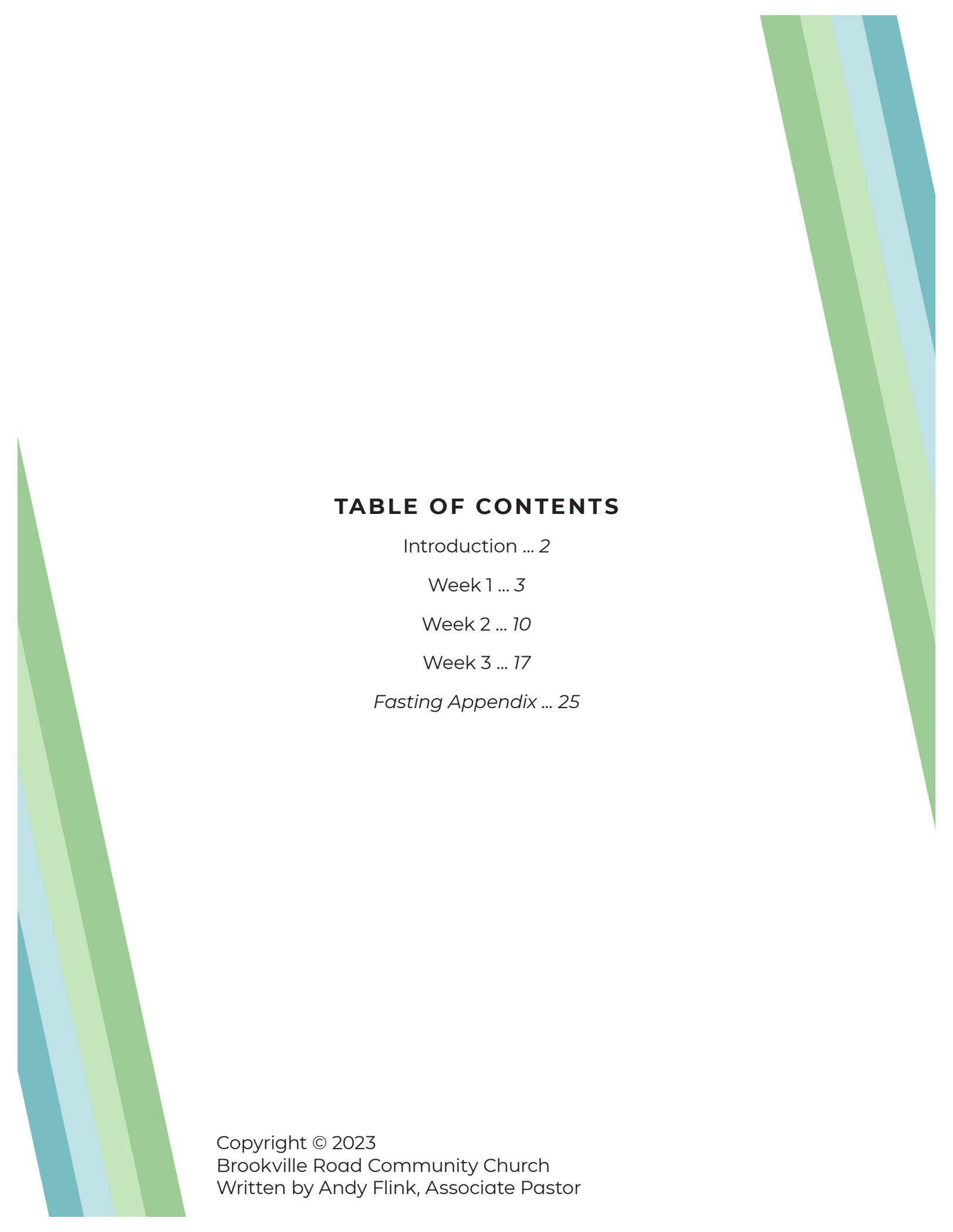




21 DAY DEVOTIONAL



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## INTRODUCTION

As we begin this new year, it is our desire for the entire BRCC family to join together in a season of seeking God through prayer, worship, Scripture reading, and fasting. During 2023, our church-wide emphasis is focused on Go Time. There are 8,760 hours in a year, and as a church family, we want to come together and give 8,760 hours of our time to serve in Jesus' name. I have written this 21 day devotional to help encourage you as we take time and intentionally look to God's Word as we begin the new year, specifically focusing on "Go Time." Go Time is serving outside the church and intentionally bringing Jesus into that opportunity.

This season of church wide prayer and fasting is an annual tradition at BRCC that means a great deal to many in the our community. Over the last decade, we have seen God dramatically answer our prayers and change our perspective on our circumstances and we look forward to what God will do in the future. I have high expectations for what God will do in our church over the next 21 days. While I cannot guarantee what any one individual or family will experience over the next three weeks, I agree with the statement, "You will get out of it, what you put into it." To me this echoes what we read in Jeremiah 29:13, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart."

