



21 Days of Fasting & Praying

Spiritual Disciplines

The Need to Feed the Spirit

A COLLABORATION OF WRITTEN DEVOTIONS

St. James Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

January 2022

The Need to Feed the Spirit

In our day and age, feeding people is big business. Look to almost every corner outside of residential neighborhoods and you will find a business that wants to feed you. Whether it is the long but efficient line at Chick Fil A, the classic staples at McDonald's, or the familiar foods of a local restaurant (Gillie's, if you are on James Island - like me), there is no shortage of people that want to fill our stomachs and please our pallets. We also have at our disposal a long list of ways to feed our minds. Self-help books, continuing education courses, community centers and churches offering courses in knitting, painting, and scrapbooking, and the thousands of self-proclaimed experts on YouTube all align themselves to feed our minds with information and knowledge. But how do we feed the spirit? Attending corporate worship is often seen as the primary way however worship services are not readily available. What is available to us is a set of practices or disciplines that can feed, condition, and support our spirits through the everyday ups and downs of life.

Disciplines like fasting, prayer, meditation, study, and worship can feed us in ways that food or academic courses cannot. Beyond these traditional disciplines, there are other practices that when done in the proper spirit, can feed our spirit as well.

This devotional is designed to help you think about the disciplines of the spirit as we engage in our **21 Days of Fasting and Prayer**. I pray that you visit it daily and respond to what you read through a journal or in prayer. I am confident that if you do, you will find your spirit and soul fed and nourished in new and exciting ways, and the tone for an exciting year of faith will be set.

May God bless you along your journey.

Pastor B

Cover Photo Credit: Pastor Pat on Google Pixel 3XL - Location: Blue Ridge Parkway, Asheville, NC

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

- There are 21 devotionals to be used each day of the **21 Days of Fasting and Prayer**. Each Spiritual Discipline is listed in alphabetical order. You may read them and journal in the order they are printed, or you may randomly select a devotional.
- Use the designated space to record the date you read and responded to the devotional.
- Repeat the written prayer often throughout the day during your fast to keep yourself encouraged.
- Use the lines at the bottom of the page to jot down thoughts, prayers, and additional Scriptures that will continue to inspire you for the journey.
- Spiritual Disciplines can be practiced in concert with each other. Use them throughout the year and for long periods of time to maximize their effect.



God’s Hang Out

Historical books of the Hebrew Scriptures help to see that God hangs out in a pillar of smoke, a cloud, and a burning bush. 1 Kings 8:27 tells that the house that was built cannot contain God. God hangs out in the praises of God’s people, according to Psalm 22:3. The Gospel texts tell that God is among the people, hence the name Emmanuel. Paul, in several of the epistles, reminds that God hangs out in individual beings and even encourages being living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. According to Psalm 96, wherever God hangs out there is always a collection of beauty and strength.

Some days beauty is obvious. For women, the attire is flawless, make up is on point, and it is one of the best hair days ever. For men, the task to be completed worked out just right with no flaws or few errors to correct. Beauty is found in these things and in so many others. Some days strength is obvious. The interview for the new position went perfectly. The conversation to end conflict was handled. Strength is found in the holy boldness that is evident.

Christian responsibility is to showcase both beauty and strength because it is within the two where God hangs out. It is beautiful to forgive. It is powerful to forget. God hangs out in the forgiving and forgetting. It is beautiful share with others. It is powerful to empower others. God hangs out in the exchange of sharing and empowerment between the parties involved. Until Christians balance these gifts, it is hard to see God hanging out. Spend some time today (and everyday) to seek out the beauty and the strength given by God for such a time as this and then welcome God into the broken vessel. **CDA**

Prayer: Lord, as the new year approaches, help me to balance the gift of beauty and the gift of strength that You gave me when I accepted the beautiful sacrifice on the cross and the powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Spending Time in God’s Presence

God allows us to experience new mercies every day, but we are often too busy to notice. In this devotion, I would like to suggest immense joy can be found when we meet God in the stillness of each breath. True worship is birthed out of our relationship with God and only occurs when we are intentional and make God a priority. When we live with the understanding that each breath is a gift and not a given, we appreciate the beauty each new day brings. As God awakens you take your hand place it on your chest for one minute. As you inhale and exhale begin to thank God for the ability to breathe.

