

S A C R I F I C E

Twenty-One Day Prayer Intensive

Day 15

This week we are praying for God to open our eyes and hearts to our role in seeing the kingdom of God extend to who the Bible would say are the least among us- the poor, the lonely, the outcast and those who don't know Jesus. Pray that God's Spirit would increase our capacity to see, and sacrificially give and serve those who need Jesus the most.

"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10:25

I don't know about you, but I have definitely sat in the seat of the self-righteousness many times. And by self-righteous, I mean, I know the spiritual answers to a lot of spiritual questions. Most of us do, right? We know the verses, we talk about them and gladly share them with others when we know what they are supposed to do.

We all like knowing theoretically the answers to the questions. It is the application that creates the problems for me. Because it means to practice the right spiritual things, it may actually cost me more than I am willing to give or share. I may be inconvenienced. I may be taken advantage of. I may be taken for granted. I may be asked of God to share what I secretly wanted to keep for myself. Ever been there? It is the shadow side of every Christian: we can be selfish.

We see this taking place with a lawyer connected to the religious community. He was an expert in the religious law. Don't you love when Jesus sets up an expert with a question and then reveals a stunning truth that silences that same so-called expert? All of us do. Unless, of course, the expert is you or me. But we see this play out in this story. The lawyer asks how to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks the man to tell him what the law says. The lawyer sums it all up with Love God love your neighbor. Jesus commends him. But the lawyer does not want to have to give anything more of himself than he has to, so he looks for a clarification. Secretly, this lawyer wants to know the boundaries. He wants to know the limits because he does not want to give one ounce more than he must. He wants the number of his neighbors to be small and therefore his giving to be small as well.

Jesus knows it. The lawyer wants black and white truth. And Jesus always has a way of delivering. So He begins to tell a parable of a man who travels on a dangerous road between Jerusalem and Jericho when he was jumped, beaten,

stripped and left for dead. A priest happens by, sees the man and walks on the other side of the road to pass him by. Then, a worker at the temple sees the man and his condition, but does not stop to help but passes by on the other side of the road. Then a Samaritan sees the man. Jesus uses a Samaritan because they were hated in Jewish culture because of mixed heritage. The hated Samaritan stops, has compassion, tends to the wounds of the beaten man and transports him to a local shelter. The Samaritan pays all charges until the man is fully recovered. Jesus then asks the question: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Go and do.

Jesus had just introduced this man to a new law to live by, one of mercy. But He doesn't just want us to know what scripture says, He wants us to embody scripture. To live it out and to express it by the way we treat those in need.

The Bible tells us we are to meet the needs of fellow believers, to extend grace to the poor, to help widows and orphans, show hospitality and to support the gospel to reach the ends of the earth. I know it sounds like a lot. But many hands make light the work. Jesus did not say we as individuals have to do everything. We simply have to do our part. And in this season, we are asking God to show us our part. We fully expect God to speak to you in this season as we give sacrificially to the people he puts on your heart. For us the goal does not have a financial number connected to it. We just want to obey His leading and whatever you feel led to give, that is enough. And giving, we too are showing mercy.

Let's pray: God show us our part in giving to those in need and highlight those you want us to support this year. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions:

- 1. What stood out or what did God highlight to you as you read the devotional?**
- 2. What invitation is God extending to you personally?**
- 3. What action step do you need to take to move in obedience?**

Day 16

"Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.

Luke 1:26-35 (NKJV)

Every year around Christmas, you might hear this passage, or at least, some version of it. It comes on the heels of 400 years of "Divine silence" and I would consider it the "breaking news" of its time. An angel would appear to a young, 14 year old virgin, named Mary and announce to her that she would conceive and bear Jesus, the Son of God. No big deal right?! Be honest, we all would have pulled our phones and updated the world about our new status. Chosen one. Angel visitation.

Rejoice highly favored one. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women. What a stunning pronouncement! Whether you are a man or a woman, most Christians would say this is an incredible statement and one that all of us would love to hear from heaven!

Well not only is this story well known in our western culture, but if you've been around the church long enough, you might have heard (or even used) the proverbial response in verse 28, of "blessed and highly favored" when asked how you are doing Because the reality is, we are! We have been chosen. We are favored by God through His Son, Jesus. And this means we have been offered forgiveness, redemption and a new identity! We are favored, we are empowered and we are also called (by the power of the Holy Spirit) to engage the world around us with gospel of Jesus Christ.

