today. Give me your Spirit's confirmation of your leadership and guide me in your will.
I am willing to obey as you open doors for me today!

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Day 5

Judges 7:1-25

“Now, this is Impossible!”

Amazingly enough... now that Gideon has the complete confirmation of God's leading, Gideon is ready to take on the task that God has placed before him. But wait! It is not enough that God chooses someone who has never lead an army before, it is not enough that he comes from the least tribe in the nation, and it is not enough that he is the least in his family! There is still more!

Has God ever asked you to do something that seemed completely impossible? Have you ever been called upon to do something that you know that could not possibly be accomplished on your own? Well, this is the dilemma of Gideon! As you read the passage, it seemed like God was calling Gideon to the impossible! Thirty-two thousand men against several hundred thousand! Wow! Impossible! But wait... to God that seems too probable, so God calls on Gideon to slim down his army to even up the odds. First, he has all of the soldiers who fear what they are doing go home. Now there's a thought! With those odds, who wouldn't be afraid? So, twenty-two thousand go home! But that's not enough either. He then asks Gideon to pick the men by the way they drink their water, and now we are down to three hundred. Ridiculous!

Except, we serve the God of the impossible! And God wants to call us to impossible tasks that could only be accomplished with Him! This was an astounding call that God was placing on Gideon's life, but once more, he gave Gideon reassurance. God told him that if he was afraid, he should slip down to the enemy camp and listen to what they are saying. Sure enough, Gideon went to the exact place where God was leading, he overheard one man talking about his dream and how they were defeated, and Gideon was willing once again! God delivered all of the enemy into Gideon's hands in a miraculous way! God did it and proved his ability to do the impossible through a simple servant who was willing to be used of God!

What an awesome story! Does it get you excited to try and tackle something impossible? Have you been sliding by in your walk with God, merely doing what you could accomplish in your own strength? Look for a God-sized task, be certain of his confirmation, and let God lead! He will do great things through those who are willing to be used!

“The man who says a thing cannot be done is invariably right, for he will never do it.”

“It is impossible to get exhausted in work for God. We get exhausted because we try to do God's work in our own way.” Oswald Chambers

Pastor Arlie Davis

Dear Lord, forgive me for looking at life from what I can accomplish and give me the courage and confirmation to tackle something that only You could accomplish through me!

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Day 6

Mathew 4:18-20

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

"Leaving it all behind"

If I could have a conversation with Peter, I would ask a few questions about his initial call to follow Christ. So here is my imagined scenario.

Michael: Peter, uh, it's so nice to meet you

Peter: The same for me.

Michael: It is such an honor...wow...uh...oh, I wanted to ask you a few questions if you don't mind.

Peter: Sure. Go ahead

Michael: I want to ask you about the day Jesus called you.

Peter: I remember it well. A beautiful day with an above average catch for my brother and I at the lake.

Michael: Yes, that's the day you left your job and followed Him. It was rather sudden, right? Just dropping the nets and coming to Jesus.

Peter: I honestly don't know why it was so easy. I heard him and knew it was the only thing I could do. His voice was so true and filled with such passion yet gentleness. (Choking up) Oh, to hear his voice. It is beauty beyond description. All my hopes and dreams resonated when I heard his voice.

Michael: (silent for a few minutes) Wow...Peter, Jesus said he would make you a "fisher of men." What did that mean to you?

Peter: It meant that I would be bringing people into this new wondrous work of God...finding them and luring them by the power of the Spirit.

Michael: So, Peter, you just left everything and believed it all without any evidence or verifiable proof?

Peter: That was the life to which he was calling me – a life of faith in Him. Complete abandon to His will and to His voice. I trust him!

Pastor Michael Dennis

*"Without trust, words become the hollow sound of a wooden gong.
With trust, words become life itself."*

Notes _____

Matthew 8:14-15

And when Jesus had come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying and sick of a fever; and he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she arose and ministered to them.

"Healing by Proxy?"

Peter was a follower of Jesus for just a short time when Jesus came to his house. Given the accounts of the Master I would assume that he was invited to meet the family...or perhaps it was for another reason. The scriptures simply tell us that Jesus went to Peter's house and saw that his mother-in-law was sick. I can't help but envision Peter, having seen Jesus' miracles, wanted one for his dear mother-in-law. Jesus entered the house and had compassion on her and healed her. She then regained strength and felt so well that she insisted on serving Jesus and his followers.

Here is where we come in. Jesus is certainly able to heal and deliver and make right what is wrong. We know of his power and are concerned about someone we love. The only thing we know to do is to bring Jesus to them and pray for a cure. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law happened because of Peter's faith.

How many people could encounter Jesus through our initiative and receive divine healing?

Healing by proxy? It happened then and by the power of the Spirit can happen now.

Pastor Michael Dennis

*Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity.
-- Hippocrates --*

Notes _____

Matthew 16:15-17

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven".

Receiving the Word

Lightning crashing or gentle rain?
Electric thoughts or frantic speech?
Deep convictions or platitudes recited?
From where do they come?
Our strict upbringing or clever adaptation?
Whispers in the wind or shouts from the rooftops?
The All Knowing and Ever-Living One knows
They are but a drop from the condensation of heaven.
An endless sea of unimaginable love and tempestuous mercy
Dwells within Him in that Holy Place.
When, perchance, He chooses to dispense that precious drop
Of revelation-infused thoughts upon a son of Adam
It shatters the hardened ground of preconceived belief
And launches his kingdom into central view.
There Peter stood, mind and heart waiting to embrace Truth
Hearing the furtive Voice from heavens murmur
"This is the Christ, the offspring of the living God."

Disclosure completed.
Faith revealed.
Foundation established.
Heaven rejoices.
And we join in the song.

Pastor Michael Dennis

"God's revelation will always be consistent with the whole of scripture. He is a God of order, not of confusion: - Anonymous

Notes _____

Matthew 14:25-29

And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

Walking on Water

(Part One)

Peter again only needed to hear the word from Jesus bidding him to walk on the water. When he heard it, there was no hesitation, no pause and no consultation. This is what amazes me about Peter. He leaps when he hears Jesus and asks questions later. Obedience precedes analysis. This is nothing new. In the Old Testament God desired obedience more than sacrifice. If the sacrificial system were the means of salvation, then we would devise ways to get the minimum amount of acceptable sacrifice for our dollar no matter the shortcuts. We would find ways to try to please God externally without the internal heart transformation toward loving and serving him. God mentioned that greatest commandment in the Old Testament when he said that we should love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Faith is a complete trust no matter what the circumstances tell you.

Peter had to release preconceived notions and ignore the storm.

He only had to look, believe, and step.

Pastor Michael Dennis

Are we willing to be obedient, even leaping to follow God even when circumstances look impossible? Are we willing to trust God without hesitation?