Dr. Judith Christie McAllister wrote a beautiful praise and worship song entitled, Like the Dew in the Morning. The lyrics simply say, like the dew in the morning gently rest upon my heart. The song then goes on to say rest, Jesus. The lyrics offer a sweet, gentle reminder that God wants us to be intentional with our worship and awareness of God. While in your sacred worship space, I pray that you allow God to reign, rule, and move in the areas of your life that you are still trying to control. I invite you to consider spending time in God’s presence daily as your initial act of worship.

Read Romans 12:1 as you breathe: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sister, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **ADW**

Prayer: Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no unworthy affection may drag downward; give me an unconquered heart, which no tribulation can wear out; give me an upright heart, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. Bestow on me also, O Lord my God, understanding to know You, diligence to seek You, wisdom to find You, and a faithfulness that may finally embrace You; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(Thomas Aquinas)



Ushering in Change

How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.

Psalm 119:9

We all have challenges. Time does not permit me to share a list, but thankfully there is no need to do so. We all know the various challenges that we face.

I am sure that as you read this, some of your issues are coming to the surface of your mind. The question is not whether we have challenges, but how we approach them. Some ignore them and others choose to self-medicate with anything that will take their minds away; neither of these methods is helpful in the long run. I have known people who have struggled with eating and weight issues, and they have altered their shopping lists and sought the help of mental health professionals who have helped them make changes.

Making changes to our mental and physical environments are important steps towards managing the challenges we face in life; however, the writer of Psalm 119 in verse 9 offers another strategy. The daily discipline of meditating on God’s word not only gives us access to the wisdom of our Creator but also reminds us that we have access to power beyond ourselves to help us manage and ultimately defeat the issues of our lives. As you adjust the physical and mental environments in your life in response to the obstacles you face, don’t forget to give attention to the wisdom of the Word. The God of the universe is knocking at the door with the keys to your life. **BCH**

Prayer: Strong God, do not allow me to dismiss the power and wisdom of Your word as I face the challenges of my life. In the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN.



An Evening Ritual

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31

A professor recently defined spiritual disciplines as “those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.” On the surface this definition seems to make sense; however, a closer look and comparison with my life reveals a conflict. According to the apostle Paul in the Scripture above, all things should be done to the glory of God. Since this is true, then even things not in Scripture, done regularly and in the right spirit, can become spiritual disciplines if they lead to growth in the gospel of Jesus Christ and Christian maturity.

Every day I call my mother multiple times a day. I call during the day, on the way home from the office, and sometimes at night after I have been home for a while. In the evening my wife, my mother, my sister, my daughter, and I connect on Facebook Messenger to converse and pray before bedtime. The conversations never include Scripture directly. Bedtime prayers with my daughter are simple and familiar; however, these talks I have with my family feed my spirit more than all the books I read in graduate school. Each time we talk, I grow in wisdom, gratitude for life, and the awareness of God’s love for me by placing them in my world. Because of their effects on me, I deem these talks to be spiritual disciplines and I would not be who I am today without them.

Consider those who are a part of your daily routine. Consider rituals that you have that cause you to grow in the gospel of Jesus Christ. With what activities do you participate that enhance your Christian maturity? **BCH**

Prayer: Gracious God, reveal to us the unconventional spiritual disciplines in our lives and speak to us through them. In the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN.



State of Mind and Heart

Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than a place. There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times.

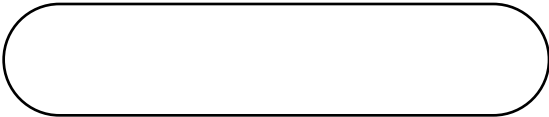
Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline (95)

When we think of solitude, we may think about being away from people. We read in the gospels that Jesus went away to a solitary place to pray, or we hear of monks and nuns cloistered away in monasteries and convents and we think being isolated is the way. But we all know that the absence of people does not ensure a spirit of solitude and peace.

On a Sunday morning, I arrive at the church 2 to 3 hours before worship. The first hour or so is a time of prayer, reading, and journaling which is what I try to do every morning. The building and I are still and calm as I sit alone in my office. However, about an hour before worship begins, my mind shifts into preparation mode. I review my notes, check the prayer list, and pray through the tasks before me. While I am generally still alone in my office, my mind is envisioning the congregation, thinking of the staff, crossing the t's, and dotting the i's. I am still alone, but I am not in a place of solitude.

This is what is meant by the quote above. Solitude is not accomplished by simply excluding the people around us. Solitude is attained by the release of stress, tension, and expectation that dwells within our minds and spirits. You can get in a car alone and go as far away as you want, but if you bring the worries of your world with you, you will not be in solitude. **BCH**

Prayer: Gracious God, teach me how to give the world over to You so that my spirit can be recharged through solitude. In the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN.