I love what Psalms 8:3-6 says,

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet"

How humbling that we are the only creature made in the image of God. We bear the mark of our Creator God. It is truly breathtaking. Yes, we are favored, but what do we do with this, with favor?

Let's look a little deeper into the words that Mary heard, "Blessed and highly favored!" Meaning: "You are well spoken of, celebrated and God is extending Himself and bestowing toward you!" But as Christine Caine says, "Favor is for service, not for status!"

Mary was indeed blessed and highly favored, BUT, the favor granted to her was connected to what God wanted to do through her. Mary was chosen to give birth to Jesus, the Savior of the world. But her favor wasn't just about her. Her favor was for the benefit of others - the lost, the sinner, the broken, the hurting .. And this same principle applies to us today.

Good News, God has given us favor as well! He extends Himself toward us. And in doing so, we need to understand that His favor toward us, is related to what He is asking of us!

Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"

This week's fasting theme is sacrifice, we challenge you to ask the Lord how you can extend the favor that you've been given through Jesus, to the world around you? Who is in need? Who are the vulnerable? And how can you extend God's favor to those in most urgent need?

Day 17

"Jesus also used this illustration: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.""
Matthew 13:33 (NIV)

Jesus used many illustrations to teach about the kingdom of God, showing us how God works in the life of every believer and in our world. God is always at work. At times, it is difficult for us to understand when we do not always see the prayers we pray answered immediately or the seeds we sow in obedience produce an instant harvest. But God's kingdom, His will, His ways and His works are constantly in motion. Most of the time we are unaware of all God is doing in our lives and in our world. Often, we think that if it is not on our radar, well, then it must not be happening. And of course, this is not true. In all things, God is at work, and like the prophecy in Luke 1 about the birth of Jesus said, "And of His kingdom there will be no end." What God intends, He sees through to completion. God desires for His ever-expanding kingdom to work in and through us as part of His kingdom expansion.

This is an eternal truth we can rest in. God will always do His part. Jesus uses this picture of yeast to create a concrete visual for his followers. Yeast is sprinkled throughout the dough and even in small amounts, it eventually finds its way into all of the dough, and the dough will rise as it is influenced by the yeast. So, it is with God's kingdom in our lives. God desires for His fullness to work through all of us until every aspect of our lives has been permeated with the Gospel message; this includes the way we think, believe, and love. God's expanding kingdom within us is part of the transformation process of every believer, and as we are changed, we become catalysts of change in the world around us. We cannot help but live out God's transforming power. The old has gone and the new has come.

There are two points we want to emphasize in our reading today. God's kingdom expands from the inside out. First, Jesus desires for His will and His way to change us from within. In the same way yeast works within dough, he wants His ways to permeate every aspect of our heart, mind, behaviors, beliefs, and actions. The Holy Spirit will never stop calling to us and conforming us to the likeness of Jesus. He desires the kingdom of God to displace everything within us so that we will live and love like Jesus did. Often, this involves confronting places where we are selfish and fearful, or unrepentant and indifferent. Just as Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice, Jesus calls us to live a life of sacrifice as well. And for this to truly happen, His kingdom and His purposes must take precedent in the hearts of His people. Boldly ask God for the kingdom of God to grow within us.

The second way God's kingdom expands is by God working His will out through us. Through Christ, we have now become ambassadors and representatives of this new kingdom. Every single Christian. God is not satisfied to do an internal work within us, He desires for us to step out in faith to see His kingdom expand on the earth. It is the delight of the Father to partner with us to the glory of Jesus through our obedience and self-less living and giving. It may be hard to believe, but each one of us can walk in the supernatural power of God as well as through practical day-by-day obedience. We must simply surrender to what God shows us to do, and then to act on it.

God's expanding kingdom includes every sphere in life and every context of society. We are called to engage, through the gospel, the need we see in whatever form it may take. As we continue to participate in this fast of sacrifice, pray that God's kingdom would continue to change every aspect of our hearts so that we may surrender and believe in the power of God to transform us. May God grant us that as we are being transformed, we may live sacrificially for those around us. Pray that God would show us the vulnerable among us that we may act on His behalf. May God do both the powerful and practical in and through all of us.

Scripture reminds us, "And of His kingdom, there will be no end." Let it be so in the hearts and lives of every person in Good News. May the declaration from the Lord's prayer be our confidence: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

Day 18

Christianity is, in its essence, sacrificial. We, of course, see Jesus offering Himself, sacrificially, in service throughout His life and then in His death for other people. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus gave to us in our place of need. This is the definition of Christianity.