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March 5th, 2010

Matthew 14:29-31

And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Walking on Water

(Part Two)

In continuing the story of Peter walking on the water, notice that Peter did not leap onto the stormy, choppy water until he heard the Master say, "Come."

This is the same voice that uttered the words, "Let there be light." This is the same voice that thundered from Mount Sinai. The same voice that pronounced forgiveness of sins. The same voice that commanded demons to flee. The same voice that told stories of what the kingdom of God is like. That voice.

Jesus simply said, "Come." He did not explain what would happen next. He simply bid Peter to come and join him. No persuasive speech. Just one furtive word spoken across storm tossed waters. I can almost see Jesus with outstretched hand and Peter, with awestruck eyes, just believing and stepping.

For all the negative accounts written of Peter when he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink, I just respond, "But who else ever walked on the water?" Yes, Peter had a small faith as Jesus told him later, but Jesus did not say he had no faith. Peter did call out to Christ to save him because he knew he could do it. Peter's faith was small and weak, like the muscles in an infant's legs when beginning to walk. However, no one ever scolds a child when they are learning to walk. Jesus' words were surely spoken with a grin on his face as he remarked at the first steps of Peter into the realm of total trust and confidence in Christ. Peter's faith was not created in that moment but it received a testing.

Pastor Michael Dennis

Pray that "the testing of your faith develops perseverance". Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:3)

Notes _____

Matthew 26:33, 35

"Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."

"Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!"

Failure

Peter's words to our Lord are very sobering as we read the narrative of the denial. He professed his love and loyalty to Jesus at the Last Supper and he was very sincere. However, just a few hours later, when confronted about his identity as one of Jesus' followers, he denies he ever knew him. Not once but three times; the third time he swore and told them he never knew him. All this from one who said he would die for his Master. If the story ended there, Peter would join a long line of those who turned away from God and would be a rather sad character in the story of the church. However, there is more to the story.

When the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, Peter was transformed from headstrong, fumbling disciple into a formidable man of God. It was Peter who preached to the crowds that gathered to try and understand the outpouring of the Spirit. It was Peter who preached a message of Christ crucified and risen and of the need for everyone to turn to the Lord in faith. Thousands turned to Christ on that day. It was the Holy Spirit who made the difference.

Without Holy Spirit's indwelling and empowering presence, we simply will deny over and over.

With Holy Spirit's power and presence, we will speak boldly and testify to God's life changing power.

Pastor Michael Dennis

According to Holy Spirit's power at work within us, we can...

Notes _____

1 Samuel 1: 1-20

“Don’t Give Up”

*What do you do when you have worked very hard to get a degree and then you can’t get a job? You have invested time and money, but nothing opens up! You search and search but to no avail! What do you do when your only hope for life is taken away? What do you do when your dreams, your value in life, your purpose for living seems to be destroyed? Here’s what you do – **You don’t give up!***

*Hannah lived in a culture where a woman’s worth and value were measured by her children. Her inability to conceive brought shame and heartache. And to top it off... it was fully recognized that having what she wanted was fully within God’s ability to fulfill! To add insult to injury, the hurtful comments from those within her close circle of family and friends made the circumstances completely unbearable. “her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.” And these comments didn’t just happen once, the Scripture says, “This went on year after year.” In spite of the fact that she was loved by her husband, it just wasn’t enough to fill that emptiness she felt. **But Hannah didn’t give up!***

She went to church (Temple) and prayed and prayed – pouring her heart out to God. And even the minister (priest) didn’t understand her pain. In fact, no one really understood her deep anguish. But she didn’t give up!

In complete desperation, she went to church, poured her heart out...and promised God that she would surrender all to Him...even the life of the one she wanted most! And you know what? God granted her the cry of her heart! When Hannah was fully surrendered to God... God was free to fully give to her the wonderful gift of a son that would become a prophet of the Lord that was recognized from “Dan to Beersheba.” What a wonderful gift! Just read Hannah’s prayer in chapter 2 and you will see how completely at rest that Hannah has become!

Don’t get discouraged by the circumstances of life... trust me... God hasn’t given up! Don’t let trials depress you! God hasn’t given up! Don’t let delays convince you that God isn’t going to answer! God hasn’t given up! You see at just the right time, when you are fully surrendered to His will... He will provide! Exceedingly and abundantly beyond what you could ever imagine... so don’t give up!

*“Worry does not empty tomorrow of sorrow - it empties today of strength.”
Corrie Ten Boom*

*“Never give up, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.”
Harriet Beecher Stowe*

Pastor Arlie Davis

Dear Lord, help me to trust you even when I can’t see the evidence. I know you want to do a miracle in my life and in response to my prayers... and I am determined by God’s grace that I will not give up! Thanks for never giving up on me!

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1 Samuel 16

Keeping His Father’s Sheep

When I read the stories of David, I am in awe of him. One of the best stories is often overlooked. When Samuel went to look for someone that the Lord had chosen to take over the kingdom of Israel, he found himself at the house of Jesse. After seeing the first son of Jesse, Eliab, Samuel thought for sure he was the one because of his stature. The Lord then said to Samuel in verse 7, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Seven of Jesse’s sons passed by Samuel, and none of them sparked any interest by the Lord. Samuel asked Jesse if there were any more sons. Jesse said there was another one, the youngest of the sons, but this one was tending to the sheep. When David was brought in front of Samuel, he was glowing in health and very beautiful in his appearance because of his tanned skin from the sun. Samuel knew right away that he was the one so he anointed David. From that moment on, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.

There are a few lessons here, but I love that David was just tending to his sheep, minding his own business, when his world was rocked by the Lord. The faith David had shone through him even when he was just doing his daily chores. He glowed in front of Samuel. It is my goal to go about my business and have the Light of Christ shine through my faith in Him. David gives us a great example of what it means to have faith while simply tending to sheep, or in our terms today, doing his daily duties.

Pastor Branden Mestach

In the duties of everyday, we can still be conscious of God’s presence and calling for our lives.

Notes _____

1 Samuel 17

“The Lord who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine.” (v. 37)

Facing a Pesky Giant

David’s faith in this verse blows me away. He uses his past victories as fuel to for future battles. He knows the intensity of this battle with Goliath, but his faith in God, knowing He will bring him victory, brings him confidence.

As we look further in this chapter, the next few verses give the account of King Saul giving David his armor. The problem is that the armor did not fit well and David feels restricted by it. He then tells Saul that he does not want any armor at all! Are you serious, David? How much confidence do you have? It is obvious to me that David’s confidence and faith in the Lord goes beyond what I imagine.

Let us put ourselves in David’s shoes. David is a boy at this point, probably early 20s, give or take a few years; he is about to face a giant that all the other warriors are freaked out about. Yet, he asks for no armor. I would want all the armor I could get to face someone three times as skilled as I am and doubles me in size. But David has great faith!