Staying After Class...

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mark 1:35

As I write this, I am sitting in a guest room at Columbia Theological Seminary. I came here for 3 days to write and outline sermons and Bible Studies for 2022. The campus is closed, and they are only allowing me to stay here because I serve as a trustee for the seminary, and for that I am appreciative. It has been quiet most of the time and I see students now and then because most of the classes are online due to the pandemic. Everyone has been welcoming but at the same time, they have given me space to write and pray. It has been a fruitful time.

While we often don't think about it, solitude is a spiritual discipline. The gospels of Mark and Luke record times when Jesus went away to a quiet place to pray and escape the crowds and even his disciples. His time alone was not because he didn't like people or because he was tired of them, but because he needed to be with God for himself. Think of life like one large classroom. There is value in going to class and sitting in your chair and listening to the teacher lecture. However, there are times when the material gets difficult, so you stay after class to have some time alone with the teacher. In the same way, solitude allows us to have some one-on-one time alone with the teacher when the coursework of life gets difficult. In this alone time, we can hear words of instruction, encouragement, and hope from the God who loves us unconditionally and works all things for our good. I encourage you to find some time for solitude. It is no reflection on your love for those around you, rather it is an expression of your need for the teacher and dependence upon God. **BCH**

Prayer: Gracious God, give me an awareness of the times when I need to be alone with You and the courage to take the time. In the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN.



Humility

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 8:3

Humility is defined as a modest or low view of yourself. From the Christian perspective, humility is when we understand that we are no more loved by God and guilty of sin than anyone else. The apostle Paul says in Philippians 2:8 that Jesus "...humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Proverbs 22:4 speaks about the promise of humility: "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life." These are only 2 of the many verses in Scripture that speak about the importance of humility in the life of the believer. The challenge with developing humility is that it comes at a price. God often allows us to enter the difficult places of life before we realize our need for God and come to a place of true humility. This was the path on which God took the children of Israel as they moved from Egypt to the Promised Land. According to Deuteronomy 8:3, God allowed them to experience the discomfort of hunger and limited their meals to a basic substance called "manna" to teach them that more than the delicacies of life, what they needed was God.

This narrative provides the foundation for the spiritual discipline of fasting. In the same way that God humbled the children of Israel by allowing them to feel the discomfort of hunger, when we fast, we enter the discomfort, denying ourselves some comfort of life, to be fed by God and brought to a place of humility. Humility indeed comes at a price, but if it is what we need to be more like Christ, it is a price worth playing. **BCH**

Prayer: Gracious God, as I fast, remind me that all I need is You, and develop a spirit of true humility in me. In the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN.



The Threefold Cord

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

In my 10th year of serving in Memphis, TN, I met a pastor named Davis Bailey. We had seen each other at presbytery meetings and other events but had never had any significant conversations. He was pastoring the church where my daughter went to pre-school and one day as I dropped her off, he asked if I was interested in having breakfast with him. I agreed. That invitation turned into a weekly meeting at the same breakfast restaurant for 2 years. Sometimes we had to bring our kids; sometimes we had to reschedule; sometimes we had to make the meetings short; and sometimes they went on almost to the lunch hour, but they were always fruitful times of sharing and friendship.

The development of spiritual friendships is a spiritual discipline that bears much fruit. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says that a threefold cord is not quickly broken. While there were only two of us (unless one of the kids had to tag along), I know that the Holy Spirit was there completing the circle of three and strengthening us for our lives as men, husbands, fathers, pastors, and disciples. I speak to Davis via text or phone from time to time now. Even though we are not face to face, when we talk it feels like we are back at the restaurant where we met for years. Looking back, I guess it was not about the restaurant at all, it was about the friendship, it was about the brotherhood, it was about the three-twined cord. I'm grateful the circle is still unbroken. Who is someone in your life with whom you can develop a spiritual friendship? **BCH**

Prayer: God, direct me to someone with whom I can develop a spiritual friendship and join us as we support one another. In the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN.



The Truck Trade

When I was seven, my family moved to Tucson, Arizona to try and escape marital troubles and financial ruin. My parents sold everything except the kitchen table. We had very little, but we packed up our truck and crammed our five-member family into the cab to make the move.

After being in Tucson for a couple of weeks, my father announced we'd be attending church on Sunday. Our family was immediately embraced by that church. We only spent a year at that church but during that time my father was called by God to become a pastor. He announced we would move to California for him to attend Pacific Christian College. At that time, we didn't have much more than what we had when we arrived.