Most of us will never know what it means to be an orphan. But unfortunately, there are many who live this reality. For me, the overwhelming need became real when I started volunteering at Teen Reach Adventure Camp and met kids like Sadie* who had been in 29 foster homes from ages 9-16. Under her angry façade was a tender-hearted girl who loved to write poetry. Or Chase*, TJ* and Ben,* biological brothers who lived in three separate homes. Rather than fight like most siblings, the three couldn't get enough time together at camp. The youngest clung to my wife's leg at the end of camp, begging her to let him go home with his brothers.

As Christians, what is our responsibility? What should the church be doing to help the fatherless? What does the Bible call us to do? James 1:27 says, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." Let's take a minute to unpack what this verse means. When we look at the Greek word for purity, we find it is the origin of our English word catharsis, which means release. Another variation we get from this word is catheter, which helps remove waste from the body. In both senses of these words, there is the removal of something that provides relief. Purity in the Greek actually means clean. Living out the pure and simple gospel means to bring relief to those in need.

When we read this verse, it sounds like a command, even an obligation. But, this is actually a descriptive verse. It is communicating the essence of God's heart to care for the most vulnerable. Thus, looking after the orphan and widow is an opportunity. In caring for the most vulnerable among us, we find a sense of the cleanest and most soul-satisfying expressions of faith. A selfless practice to those who are in need. And, to those who probably will never be able to pay us back. Again, this is the essence of the gospel.

Looking after orphans and widows actually means to give intense attention to and go see. It signifies a habitual action and attitude rather than an independent or inconsistent act. This act of faith is both personal and repetitive. In this verse we see a way of living out the gospel message—to continually draw near to the orphan and the widow. A better way of communicating this verse may read something like, "One of the purest and most undefiled ways of living faith is to draw near to orphans and widows in their distress..."

The fact of the matter is orphans are part of the most marginalized people in our society and often experience tremendous amounts of trauma and neglect. No one has to explain the pain and loneliness that accompanies loss, abandonment or the feeling of having no one to trust. Youth like Sadie, Chase, TJ and Ben who end up on the streets, caught up in sex trafficking or incarcerated if we do nothing.

The writer of Psalm 68 wants to paint a picture of who God is to all of us, including the most vulnerable among us. Psalm 68:5 describes God as, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows."

When we think of the term father, we think of the responsibility of provision and one of protection from someone who cares for us. Psalm 68:8 says, "He sets the lonely in families." God desires for people to be part of a family, and most importantly, His family. He adopted us through Christ and calls each of us to help the cause of the vulnerable in our society.

Romans 12:13 is a reminder "When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality." The power of the gospel is the ability to share freely what we have received from God. The gospel calls us to action. In the words of Martin Luther, "The world does not need a definition of religion as much as it needs a demonstration." Amen.

In this season, and the seasons to come, may we each play a role in meeting the needs of the orphans in our city and in our state. And may we take action for the most vulnerable among us.

*Names changed to protect identity.

Day 19

"When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all you do." Deuteronomy 24:19

If any of you have ever had a conversation about the bible with me, you know I am all about context and asking 'what did this mean to the people who first heard it?' It is an important step in helping us to understand what God is then saying to us now. Because I don't know about you, but I do not find myself harvesting fields very often. So how am I to respond to this verse?

If we uncover just a few pieces about the culture of the Ancient Israelites we can see what God was trying to reveal about Himself to us. First off, this was an agricultural community. Men would own land used that land to grow crops to harvest, which is how they provided for their families. Family size was usually pretty significant too, imagine 40+ people could all be living under roof! But I guess you have a lot of help when it comes time to harvest. Those crops brought you not only provision for food but also for selling or trading which provided for financial security.

The second thing that is important for us to understand is why God is asking them to leave stuff behind for foreigners, orphans, and widows. The main thing these people had in common was a lack of family and land. Foreigners, orphans and widows then found themselves on the outside of the normal structured community. They were in a vulnerable position, unable to provide for themselves. And bring even more clarity, the terms widow and orphans did not just mean the father had died. It could mean any woman or child who was without the covering of a male relative. Without that covering, it was very difficult for them to find provision and often cause them to be placed in and even more vulnerable position, which children and women being sold into slavery.