I think sometimes we look at this story and think that we could not imagine having such great faith. The Holy Spirit is so powerful, and we see that in stories such as David and Goliath, but do we get it? Do we have enough faith today to know that the Holy Spirit can give us power beyond our belief? That no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, God gives us strength to get over it and bring us victory in it? I think we need to start trusting that God can do anything with us, if we are willing to submit to Him and Him only, just as David did.

Pastor Branden Mestach

Nothing is impossible for Christ when we put our whole faith in Him.

Notes _____

Psalms 23

Just a Memory Verse?

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because thou art with me.” The first half of verse 4 is a very familiar passage to us, but do we grab on to what David is conveying?

When I think of valleys and death, my mind wanders to my freshman year of college when I received a phone call of my grandpa’s death. I had just seen my grandpa one week prior when I took him to a doctor’s appointment. He seemed to be fine, so when I got the call at 3AM, I was shocked. My brother and I packed the next day and went to be with my family. When I saw him in the casket, I held my own because people were around. After all had left, I found myself standing alone looking at my grandpa, freaked out about the fact that I would never see him again in this life. Death is not a pleasant ordeal, and certainly that day was a dark day.

That day was frightening, but what does Psalm 23 tell us? Should we, as Christians fear death? My grandpa was saved, so I know he is with Jesus. Death is so hard for humans to deal with sometimes. But should we be afraid of it? Was my grandpa afraid of death? I do not think he was because of his faith in Jesus Christ. When I think of death, it is scary. How will it feel? What happens directly when I die? There are so many questions I have, but then I read verse four of David’s Psalm. It seems as though David has no fear and wants us not to fear death either. Think of this statement:

“There is no evil in it (the valley) to a child of God; death cannot separate us from the love of God; it kills the body, but cannot touch the soul.”

Isn’t this what David and God are saying to us? Why fear death when, for Christians, we get a pleasant walk through it? The shadow of an object, as talked about in the verse, does not hurt anybody, does it? Have you ever been hurt by a shadow? Because of our faith, we have hope that death is just a beginning, and while it happens, it cannot harm us in the after life.

Pastor Branden Mestach

Death may be able to kill the body, but it cannot kill the soul.

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David and Jonathan: Faithful Friends

*“How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan! Oh, how much I loved you!”
2 Samuel 1:26*

“Your pride and joy, O Israel, lies dead on the hills! How the mighty heroes have fallen.” 2 Samuel 1:19

Part of the greatness of David's faith comes from his ability to invest in other people.

An unknown author once wrote, “A faithful friend is one of life's greatest assets.”

If suddenly the world as you know it falls apart, would you have a faithful friend to run to or call? To David, Jonathon was one of those friends. We know this because of the way David mourned for him. He tore off his clothes and fasted and prayed for his friend. He even wrote a song in honor of Jonathan's and King Saul's deaths. He gave more attention to Jonathan as his true friend because Saul was his enemy. Even still, David respected Saul and gave him the proper credit.

Having faith in other people is hard to do, especially in today's selfish, post-modern society. Still, we need to have a friendship that is comparable to Jonathan and David's. We have been learning about our faith in God and how important it is to trust Him with our lives, but what about our earthly relationships? Are they not important? David thinks they are. Part of his faith in God is shown through his faith in a godly friendship.

David's beautiful funeral song for Saul and Jonathan shows that he took the time to invest himself in the lives of other people. He gave his time and energy to be there for others. David displayed his faith in God by his relationships. What about you? Are you prepared to risk befriending other people?

Pastor Branden Mestach

Give thanks for the wonderful friendships in your life.

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When our Faith Stumbles

“I have sinned against the Lord.”

We are aware of the story of David and Bathsheba. If you are like me, you think, “If David was a man after God's own heart, how could he commit adultery and murder?” Today is about our faith stumbling on the blocks of our spiritual journey.

The 2010 Winter Olympic Games have just ended. As I watched the amazing athletes flip and turn in mid air and then land on two skis perfectly, I wonder how in the world they do that. The skill, precision, and focus of the Olympians have their audiences in awe. I listened as stories were told of the hard work and years of practice and preparation for the one moment, a moment to win the prestigious award, a gold medal. The sad thing is that some of the athletes fall and ruin their chance of even a bronze medal.

When I think of David and Bathsheba, the parallel of this colossal mess-up reminds me of the athletes in the Olympics. David had a tight relationship with God, an important military campaign to keep his mind occupied, and an entire nation of Israel looking to him, but with his guard down, he was overpowered by sinful desire. Like the Olympians, the hard work and many times of seeking after God's own heart were just not enough.

We need to watch out for those weak moments. We can learn a lot from the story of David and Bathsheba, but for me, I see it as an incredible man of God letting his guard down and failing miserably. This is why we need to be on our guard by seeking God in every way and in every moment.

Pastor Branden Mestach

How hard are we working to increase our faith?

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David's Leadership: The Greater Good

"The King is sitting in the gateway"

After Absalom, his son, was killed in battle, all David wanted to do was mourn and grieve. David did and then got word of the army being demoralized because of their leader's grieving. He was warned that if he did not stop mourning not one of his soldiers would survive the battle. So David put his game face on because he also knew the importance of his leadership and example. When it was announced to the warriors that David was not actually grieving, but he was sitting in the gateway ready to lead them into battle, their confidence and morale shifted from demoralized to uplifted and strengthened.

The most effective leaders are the ones who understand the concept of "the greater good". The problem with making decisions based on the greater good is that it often calls for sacrifice in the meantime.

Is there a situation in your life that requires you to make a personal sacrifice for the greater good of your family, church, or company? If so, are you prepared to make that sacrifice?

We all are, in essence, leaders. When we have strong faith in our lives, the characteristics of leadership and a positive example will shine. Like David, sometimes we have to put on our "game face" and make sacrifices for the greater good even though we feel like doing anything but that. What is God prompting you to do? Are you ready to do it?

Pastor Branden Mestach

The greater good is choosing the course of action that will be most beneficial in the long run.

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"No Matter Where?"

There are times when we witness unconditional love. There are times when we experience unconditional love. There are times when, by God's equipping power, we express unconditional love. This is the love that Ruth showed to her mother-in-law Naomi and the loyalty that Ruth demonstrated made the difference in one of the most striking ways!

The story of Ruth is an incredible love story! Ruth's confession of loyalty and love in verse 16 and 17 is one of the most quoted love commitments in the Bible. It is often used in marriage ceremonies, but in the original context, it was Ruth's covenant to her mother-in-law. During a famine, Naomi and her family had moved to Moab. While living there her two sons married women in that country. Both sons died, as well as her husband, Elimelech and Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. She urged both daughters-in-law to stay behind, but Mahlon's widow, Ruth, was the one who determined to stay with Naomi with her incredible pledge of loyalty.