The night before our departure the church held a prayer meeting for us. I remember the pastor asking my dad his prayer request. My dad shared that our family of five was still cramming into that old truck and he worried that the truck wouldn't get us there. The pastor prayed that God would provide. At the end of the prayer service, we shared tears and hugged our fellow congregants.

I stood by my father and watched as a family approached and handed him the keys to their car. They stated they wanted to swap vehicles - their nice sedan for our beat-up old truck. My father didn't question their decision, yet I saw him tear up and hand over the keys to our truck. That one gift taught me about giving generously and my father's reaction taught me to receive the gifts God has in store for us without question. May we be as generous as that family when we give, and may we not question the gifts that are given in response to the prayers that are lifted. **TRW**

Prayer: God, teach me to be generous in my giving and gracious in my receiving. I want to give with a big heart and receive humbly all that Your grace offers me. Amen.



Deep Love...

A brother posed the following thought and question: “They say to listen to your heart, but what if you don’t understand what your heart is trying to tell you?” I responded with a series of logical statements. The heart speaks in beats. Beats have always spoken in rhythms. Rhythm is a continuous pattern. Patterns are consistent and unchanging. Therefore, when listening to your heart, you are expected to feel something that does not change. Deep love is love that does not change. A mother’s love is deep. A spouse’s love should be deep. God’s love is as deep as it gets.

In response to the deep love felt from God, then you must respond as David did in Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19. You must love the Lord because of the unchanging love God has for you. When no one else is there to listen, God will hear your cry for mercy. When death seems to entangle you either by way of personal trials or the physical death of a loved one, remember to call on the name of the Lord to save you. In this Scripture, you should be able to find peace in knowing that when you are overcome by distress and sorrow you can call on the name of the Lord to save you.

David also gives us ways to respond to God’s deep love: 1) Lift up the cup of salvation; 2) Fulfill your vows to the Lord in the presence of God’s people; 3) Declare out loud that you are God’s servant; 4) Serve God as you have witnessed your foremothers and forefathers serve; and 5) Offer thanksgiving to God. In all things, praise God. **CDA**

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, thank You for loving me in every way every day. Thank You for sharing Your deep love so that I may listen to my heart. Help me to embed Your Word in my heart so that I may always hear the beats of Your love for me, the rhythm of Jesus’ moves, and the patterns of the Holy Spirit’s presence. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Listen for God’s Voice

Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey His word. It is that simple.

Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline (16)

When I was in seminary one of my Old Testament professors told us the stories of Jewish rabbis who would get so lost in their study of the Scripture that they would forget to go home to their wives and children. They would study into the night and the leaders in the community would have to come and break them from their trance-like engagement with the Scripture. While this is impressive and honorable, meditating on the Scripture does not have to be that intense.

Take a passage of Scripture, pray for God’s presence, and ask the following questions:

- What are people doing in this text?
- What is God doing in this text?
- Where do I see myself in this text?
- How can I live this text today?

After asking these questions and questions like these, relevant words and challenges will arise from your time, and you will discover God’s word for you. Pick a passage, pray for presence, and pursue the text and God will speak. **BCH**

Prayer: Creator God, allow Your word to speak clearly to me so that I may walk in Your wisdom every day. In the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN.



Rewards for Obedience...

Have you ever expected something for doing what you were supposed to do in the first place? I recall working at a school and the principal was upset about people being late to work. I suggested he start an Attendance Committee that sought to grant incentives for those who were on time for work. In a very degrading tone he replied to me, "Why should I give incentives to people who are already being paid to be on time?" I wish I would have thought to answer by saying, "God offered rewards for obedience, so maybe offering incentives for expected behavior is beneficial."

In Leviticus 26:1-13, we find God granting things in our favor if we merely follow God's law, keep God's commandments, and observe them faithfully. However, when I read these rewards for obedience, I recognize that God has been faithful to give us these rewards without our obedience. God has been faithful in keeping the seasons so that our crops are well. God has been faithful in keeping us safe in the land. God has been faithful in letting us be fruitful and multiply. God has been faithful to dwell among us. Most recently God has given us the gift of Jesus Christ... again. God has been faithful. Have we been faithful?

Don't make a new year's resolution for 2022 but make a commitment to be a better steward of your life. With your body, mind, and soul observe what God has called you to do and be obedient. The Scriptures declare that there are rewards for obedience. One incentive for being a better steward is the offer of life and that is life more abundantly. **CDA**

Prayer: God of perfect gifts, thank You for another year. Help me to be a better steward of this life. Help me clean up the temple where You should dwell. Help me to have the mind of Christ. Help me observe the Holy Spirit correcting me, convicting me, and comforting me as I strive to be obedient to Your will and Your way. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



When Going Seems Tough...