We may not live in the same type of community with the same type of structure as the ancient Israelites, but we still live in a society with people who live day to day, without the security of knowing where their provision is coming from or how long it will last. Single mom and their kids often live under a fear of not knowing where their needs are going to be met.

In this verse we can see God's heart then is to make sure the vulnerable are taken care of and provided for. It is important enough to Him that He made it a law that they should keep and could get in trouble with Him if they didn't. What is important to God, is what should be important to us. When we align ourselves with God's heart, it helps us reveal Him to others. AND, the Lord promises to bless us. Blessing can come in many different ways, but blessing will bring peace and security to those who live under it.

I spent many years as a single mom, raising two little kids on my own and I saw God move on my behalf to provide for me over and over. One instance kinda reminds me of the story in 2 Kings 4 where a widow runs up to Elisha a cries out to him for help. Her husband, who had been a part of the group of prophets that Elisha had, had died and now creditors were coming to take away her sons to put them into slavery to pay off her debt. She is desperate to save her children but unable to do so. Elisha asks her what does she have of value and the only things she had was a flask of olive oil. That is not much. Elisha instructs her to go to her neighbors and gather as many jars as she could find and began filling them all from the one small flask. Every jar they brought him, he filled up. It was so many they even ran out of jars! Through Elisha, God provided above and beyond for her needs in a miraculous way.

Now remember, I said this story KINDA reminds me of a time when I saw God move on my behalf. It was an instance where He provided above and beyond what I needed. A few years ago it was a rough year for me and the kids and I had some significant medical bills pile up. Everything I had in savings went towards them and they still weren't covered. It was the end of the year so Christmas time was coming and I had nothing to spend on Christmas presents and even if I did, it would need to go towards medical bills. I was very upset and to be honest, my anger was directed towards God. I cried out to Him and reminded Him that I work FOR Him and He should be taking better care of me. My attitude was really bad. I did not deserve what He was about to do. A few Sundays before Christmas, I was at church and went to check my staff mailbox. In there was an envelope with my name written on it. I took it back to my office to open and when I did, I saw there were 10 - \$100 bills and a note to me. The note said that God had laid me and my kids on their heart to bless and that I was supposed to use it for us, not give it away. Also in the note was a word

they had felt God want them to share with me and it was about how He sees me and is proud of me. The money was great to receive but those words brought life to my soul. I began thanking God and telling Him that just knowing His thoughts about me was enough and I heard Him say to me, "No, they weren't. I had to put my money where my mouth is." I couldn't help but laugh at the way God was speaking to me, speaking my own language. God had provided for me in a miraculous way and spoken life into my situation. A few months later He provided a way to get the medical bills covered, another blessing of provision for me and my kids.

In this last week of our fast where we have focused on the them Sacrifice, ask God if there is anything He would like for you to do in caring for single. Moms or widows. It may be blessing someone financially. Or, it may be serving in some capacity to meet an need. Either way, engage God in praying for those in need and look to be a blessing to someone else.

Day 20

One of the greatest areas to give where there is no chance of human repayment is in prayer. The lost must be continually brought before the throne. Preparing the ground and sowing seed for others to know salvation are the first steps in reaping the harvest and most often the most labor-intensive and least exciting. Everyone likes to cheer on when someone visibly comes to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus, but fewer want to do the hard work behind the scenes that leads up to that moment.

The Bible is so very clear about what God's heart is. God is looking at the harvest. He always has. He came to seek and to save what was lost. From the very beginning, when the first man and woman had a choice to obey or disobey, He let them know He had a rescue plan in mind that would bring mankind back into right relationship with Himself. From Genesis to Revelation, God tells of his redemptive plan. God is a missionary God and the Bible is a missionary book and this redemptive plan is for all humankind.

John Stott says, We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God! The incredible part is that the Lord wants us as believers to be a part of all this. He doesn't even ask us, He tells us and more than once. Matthew 24:14 is one place where we learn what this mandate is: And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Mark 16:15 says: Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. That "go" doesn't single out pastors or missionaries but applies to all.

So what does the ultimate goal look like? Revelation 7:9 tell us: "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nations, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

Psalms 86:9 says "All the nations you have made will come and worship before You, O Lord. They will bring glory to Your name."

With about 7,000 unreached people groups still in the world, we have not conquered this goal yet. It is indeed in the making. Believers world wide for generations past which now leads up to include us here in the present, are a part of prophecy unfolding: "The Lord has made His salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered His love and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." Psalm 98:2 and 3. It is fulfilled through the outpouring of Holy Spirit upon believers right now, like YOU and ME, by the Spirit-empowered proclamation of the gospel!