Although Naomi returned with great loss, she also returned with an incredible gift, the gift of love and support that Ruth gave to her. Ruth chose to love, in spite of an uncertain future; Ruth chose to love, in spite of an unknown land; Ruth chose to love, in spite of leaving behind all that was familiar to her, and to unconditionally give herself to Naomi and the God she served. Upon arriving in Bethlehem and working in the fields, she ended up being redeemed by Mahlon's nearest relative, kinsmen-redeemer Boaz, and this union produced a son by the name of Obed. As a result, Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David and in the blood line of Jesus, the kinsmen-redeemer for us all!

Ruth's unconditional love and loyalty is an example of the unconditional love of our kinsmen-redeemer, Jesus Christ. He loves us just as we are, despite our sin and despite our self-centered hearts. He loves us unconditionally and redeems us that we might be examples of that same unconditional love to a world desperately in need of a redeemer!

How are you demonstrating unconditional love to the world around you? Are you loving those in your world unconditionally or are you only loving those who love you in return? God's only plan to reach our world is through us! Oh, that God would fill us with His unconditional love that we might be salt and light to our world! Who knows how God will use that love to change our destiny?

"The greatest gift that you can give to others is the gift of unconditional love and acceptance." Brian Tracy

Pastor Arlie Davis

Dear Lord, help me to love those in my world with a love that is unconditional; a love that only you could give! A love that only you could possess!

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Exodus 2: 1-10

Exodus 2: 11-15

Formative Years

Fateful Decision

You may remember from your early childhood days the Bible story of Moses floating in a little basket at the river's edge. The king had decreed that all Hebrew males born must be thrown into the Nile. His mother, Jochebed, partially obeyed the order by placing her baby in the river. Left to float on the Nile, he was discovered by pharaoh's daughter, and she rescued him from the river and from death. Nursed and taught by his Hebrew mother, he learned the ways of his own people while living in the grandeur of the palace. His mother provided for his physical needs while she was able to impress on him at an early age, the heritage and faith of his family. He knew training in the finest schools in the world and became a prince in Egypt. God spared him and prepared him for the future during those formative years. What a beautiful convergence of his Hebrew heritage and faith with the best education available in the world.

As an adult, Moses went out to observe his own people and their terrible treatment as slaves in Egypt. While there, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, so Moses killed the offender. The next day he saw two Hebrews fighting and in the midst of refereeing the fight he was asked; "Who made you judge over us? Will you kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses realized that his secret was out since the pharaoh ordered him killed, he fled to Midian.

Born in a Hebrew home, protected by his family for three months and then picked from the Nile by royalty. A child destined by God to be spared while others perished and yet, not only spared, but blessed. His formative years as a child were at his mother's side being immersed in faith and then as a young man, learning the ways of a prince.

In the act of killing the Egyptian, Moses had also slain his "Egyptian self." He knew only the comfort of the palace until now. This split-second decision immediately took him away from all his life in pharaoh's world. How did God use this transgression for good in Moses' life and the life of Israel? Here the Hebrew was spared death by the princess only to turn his back on his adopted family by identifying with his own people. Did the quick action on his part result in losing the place God had prepared for him?

God knew how Moses needed to be prepared to face the calling that would be placed on his life. God has a plan for your life that began before you were even born. The psalmist reminds us that He knew us in our mother's womb and numbered our days. How about your formative years; were they blessed, or do you wonder why your training was a trying time? Whatever your background, whatever the training and testing, God has prepared you today to be his man or woman in his time. As we continue to look ahead with Moses over the next few days, take hope in how his early years prepared him for the trials, isolation, the confrontation and the journey of leading God's chosen people.

Most of us haven't killed an enemy lately, but many of us have made quick decisions that caused us to lose our place in life. How can God use us after this thing we have done? Does God have only one plan for my life, and if I miss it, will I never know the fulfillment of serving Him to my greatest potential? Over the next few days, we will continue observing the life of Moses and see how God led him through the desert time to being the leader of his chosen people. Stay with us as we look further as he even questioned God's calling him. So Moses, in spite of himself, was called by God to lead a less than leadable nation after surviving his years of isolation.

Pastor Bud Rutherford

Pastor Bud Rutherford

Whatever your background, whatever the training and testing, God has prepared you for today to be his man or woman in his time.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

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Fearful Isolation

Moses' picture is now hanging in the Egyptian post offices. Wanted: Dead or alive, Moses of the tribe of Levi, for murder and insurrection. The wrath of his adopted grandfather burned against Moses; pharaoh sought to have him killed. So Moses took off to Midian, which is east of the Red Sea in the vicinity of Mount Sinai. He sat down by a well as the seven daughters of Jethro the priest came to water their sheep. Bedouin shepherds tried to drive the sisters away but in swept Moses to the rescue again. He stood up for Jethro's girls and this time he was a bit more tactful. The Bedouins ran off and Moses was a hero. The daughters of the priest reported this kindness and their father provided refuge for Moses while he spent 40 years in exile. The prince of Egypt was now tending flocks in Midian and would soon marry one of the daughters, Zipporah. Moses was roaming freely about the valleys and wilderness, seeking water, food and shelter for the sheep. How could God possibly have a plan or a purpose for this exile in a strange and desolate land?

His training in Egypt prepared him to then study the customs and ways of the Bedouin tribes which he would need to deal with later in his life. Moses was in training for the great task that awaited him in the last forty years of his life. Strange isn't it, how God spared him at birth, trained him in the courts of royalty and then allowed him to learn about the land and the people he would deal with in accomplishing his mission for God. Moses was tending sheep that didn't belong to him, did a job below his pay scale but he was faithful, did the task the best he could and received on-the-job training.

Are you feeling like this is desert training time for you? Not a literal desert, but the desert of your soul and mind where you are possibly living as an outcast. Your job stinks, your place in life is depressing and you wonder if God even cares. Take heart! God is working out his perfect plan for you. Only you can do what he is uniquely preparing you to do. So, learn all you can, be faithful in spite of adversity, do the task he is asking you to do and see what God will bring to you.

Pastor Bud Rutherford

Only you can do what he is uniquely preparing you to do.

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Fiery Call

Eighty-year-old Moses had been tending Jethro's sheep for 40 years now. I wonder if he ever questioned God about how long he would do this menial work. Would he die in this awful place without ever seeing those he loved in Egypt? "How long, God, until something happens to change my life?"