Howard Thurman said, “There are two questions we have to ask ourselves. The first is ‘Where am I going?’ and the second is ‘Who will go with me?’ If you ever get these questions in the wrong order, you are in trouble.” There are many who are willing to go with anyone anywhere, but there are fewer who declare where. Most of the time it is hard to declare because the place is unknown. It seems easier to go with someone else because the responsibility of where is not yours to decide.

Ironically, the call on your life starts with God telling you to go. If you are obedient to the call, you will pack up your stuff and be willing and ready to go. 2 Corinthians 4:5-11 is the reminder that going requires knowing that you will be afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. This knowledge is a part of the dilemma in determining where to go. After all, who wants to go anywhere and be afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down?

Yet, the Scripture is not fully accounted for if the clause ‘but’ is not considered. You will be afflicted, but not crushed. You will be perplexed, but not driven to despair. You will be persecuted, but not forsaken. You will be struck down, but not destroyed. This should help you respond fully to the call on your life and help you to go. With discernment, you can find where you are going and who will go with you. Just know that no matter what, God called you to go. **CDA**

Prayer: God of grace and mercy, send me where You would have me to go. Help me to respond to the call You have on my life and help me to be obedient to Your command. You already know that I do not know where I am going and surely You know that I do not know who will go with me besides You. I pray that You bless my going and You specifically select my companions for the mission. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Smartphones and God’s Creation

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well.”

Psalm 139:14

With the advent of the smartphone, the social media landscape has exploded! We live in an age where we can see just about anything in real time through photos and videos with the simple tap of a button. You know, snapshots of those important milestones in our lives: the arrival of a new baby, birthdays, funerals, graduations, etc.

I love my smart phone because it has the capability to do so much! It allows me to access the internet anytime I want, provides me with space to keep my appointments and reminders, and the biggest feature of all (well, at least in my opinion), is the camera! As an avid photographer and nature lover, I enjoy capturing and sharing all the beauty I see on my daily walks and in my travels. Through my lens, I capture God’s creation in all its splendor: flowers in bloom, rain clouds, trees, the vast, calming beauty of the ocean, and the seasons as they change.

Through my lens, I witness God’s handiwork on a much deeper, spiritual level, and I am reminded of God’s awesome love for all creation! Humankind is made in the *Imago Dei**, that is, the image of God! How wonderful it is to know that God has taken great care in creating us all! How fortunate and privileged we are to experience the vastness of Earth’s beauty through the lens of a telephone camera. **PBJ**

Prayer: Almighty God, Your word of creation caused the water to be filled with many kinds of living beings and the air to be filled with birds. I rejoice in the richness of Your creation, and I pray for Your wisdom for all who live on this earth. I pray that we may wisely manage and not destroy what You have made for us and for our descendants. Amen.



On Prayer...

What is prayer, and is it necessary? Prayer is our connection to the Triune God that allows us to unburden ourselves of those things that have traumatized and hurt us; and yes, it is necessary for our spiritual growth. Prayer allows us to speak those things that we have never uttered to another person. It can be a form of healing and comfort when we are experiencing difficulties, i.e., death, illness, depression, anxiety, anger, and fear.

The beautiful thing about prayer is this: we can participate in it freely, whenever and wherever we desire to do so. Sometimes when we hear the word prayer, it strikes fear in us because we are concerned about how we sound, we question our sincerity and ability, and we make the oft dreaded mistake of comparing our prayers with others, and it just becomes a vicious cycle of self-doubt and self-loathing. Prayer requires discipline and commitment, and because of this, many people find prayer controlling and restrictive. I do not believe this is what God wants for us. Yet, we must know and understand that prayer is not a “one and done” act.

Prayer and consistency work in tandem; and as 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” My siblings in Christ, the purpose of prayer is not to stress us out, but to draw us nearer to the Source of all creation, God! God already knows what we need, but it is through prayer that God witnesses our faith and trust in action! Prayer ushers us into God’s presence, and it is there, if we listen closely, that we get the answers we seek. **PBJ**

Prayer: Loving God, You want me to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing except losing You, and to lay all my cares on You, knowing that You care for me. Protect me from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds in this mortal life may hide from me the light of Your immortal love. Amen.



God's Plan...

Life is tough. There are some good times. There are some bad times. There are even some ugly times. No one said it would be easy and no one knows what each day will bring. Clichés tell us several things: When it rains it pours... You get what you give... Better late than never... Delay is not denial... Yet, we memorize those and overlook beneficial Scripture verses.