Not only do we pray for the lost but we go to the lost. So where are we at world-wide when it comes to reaching all peoples of the earth with the good news? Unfortunately, it is not as good as we would hope.

Billions, yes billions of people still need to be reached. Those 7,000 unreached people groups mentioned earlier just don't have enough believers among them to adequately evangelize their own people groups. They need outside help. But are they getting that help? 97% of all Christian workers in the world are living and working in countries that already have access to the gospel. Only 3%! Only 3% are working in the countries of the 10/40 Window.

When it comes to funding, 99% of finances are used in countries that have access to the gospel. Only 1% of all mission funding in the world ends up in the 10/40 Window. This is where billions, yes billions of people, do not have adequate access to the gospel. So you can see it is not a matter of lostness. There are lost people in Omaha and there are lost people in Afghanistan. What makes the difference is access and that comes through resources such as sent Global Workers and finances.

These stats are shockingly and shamefully unbalanced. I was a missionary in Guatemala for five years. Our two children were born there. As much as I love Guatemala and would love to be back there, I could never return as a global worker. Why? Because there are already more than enough believers there to adequately evangelize their own people. We need instead, to send global workers to the unreached places which happen to be the hardest places and probably the most dangerous. This is where we find ourselves in the times we live in and this is what we must rise up and do. Good News Church is working toward this mandate of reaching the lost. This year alone, three more of our families will

head to the 10/40 Window as long term Global Workers. As our three week fast with the theme of sacrifice is coming to a close, please pray about helping two of these families complete their fund-raising: Steve Hauser has reached his financial goals but Rushton and Julie Gunter and Levi and Sarah DeVries are still in process. Let's be willing to give more than what is comfortable when it comes to prayer for the lost and the sending of our financial resources. God is always drawn to those who act sacrificially.

Day 21

"Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

John 12:24 (NIV)

As we close out the fast, first, congratulations. No matter what you fasted, making the commitment to seek the Lord for 21 days is an amazing feat. Spending extravagant time with Jesus is never wasted. I always think of it as an investment in relationship. And time is one of the measurements in a healthy relationship. So thank you for making the sacrifice of time to be with the Lord.

Second, thank you for the diligence of your pursuit of Jesus. God promises He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. The word diligence can be described as the intense and personal desire of the seeker. It is not driven by mandates or obligations but an earnest desire to meet with God. Thank you Good News for your diligence, for making a decision to meet with God.

Third, thank you for expectation. Expectation is connected to faith. Action is belief in motion. Think of a car that is already in motion. It is easy to steer. Expectation helps God move us in the direction He desires. We just read that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. The word rewarder in the Greek actually means paying what is due and giving rewards in keeping with one's own values. I love this definition because we know God loves to bless His children. He also cannot not reward when we pursue because it is part of His character. He is a Father who loves to reinforce and reward correct decisions. Thank you for your expectation.

The last thank you is in regard to sacrifice. Thank you for all of your prayer, devotion and pursuit of the Lord. Thank you for giving up something, whether it be food or social media, in order to say yes to Jesus. Thank you for laying down a part of your life for the benefit of others as we have sought the Lord. I am proud of you all.

As this fast draws to a close, we wanted everyone to take some time to pray through where to give and how much it will be. The amount is not nearly as important as the heart behind it.

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done."

Proverbs 19:17 (NIV)

In two weeks, we will take up a sacrificial offering with the following three designations. The first grouping is for single Moms and widows. P. Terry and P. Mark will help bless our single Moms and any widows we know are in need. We will also support Assure Women's Center.

Our second group is orphans and they will be represented by Teen Reach Adventure Camp led by Will and Angela Prusia and nationally through Compact with the Assemblies of God. 90 something percent of those fostered through this organization remain with the families and are adopted.

Our third and last group are Global Workers. Steve has reached his goal (way to go Steve) so all support will go to Rushton & Julie and Levi & Sarah to support them as they go to the field.

Remember, the amount is not as important as the obedience to God's prompting. Pray that God would speak to you about what group God wants you to bless and the amount He wants you to give. Thank you Good News again for the sacrifice you have made the last three weeks. I pray that you would know Jesus more and more and the seeds you have sown in this season would become many in the seasons to come.

God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. God bless you all.