Moses' old eyes might have deceived him, but it looked like a bush was burning. Now I have been told that spontaneous combustion of brush in the hot arid land was not unheard of. But Moses saw a bush on fire that wasn't being consumed. What was this? Moses approached, and the bush spoke. I don't know about you, but this would certainly get my attention; a bush that burns, but doesn't burn up, and now it speaks. It was God speaking, and he identified himself as the God of Moses' father, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God gave him his mission; go back to Egypt and lead the people of Israel out of bondage. Moses hesitated, and God assured him that one day the Hebrews he would lead out of captivity would worship on this holy mountain (Sinai.)

Would a talking, burning bush help you to find God's will for your life? Wow, I could know what God wanted if he did that for me! But how did Moses react? "You want me to do what and where?" God said, "I will be with you". Again Moses questioned God and said, "What if the people don't believe that you have sent me?" God answered that he should tell them the God of their fathers has sent him; "I Am who I Am." Then He turned Moses' staff into a snake and back to a staff; he turned his hand from leprosy to wholeness again. Yet Moses persisted and said he didn't speak well before seeing the burning bush, and he still didn't. This angered God, but he gave him his brother Aaron to speak for him. With Aaron and his rod, he would work mighty wonders for God.

There is no burning bush for you and me but usually a small inner voice, confirmed in Scripture and in other believers, that says, "Go and I will be with you".

Pastor Bud Rutherford

"What is that in your hand?"

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Freedom from Bondage

With the blessing of his father in law Jethro, Moses took the rod of God in his hand and left for Egypt. He met up with Aaron on the mount of God and together they made the journey to Egypt. They met with the Hebrew leaders and announced God's purpose to deliver them. Moses and Aaron confirmed their mission with miraculous signs and the people accepted their leadership.

Moses now had the challenge of confronting Pharaoh and asking for the people and all their sacrifices to make a three day journey in order to make sacrifices to the Lord. He was denied their request and more pressure was applied to the Israelites. A second attempt and miracles were worked with Aaron's staff but no release. Finally a third demand was also refused which resulted in the beginning of the ten plagues sent by God on Egypt. The nine plagues began; blood, frogs, lice, flies on livestock, boils, hail, locusts and darkness, with Pharaoh trying to negotiate a deal. The agony inflicted on Egypt was overwhelming but the king would not relent.

Freedom for the Israelites was won by the sacrificial blood applied to the side and top of their door frames. The death angel visited Egypt and executed the firstborn son of every household who didn't have the blood on the doorframe. Israel celebrated the first Passover as each household killed a yearling lamb without blemish and applied the blood to the doorframe. The lamb was roasted and eaten the same night with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. In the midst of the terror on the Egyptians, the people of Israel began their exodus to freedom. This established an annual celebration of freedom for the Jewish nation.

We celebrate "the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29. All of us are worthy of death, born in sin, in a sin fallen world and living as sinners, but Jesus came as the perfect lamb to buy our freedom. Have you accepted this freedom in Christ who forgives our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness? Today can be your day of freedom!

Pastor Bud Rutherford

Today can be your day of freedom!

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Freedom Journey

The Israelites left Egypt with not only their possessions but with much of the wealth of their captors. They left Ramesses to Succoth on that night to remember in Abib, or April. The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and with a pillar of fire at night. Why a cloud and fire? The cloud lead them but also provided shelter from the sweltering sun. The fire at night gave light and kept them warm. They would go through the wilderness to the northern tip of the Red Sea and once across the sea, would be out of danger from the Egyptian army. Of course, Pharaoh changed his mind again and began to pursue them. They were caught between the swiftly approaching army and the sea and Moses said; "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring to you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Exodus 14:13-14. God delivered them, provided food (manna and quail), water, the Tabernacle and the Law to live by. The forty years was a frustrating struggle for Moses as the people grumbled, complained and sinned. He lead his people to the border but never personally entered the Promised Land.

Do you feel trapped between your Red Sea and a pursuing army? Does your freedom journey seem less than freeing? Remember Moses; God said he would go with him. God provided miraculously for Israel and blessed them in so many ways yet they grumbled and sinned against Him. How is your journey? Is God providing, but are you looking at the circumstances that surround you and grumbling? Yes, the journey is long and we have many challenges along the way, but God is faithful, His word is true and we can trust him. You remember the end of Israel's journey, they enter the land. In spite of themselves, their weaknesses, the spy's defeatist report, grumbling, sin and rebellion, they reach the Promised Land. We are weak and don't always live our lives totally for Christ, but as we continue to follow him and ask him to work in us, we reach toward the goal of life in Christ for today and eternity.

Pastor Bud Rutherford

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness... II Timothy 4:7-8a

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Esther 5:1-8; 7:1-4

“A Step of Faith”

Often that first step of faith is the most difficult step to take. When we take that first step, we are choosing to go forward and there is always an element of risk that is involved. That step will determine a new vocation, a new ministry, a new relationship, or a new direction; but somehow that first step is usually the most difficult.

That first step for Queen Esther was taken at the risk of losing her own life! Esther was a teenage Jewish girl who was very beautiful and pleased the King when he was in pursuit of a new queen. Certainly God placed Esther at just the right place and in just the right time, but even the knowledge of that didn't take away the fear that must have been in this young girl as she approached the King. It seems that the King's number two man was seeking to destroy the Jews and up until this point, the King did not know that his Queen was a Jew. When the edict was issued to annihilate all the Jews, her uncle persuaded her to intercede for her people with the King with the confidence that God had placed her in her position "for such a time as this."

Taking that first step to come before the King could be death for anyone unless he extended his gold scepter toward the person, indicating his pleasure in seeing them. Now the last queen was removed from her throne so Esther knew the risk she was taking. And yet, she needed to take that step of faith, believing that God had brought her to her position to fulfill His will. She was fully committed to take the risk, even if it cost her life!

Esther's faith made her willing to take a risk! Esther's faith was willing to do whatever was necessary to accomplish God's will. And that is exactly what happened. Her uncle was elevated to the highest position in the kingdom and Esther saved her people.

What are you willing to do to fulfill God's will for your life? Are you willing to step out in faith? Are you willing to put it all on the line to see God's plan be accomplished? If so, then seek God's will and take that first step of faith to see it happen!

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
"Don't tell God how big your storm is, tell the storm how big your God is."

Pastor Arlie Davis

Dear Lord, help me to have the strength and the courage to take the first step of faith that is necessary to see God's will be accomplished in my life!

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1 Kings 17:1-10

“Elijah: Good to Go”

Has the Lord ever asked you to go? Has He ever asked you to actually go somewhere or do something that required faith on your part? Ahab had to be one of the most wicked kings to rule over Israel. The Bible says, "[He] did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him." Elijah went before Ahab and told him all the dew and rain would cease until he gave the word. And that's exactly what happened.