There are several reasons our Triune God is Savior. Most people equate and understand Jesus as Savior, but only in the sense that Christ died on the cross for our sins. Yes, Christ died on the cross for our sins and that fact alone makes Jesus our Savior. Yet, have you ever considered how God is a Savior in other arenas of your life?

God is Savior during your trials and tribulations. God is Savior when you have sinned and fallen short of God's expectation. 1 Corinthians 10:13 is very plain, and it is very direct. There is nothing you are going through that somebody else has not already gone through and survived. The Scripture continues to remind us that God is faithful and will not let us be tested beyond what we can bear.

There is a cliché that says, "God won't put more on you than you can bear." I think that blames God for the testing that you go through and that is not fair. Everybody goes through a test of some kind in their lives and God is not always the initiator of the test. Remember, it is God who makes sure you have the strength to bear the test. It is God who makes sure you have a way out so that you may be able to endure it. **CDA**

Prayer: God, thank You for being there with me during all my tests. Thank You for being my Savior when I need reassurance about what I can bear. Thank You for the escape that You provide in times when I need it most. Thank You, God. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



The Facts of Life

Do you remember that TV show? Do you remember the lyrics of the theme song? *You take the good, you take the bad, you take them both and there you have the Facts of Life, the Facts of Life. There's a time you got to go and show you're growin' now you know about the Facts of Life, the Facts of Life. When the world never seems to be livin' up to your dreams and suddenly you're finding out the Facts of Life are all about you, you.*

The TV show had characters that spent time experiencing an adolescent lifestyle. The show was about a group of girls attending a boarding school and their experiences while under the guiding hand of housemother Edna Garrett. Each episode was a problem regarding a particular relationship followed by the girls attempting to fix the problem on their own. The ending would be Mrs. Garrett catching wind of the situation and offering words of wisdom about the facts of life. What I find funny is how similar our lives are to the episodes. We encounter situations and we attempt to solve our problems on our own. In the meantime, our Sovereign God already knows all about it. When we turn to God in prayer and when we read the Word of God, we walk away with wisdom.

In Luke 24:13-35, two walked with Jesus explaining all of their issues and disappointments, they were also considering how they were going to fix the situation themselves. It was not until they broke bread with Jesus that they recognized Him and received the wisdom of the Master. I want to encourage you to taste the Bread of Life and drink of the Living Water and see how much you can glean about the facts of life.

CDA

Prayer: God of mercy and God of grace. Teach me to come to You as I face my day-to-day issues regarding the facts of life. Help me to remember that through You who strengthens me, I can do all things. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



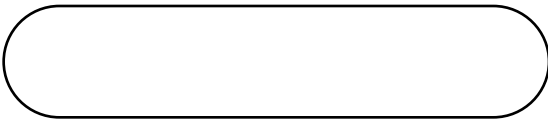
The Danger of Comparison

Have you ever noticed that when you compare your situation to someone else's situation, it seems as if you are worse off than they? Or sometimes when you want to feel better about a situation, you tend to compare your situation to someone who has a worst situation? Sadly, as humans, we make this mistake too often. We compare our situation to someone else's situation, and it makes us feel a particular kind of way. Either we are worse than before, or we are relieved that we don't have it so bad. Either way there is danger in comparison.

There is a quote that says, "All unhappiness stems from comparison!" This is a very true statement. Consider something with which you have been unhappy and then try to determine what the comparison is that caused your unhappiness. Maybe a loved one has passed away... the comparison is in the life they once lived or in knowing they will be absent from your life. Maybe you desire to be in a committed relationship... the comparison is in how you once were in a committed relationship or how you've seen others appear. Regardless of the unhappiness, the unhappiness came from a comparison.

Jesus questions those present about the sins of those in Luke 13:1-8. Then Jesus warns the listeners by saying, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Jesus tells us to bear fruit and before we get cut down for being fruitless. Quit comparing what you have to what someone else has and produce what God has called you to do. Who knows, if you do not bear fruit next year, you might just get cut down. **CDA**

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, I repent. I repent because you have sent Jesus as the One who takes care of the vineyard and I have been the tree that You have been waiting on to produce fruit. Let Jesus continue to dig around me and fertilize me so that I may be all that You desire of me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



So Many Doors

In my previous life, before community organizing, I lived in a tiny Kansas town and attended a tiny Kansas church. At my tiny Kansas church, I taught the not-so-tiny high school Sunday School class. I remember one Sunday a student challenged the command to “pray without ceasing.” “That is an impossible task,” she declared. Honestly, I had my own doubts on whether it was possible, so the following week, we began to study prayer. What I remember most about that study was an activity we did together.