This is the moment when God said "go" to Elijah. He instructed him to a place where he would receive daily sustenance. The Bible doesn't say, "Elijah thought about it for several weeks. After he worked through every detail in his mind about how he would get there and how God would really instruct birds to bring him food, he left for his destination." It also doesn't say, "After thinking it through, Elijah decided not to go because he didn't feel the timing was right." The Bible does say, "So Elijah did as the Lord told him..." (v. 5) Elijah says "yes" again to a go-command from God in verse 10!

Sometimes we wait on the Lord. But sometimes He gives us clear vision and asks us to "go". Our response needs to match that of Elijah. You can think through every detail, play out every possible outcome in your mind, and whether or not you agree with God... your decision should read, "So I did as the Lord told me." God always directs us in the right timing for the best possible outcome. Sometimes that outcome isn't revealed in this life, but we know (in the scope of eternity) all things are working together for the good. Read on in this chapter, and you'll see a part of God's reasoning. Are you ready, in faith, to "go" if God's asks you? Are you ready to be a whatever-whenever-where ever kind of person? That's the kind of followers Jesus is looking for.

Pastor Ryan Brosious

God will never ask you to do something if it isn't good or for the good. Remember, God is good and does good!

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“Elijah: Where He Said He Would Be”

A characteristic I would associate with people of genuine faith is commitment. You have to be committed to step out in faith; otherwise you really have no reason to step out at all. Elijah was so committed to pleasing God that he was willing to do whatever God led him to do. People of genuine faith will not only be committed to God, but committed to their word. They won't say one thing and do another. They realize that their reputation of committed faith will be affected by a lack of dependability. They realize that because God is completely dependable, they should model that as well to give Him glory.

In 1 Kings 18, Obadiah, a palace overseer, was commissioned by King Ahab to help search for available food for the livestock. The famine spoken of in my last devotion had now gotten so severe that Ahab was very concerned. While Obadiah was searching, he ran into our friend Elijah. He knew that Ahab wanted to find Elijah because of the famine/drought that he brought on Israel. Elijah instructed Obadiah (a servant of the Lord) to tell Ahab “Elijah is here.” (v. 11)

Obadiah feared that if he told the king Elijah was here, and Elijah didn't show, he would be killed. Elijah's response to him in verse 15 was, “As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today.” And that is exactly what Elijah did.

You see, our commitment level affects people beside ourselves. If Elijah had not shown up, I'm sure Obadiah would have been killed. When you say you're going to be somewhere, can people count on you to be there? People of faith have a great reason to be committed. We have a God who is totally worth our time, our resources, our schedule, our life.

Pastor Ryan Brosious

Being a person of commitment eliminates distractions so that God is the focal point and not your lack of dependability.

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“Elijah: Not on the Fence”

In the last devotion we talked about being committed and the importance of being dependable. I mentioned that you have to be committed to step out in faith; otherwise you really have no reason to step out at all. In order to be committed to something, you have to be absolutely sure you stand behind it. Otherwise, you're just pretending. True dedication is always accompanied by genuine belief. In 1 Kings 18:18-40, we read about the ultimate “showdown” of Elijah's God and the gods of Ahab. Elijah challenges the gods of King Ahab by instructing the prophets of Baal to place an animal sacrifice on an altar. He continued by ordering them to call on Baal to burn up the offering.

Normally, our God coming through and consuming the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust and even the water poured on the bull is the focal point of this passage. But I want to back up to a verse that really stood out to me this time. 1 Kings 18:21 says, “Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him. But the people said nothing.”

Like I said earlier, if you're going to be committed to something you have to be absolutely sure you believe it. Do you just give lip service, or do you believe 100% that God is who He says He is? If you believe 100%, then your life has to be radically different because of it. If God is who He says He is, then you are (in Christ) who He says you are. And if you are in Christ, then the Holy Spirit dwells within you. And if the Holy Spirit dwells within you, then His power is available to you. And if His power is available to you... then you cannot sit on the fence. It's time to jump in and follow God with a crazy passionate lifestyle that brings glory to Him and others to the knowledge of Him. It's time to respond to the great love you've been shown!

Pastor Ryan Brosious

If you say you are for the Lord, then the question is no longer God's legitimacy but yours.

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“Elijah: Faster than a Speeding Bullet!”

“Elijah: Priorities Straight”

You know that moment when you literally have no more strength to do something? You're tired, worn out, burned out, you just need to rest. Well, I think we all have moments when we need to recuperate and rest. But I don't think those moments define the life of a radical believer. As a matter of fact, I think God helping us to press on in spite of those moments defines us. And what you'll usually find is that God gives you supernatural strength to do greater things than you could have imagined or ever done in your own strength.

That was the case with Elijah in 1 Kings 18:41-46. Israel was still in a drought and famine. Elijah began to pray for rain to come. Read the passage. It comes, and it comes mightily. Elijah warns King Ahab to mount up on his chariot and get home before the storm comes. It was going to be that big. This is Elijah's Superman moment! He didn't have a chariot, but when his God even needed man's inventions to complete His plans? Verse 46 says, "Then the LORD gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel." (NLT)

I love the phrase "Then the LORD gave special strength to Elijah." I've never run faster than a chariot, but there have been moments in my life when the only reason I've made it is because of God's special strength! How about you? Can you think of a time when God gave you the ability to press on through something you could not have come through on your own? Write it down. Reflect on it, and give Him thanks!

Read on to 1 Kings 19:1-9. Elijah's strength ran out. Look what God did!

Pastor Ryan Brosious

People of genuine faith know where their strength comes from.
They know they can't make it without the Lord.
They tuck in their cloaks and let God work through them!

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I chose an entire chapter today, but I think it's good for you to read it. 2 Kings 1 tells the story of God's protection. Elijah has a less than favorable message to deliver to the new king of Israel, Ahaziah. When the king's messengers deliver Elijah's message, (basically, "King, You're not going to get better, you're going to die in your bed.") the king sends an army captain and 50 men to arrest Elijah. There are some things Elijah doesn't do. He doesn't try to find a weapon of his own to fight off the 51 men. He doesn't try to run (even though God had directed him that way before and gave him lightning speed.) He doesn't try to sweet talk them with great words. He immediately looks to the Lord for assistance. He calls down God's heavenly fire to consume them. They are completely burnt up. The king doesn't take the hint, and sends another captain and another 50 men. Same story... burnt to a crisp. You'd think by now Ahaziah would want to conserve his men. Nope... he sends another 51. The captain is a little smarter than the king and begs Elijah not to burn them up.

Elijah returns with them and delivers his message to the king. The king does indeed die from his injuries and the last group of 51 men returns to work.

So what's the point of sharing this passage? I think most of us have been guilty of looking to God for help after our ideas and plans fail... as a sort of last resort. Let me encourage you that people of genuine faith start with God. Their priority is His plan, His will, His strength. They know their strength isn't enough. Elijah called on the Lord first. As a matter of fact, it was the Lord's strength that spoke to the last group of 51 men. They knew God (or something) could kill them.

So where do you start? Is prayer a last resort or a first stop? I'm not saying God won't come through in a "prayer-as-a-last-resort" situation, but there is tremendous benefit and blessing when you begin any task, situation or trial with consultation from your Redeemer. And by the way, it's ok (even preferable) to address more than one member of the Trinity when you pray. If you're looking for counsel, why not talk to your Counselor, the Holy Spirit? If you're seeking grace, why not talk to your Savior, Jesus? If you're looking for acceptance, why not talk to your Father God? I don't want to dive too deeply into theological discussion, just an idea. He is three in One, God.

Pastor Ryan Brosious

Look at your average day. How does it start?
Look at your average situation. Where do you begin?

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“Elijah: Replaceable”

Before Elijah would leave this world, he began to pass his responsibilities on to another, Elisha. He called him out of a plowing field and brought him on as his assistant. Elisha became very close with Elijah, never wanting to leave his side. He admired him and even requested a “double portion” of Elijah’s spirit after he was gone.

If you read on through verse 25, you’ll learn of Elijah’s miraculous ascent into heaven. You’ll read of miracles performed through the Lord’s power by both Elijah and Elisha. But these aren’t the focus of today’s devotion. One of the messages I see in this passage is that the Lord’s work is never limited to one person. As a matter of fact, the Lord’s work is never limited to people at all. He chooses to use us in His work, but it’s not limited to us. Elijah knew that his earthly life would end at some point. He knew, with the Lord’s guidance, that Elisha would replace him.

My encouragement to you is to remember what it’s all about. It’s not about you or what you contribute. It’s about God and the accomplishment of His will. I don’t say this to make you feel insignificant or small. Remember, if the God of creation loves you, then you are not insignificant! However, He is the center of focus and there will come a time when someone will have to pick up where you leave off. Transition is always easier when you are part of that delegation. Whatever area of ministry you serve in, keep Christ at the center... not yourself. You are a servant of the King, working until He calls you somewhere else or ultimately home to heaven. When that time comes, your purpose will be to move, not to hold and defend your current position. Elijah knew the benefit of being at the center of God’s will. He knew he was replaceable. Not insignificant surely, but replaceable.

Pastor Ryan Brosious

People of genuine faith are more concerned with the completion of God’s will than their own position.

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“Nothing is Impossible with God!”

Never before have we faced times of such possibilities! Never before have we witnessed the expansion of knowledge, the development of technology, and the incredible avenues of communication that unfold daily. But despite all of these possibilities, there are still those impossibilities in each of our lives!

What are the impossibilities in your life? Are there people that you think will never change? Are there resources that are never there when the needs arise? Are there relationships that could never be mended? Is there sickness, physically or emotionally, that you think could never be healed? Are there those in your life that seem like they are beyond reach? Are there struggles that you feel you will never be able to overcome? What are your impossibilities? Because the Scripture says, “Nothing is impossible with God!”

When Mary was confronted with the reality that she was a teenage virgin that was pregnant, what must have been the thoughts that went crashing through her mind? Will Joseph reject her? Will he have her stoned? Will her family reject her? Will she be driven from her home? Is her life ruined? Will she ever be able to live above the circumstances? All of these were a very real possibility for her, and yet she said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” She willingly submitted herself to the Lord’s will, no matter what the cost! Mary’s simple humility and ready spirit is exactly the kind of people that God uses! In spite of her youth, she possessed maturity beyond her years as she was willing to pay the cost to see the will of God be accomplished.

And you know what? It happened just as the angel had said... because “Nothing is impossible with God!” God gave Mary the greatest gift that any woman could have – the privilege to be the only human to bear the Son of God! She would forever be recognized by the line, “blessed are you among women!” As she had been gifted by God for this great honor.

“Never tell a young person that anything cannot be done. God may have been waiting centuries for someone ignorant enough of the impossible to do that very thing.”

-G. M. Trevelyan

With every honor that God brings us, there is a risk! With every miracle that God wants to accomplish, there is a necessity of faith! For the impossible to become possible, there must be willing servants who will simply believe in the God who makes the impossible possible!

Pastor Arlie Davis

Dear Lord, help me to trust you for the impossible! Help me to believe you can work in greater ways than I could ever imagine. I am willing for you to do the impossible while I do the possible.

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Isn't That Just Like God?

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob – just one of the grandsons of Isaac and just one of the many great-grandsons of Abraham. Who would have thought it would have been Joseph to be used by God to save his entire family and many in the known world at that time from a near certain death due to a massive famine? This role of leader, and of savior – if you will - would normally have been assumed by Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob.

Take a look at a couple other examples from scripture – Rahab was a prostitute and yet was used to help deliver Jericho into the hands of the Israelites when they were entering the Promised Land and was listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. Ruth was a widow and a foreigner, but ended up being in the family tree of David and Jesus. David was the eighth and youngest of his brothers and the last person anyone thought that God would call to replace King Saul, but God reminds us in 1 Samuel 16:7 that “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Isn't that just like God to use someone the world would write off or discount as average or even worthless to be an incredible influence or a strong leader? Do you think that this was just limited to a few stories from Scripture? I know a number of people who have been used powerfully by God, but people who looked at their “outward appearance” would have never thought they would have been able to be a leader.

Through Joseph, God saved Jacob's fledgling family and preserved His promise to make Abraham a great nation. What made the difference? Joseph's faith, and his willingness and tenacity to serve God in every situation made the difference. God is still God and He can do amazing things through ordinary people - just like you and me.

Pastor Ken Paulhamus

Pray today that God will use you to make a difference in your family, your work, or school, your community, and your world.

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God Can Redeem Even Broken Relationships

What caused the “bad blood” between Joseph and his brothers? It would be easy to blame all the problems on the brothers. They certainly should not have hated their brother and they were definitely in the wrong when they sold him into slavery and lied about it to their father Jacob. They were older than him and should have understood that it was in part Joseph's immaturity that was the problem. However, Joseph shared a part of the responsibility as well. He should have been more sensitive when he shared his dreams – he should have thought about how it would impact his brothers and he should have put their feelings ahead of his need to share the details of his dreams. Jacob also played a huge role in the situation. By singling out Joseph as the favorite, by giving him his special coat of many colors, by not sending him out to work alongside his brothers, Jacob set Joseph up as a target for the brothers frustration and anger. So all three parties had a part in creating the problem, and all three could have done something to help solve it.

Are you dealing with a broken or failing relationship? The easy thing to do and what we do naturally, is to find the fault in the other person and make excuses for the part we play. The right thing to do is to pray and ask God to forgive us for what we may have done to cause the problem and for His help to restore the relationship. Then we need to honestly evaluate what things need to change in ourselves. We cannot change the other person, we can only change ourselves. Establish good, healthy boundaries and work to restore the relationship as God opens the doors.