To try to understand the act of “praying without ceasing” we decided to tie the act of praying to something that we did regularly in a day and to do this experiment for two weeks. Different ideas were thrown out. We settled on praying every time we opened or closed a door. Whoa! I never realized how often you open or close a door in a day! You open and close car doors, bedroom doors, bathroom doors, doors to work, cabinet doors, refrigerator doors, oven doors, locker doors, doors to your house, doors to the grocery store, doors to the church, doors to the restaurant, doors to the bank, doors in the freezing food section of the grocery store. I could go on.

What did this experiment reveal? Well, when you pray that often, your prayers begin to change from requests, to gratitude, to conversation. Praying that often focuses your mind on the things stated in Philippians 4:8: “... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent and praiseworthy” - those are the things we thought about following our prayers. As you enter this New Year, I encourage you to try it. Pray every time you open a door and see what revelations God has in store for you. **TRW**

Prayer: O God, hear my prayers that are without ceasing. Help my prayers to be complete conversations with You. Help me keep on doing the things that I have learned and received. Amen.



After the Touch...

Luke 8:40-56 is a familiar story. We even sing songs about the encounter... “for I have touched the hem of His garment, and His blood has made me whole” or the hymn “He Touched Me.” This Scripture lesson has three encounters with Jesus, but I will only highlight the two. The woman with the issue of blood was healed and the little girl who was thought to be dead was resurrected, but what happened AFTER the touch?

We can make the general assumption that they lived happily ever after. However, that would indicate that the experience was likened to a fairy tale. I believe there are different endings to the stories that are not captured in the Scriptures but are lived when we align our lives with the lives of the two women mentioned in these Scriptures. We can recall a time in our lives when we felt like an outcast and seemingly despised by those closest to us. Or we can recall a time in our lives when we felt as if we were no longer living, but dead on the inside. Because of our faith, or the faith of those who surround us, we were exposed to Christ and either touch the hem of His garment or felt His touch and was given life anew. What then happened, after the touch?

Now these daughters in the Biblical story are special. Although the sacred text does not discuss how long or how faithfully the daughters lived, the rest of their lives must have been one of servitude and proclamation. Others would have pointed them out because they were touched by Jesus. You should live a life of servitude and proclamation because, trust me, folks will be talking about you if they can acknowledge that you’ve touched or been touched by Christ. **CDA**

Prayer: God help me live a life that displays that I’ve touched You and You’ve touched me. Help my “after touch.” May it transform the life of someone else to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