Once Joseph was sold into slavery, it appeared that the family relationships had been broken to the point that they would never be restored. God had a different plan. Our miracle working God worked a miracle in the lives of Joseph and his brothers. Through a series of events that could only have been orchestrated by our great God, they were put in a position where the broken relationships were restored. God can take an awful situation created by our sinful nature and redeem it for good.

Pastor Ken Paulhamus

Pray today that God will work through the bad situations and broken relationships in your life, and redeem them for good.

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Genesis 39:1-6a

The Lord Was With Joseph

Joseph's brothers did not like him – in fact the Bible says that they hated him. When they had an opportunity to rid themselves of him, they sold him into slavery and he was carried off to Egypt. Joseph found himself a servant in the house of Potiphar, the captain of the guard for Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Joseph did not deserve to be sold into slavery and taken far away from his home and his family. Genesis 39:2 says that "The Lord was with Joseph..." Do you think Joseph felt like the Lord was with him?

We have the benefit of knowing the rest of the story and we know how God uses Joseph. At the time though, Joseph only knew he was being treated in a way he most certainly did not deserve. Given his situation, how did Joseph act? Did he become a bitter and angry man? No! He remained faithful to God and his relationship with the Lord must have been evident to those around him. Even Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him.

I think the statement in Genesis 39:2 is significant – "The Lord was **with** Joseph and he prospered...". Many today would have us believe that if we remain faithful to God, everything will go well for us and that we will be financially prosperous. However, Jesus told us in John 16:33 that "In this world you will have trouble". So using Joseph as our example, we can have joy and even flourish in the most desperate circumstances – knowing that the Lord is with us. God does choose to allow some people to prosper financially, and some to prosper in other ways – this we may not understand. Nevertheless, we must trust that God knows what He is doing and has the big picture in His gaze – He knows what is best for us and He will use us to work His will. What a privilege it is for us to be used of God.

Pastor Ken Paulhamus

Pray today that you will be a witness to those around you – so that they will know God is with you in spite of your circumstances – good or bad.

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Genesis 39:6b-10

Is Resisting Temptation Always In Our Best Interest?

This may sound like a rhetorical question, yet Joseph's experience would communicate that in the short term, giving in to temptation may allow us to avoid some problems. Day after day Joseph was being tempted by Potiphar's wife to commit adultery with her. What happened when Joseph resisted temptation and refused to give in to his master's wife? She accused Joseph of doing the very thing he resisted and was thrown into prison because of her false accusations.

From a short term perspective, it may have been perceived as a benefit to Joseph to give in to temptation and sleep with Potiphar's wife. He may have appeased Mrs. Potiphar and avoided being thrown into prison, but Joseph knew this would have been wrong in God's sight and it would have been a wicked thing to do given how much Potiphar trusted him. He refused to give in to temptation in spite of the daily badgering. In addition, even if Joseph had succumbed to the temptation, he would have become imprisoned by Mrs. Potiphar's ability to hold this sin over his head and get whatever she wanted in the future.

Joseph's decision to resist temptation and do what was right in God's sight resulted in him suffering unjustly. Paradoxically, if he had not resisted the temptation he may have missed out on the experience of God's blessing just a few short years later.

So back to the question posed in the title of today's devotion – is resisting temptation always in our best interest? The short answer is yes, and the long answer is unequivocally YES!! There may be times when it appears that there are some short term benefits or pleasures to stepping onto the slippery slope of giving in to temptation – especially if it appears that no one will find out. Still, there are **ALWAYS** unforeseen consequences and there are blessings that will be missed that would far outweigh any short term benefits.

Pastor Ken Paulhamus

Pray today that God will continue to give you the wisdom and the strength to resist any temptation that the enemy may place in your path.

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Genesis 40:14 & 23

God Will Never Forsake Us

Sometimes people disappoint us – sometimes when we are counting on them to come through, people let us down and forget all about us. This is not the case with God.

Joseph had already faced two huge injustices. His brothers sold him into slavery and he was carried off to a distant land. Then, just as his situation was improving, his master’s wife accused him of attacking her and Joseph unjustly ended up in prison. But again Scripture tells us that “the Lord was with him”. Two of Pharaoh’s officials, the cupbearer and the baker, ended up in the same prison as Joseph and with God’s help, Joseph interpreted their dreams. The interpretation God gave to Joseph came true for both officials. The cupbearer was restored to his position in Pharaoh’s service and the baker was executed. Joseph had asked the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh so he could get out of prison. But the cupbearer forgot about Joseph.

Joseph had justification to lose his faith that God was in control and that God would deliver him. The Bible records no indication that Joseph ever lost his faith and trust in God. He continued to live above reproach and to do the right things. Finally, when Pharaoh had a dream which no one could interpret, the cup bearer remembered Joseph and suggested that Pharaoh bring him out of prison to interpret his dream. This was done and Joseph correctly interpreted the dream, while giving all the praise to God for the interpretation.

As a result, at the age of 30, Joseph was promoted to an office where only Pharaoh himself held more power in all of Egypt. This put Joseph in a position to help his family survive a severe famine that hit seven years later. God’s timing is not always what we would hope for, but, as the Bible says in Deuteronomy 31:8, “The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” People will sometimes let us down, but God will never forsake us.

Pastor Ken Paulhamus

Pray today that God will give you courage to trust in His unfailing power.

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Genesis 50:15-21

Forgiveness

The culminating act in the story of Joseph is when his brothers traveled to Egypt to purchase grain and on the second trip, Joseph revealed himself to them. Their reaction when they learned his true identity was to beg his forgiveness. In his role both as slave and then as prisoner, I am sure Joseph had lots of time to play out this scene in his mind. What would he say to his brothers if he ever had the chance? What would he do to repay the evil that was done to him – to make up for the years that were stolen from him, and the family memories of which he was robbed? They deserved anything Joseph was able to dish out to them.

So what did Joseph say? He said, “Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.” Even 17 years later, after their father Jacob died, the brothers were afraid of what Joseph may do to them to repay the evil things they had done to him. They sent him a message as if it were from his father asking Joseph to forgive his brothers for the wrongs they committed. Again, Joseph’s response was a model for us to use in forgiving those who wrong us. He said, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish... the saving of many lives. So then don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” Joseph then reassured them and spoke kindly to them. I’m sure, in both cases, this is not how the brothers expected to be treated.

This was going above and beyond the call of duty. Surely God would not expect us to forgive people who wrong us with this type of forgiveness - right? Wrong - Jesus commands us to even go further than Joseph – He says to “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” (Luke 6:27-28) If we do this, we demonstrate God’s love and point them to Christ.

Pastor Ken Paulhamus

Pray today that you will be able to forgive those you need to forgive – even if they do not deserve to be forgiven.

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