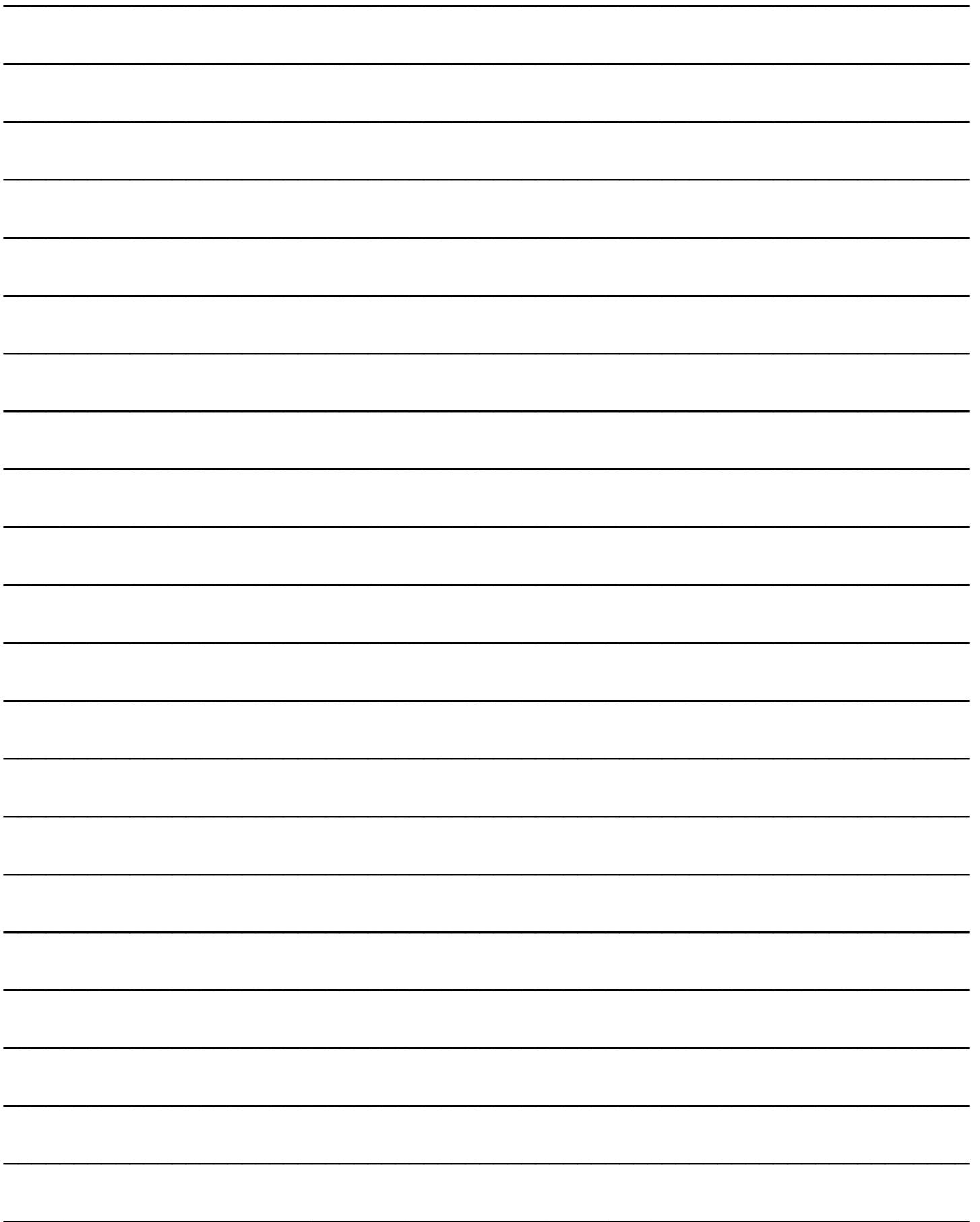
Why the Spirit?

During this season of unrest, uncertainty, and Covid-19, we have all gone through changes. Many of us have put on what some are calling the “Covid-19” around our waist as well as experienced a degree of never experienced before anxiety. In response to these changes in our bodies and minds, we have been told that we need to condition our bodies through exercise and support our mental health by seeking professional help. Both are high trusted ways to support mental and physical health.

Mental and physical health are always at the forefront of our minds; however spiritual health often gets lost. Some lump mental health and spiritual health together; however, this is a mistake. Every time you take a step your body and mind are engaged, but they are doing two different things. Your mind is giving your body instructions about breathing and movement so that your body can put one foot in front of the other and walk. In the same way that your mind informs your body, your spirit informs your mind as to who you are, who God is, and how you should respond to what you experience in the world. This is why you may wake one morning feeling depressed or anxious, but after you pray, read Scripture, or listen to spiritual music you feel better.

Prayer, Scripture, and spiritual music feed the spirit, the spirit speaks to the mind and body, and every part of you feels better. So, as you move towards your goals of mental and physical health, don’t neglect the spirit. In many ways, your entire person depends on it. **BCH**

Prayer: God, remind me that I am mind, body, and spirit and help me to give attention to all three as I move toward wholeness. In the name of Jesus, I pray. AMEN.



Authors, Notes & Definitions

ADW – Rev. Angela D. Wright is a resident of Columbia, SC, an ordained Minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a certified public educator for more than 20 years, founder of Building Beyond the Walls (buildingbeyondthewalls.com), and the co-author of *Oh, How We Love Our Sons: An Anthology to Life and Inspire Our Sons and Yours*.

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TRW – Treva Williams is the lead organizer of the Charleston Area Justice Ministry and a former youth director at First Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Fort Scott, Kansas. She moved with her family to North Charleston to answer God's call upon her life to do justice. Treva enjoys working closely with people of faith and being part of a diverse organization.

Richard J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* is hailed by many as the best modern book on Christian spirituality with millions of copies sold since its original publication in 1978. The 3rd edition is quoted in a few of Rev. Dr. Brian C. Henderson's devotionals.

“Imago Dei, as noted in Rev. Patricia Bligen Jones devotional, is defined as the metaphysical expression, associated uniquely to humans, which signifies the symbolical connection between God and humanity. The term comes from the Latin version of the Bible.

The Scriptures used throughout the devotional varies on the versions used. A few of them used are the New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, and the English Standard Version.

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