We can't control God, but when we intentionally set aside time to worship Him by spending time in prayer and reading the Bible, God usually reveals Himself to us in a fresh new way. I look forward to hearing how God is going to work in your life! I will be praying for all of you!

Pastor Andy

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

## **DAY 1 ... January 9, 2023**

### **Read Acts 1:4-8**

In the American judicial system when a witness is called to the stand it isn't their responsibility to determine the outcome of the trial, that is up to the judge or the jury. The role of a witness is to testify to what they have seen or heard or experienced. In the same way, as witnesses for Jesus, it isn't our job to "make" someone become a Christian. (We couldn't even accomplish that if the other person wanted us to "make" them a Christian!). Our responsibility is to testify to what Jesus has done in our lives and then trust that our Father in heaven is able to transform the lives of other people just as he has transformed our own.

Jesus expected that his disciples would be witnesses to an ever expanding sphere of influence. They were supposed to start where they were in Jerusalem and over time they would be witnesses to the ends of the earth. As you go through the next 21 days of prayer and fasting, take some time to reflect on what it would mean for you to be a witness for Jesus. Where will you be a witness, to whom will you be a witness? Don't be overwhelmed with a feeling that you don't know what to say or where to start, just begin where you are and testify to what you have experienced. The results are up to God!

### **Application**

- What do you think it means to be a witness for Jesus?
  
- How has Jesus transformed your own life?
  
- Who are some people in your own life for whom you could be a witness? Commit to praying for them every day for the next 21 days.

## **DAY 2 ...** *January 10, 2023*

### **Read John 1:1-14**

John tells us that the Son took on flesh to become the Christ (literally the Messiah) for us. We are told that Jesus "made His dwelling among us." In the Greek, this phrase more literally translates as "he pitched his tabernacle among us." In the Old Testament the tabernacle was a portable tent the Israelites took with them wherever they went. It was the place where God's presence (signified by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night) dwelt among the people.

The tabernacle was a tangible reminder to the people that their God was with them. The significance of this same word "tabernacle" being used to describe Jesus reminds us of the continuity of the Old and New Testament. Jesus wasn't some aloof deity, descending from the clouds to tell humanity what they did wrong. No, He got down in the dirt with us. There in the sin and the pain, Jesus came into the world for our sake. He left behind the glory which was His and lived down here, a human like the rest of us. He pitched His tent with us and He knows exactly how we feel.

Life is hard, but in the midst of our struggles it is encouraging to remember that our God is with us!

### **Application**

In Matthew 1:23 Jesus is described as Immanuel, which means "God with us." He could have stayed in heaven (the ultimate comfort zone), but instead he decided to GO and be with his people. This should affect how we pray and how we view sharing our faith. Jesus came to be with us and His presence is a tangible reminder that God cares about you and your situation. His example also reminds us that we must be willing to get out of our comfort zone and GO to be with those who need us.

## **DAY 3 ...** *January 11, 2023*

### **Read Nehemiah 6:1-15**

Henry Ford once commented, "Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal." This is an idea Nehemiah clearly understood as he was leading the massive project to rebuild the wall surrounding Jerusalem. As he was working, Nehemiah's enemies tried to intimidate him, frighten his workers, sully his reputation and even confuse him with false prophecies claiming to be from God. If Nehemiah had allowed himself to focus on what his enemies might do to him, he would probably have missed out on what God would do through his life.

If Satan cannot get us to stop what we are doing by luring us into sin, he will frequently attempt to sabotage God's plan for our lives by interrupting our lives with problems or situations (which usually feel extremely urgent and are often quite scary) so that our attention is diverted. Nehemiah chose to concentrate on what God had asked him to do and he considered everything else a distraction. He was able to maintain his focus because he chose to look at the goal God had given to him instead of the scary obstacles being thrown at him by his enemies. We must learn from Nehemiah's example. Nehemiah told them, "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3)

### **Application**

- What are your thoughts about the quote about obstacles from Henry Ford? Can you relate to the idea that sometimes Satan uses distractions to try and keep you from experiencing what God has in store for you?
  
- What is the "great project" God has placed in front of you?
  
- What are some of the obstacles that you face in achieving it?
  
- What do you think is God's perspective on the obstacles you face in life?

## **DAY 4 ...** *January 12, 2023*

### **Read Matthew 28:16-20**

In the church world, there is a lot of conversation about making disciples of Jesus, but what does that really mean? Simply put, a disciple of Jesus is someone who is studying the life of Jesus in the Bible so as to live the kind of life that Jesus would live if He were in our place. This involves obeying Jesus' teaching, but also imitating the things that Jesus did. This means that making disciples isn't a religious activity that should be reserved for "experts." Making disciples is something for all Christians and it is about using our influence to direct people towards a closer relationship with Jesus.

This perspective on discipleship, helps us to recognize an idea that is sometimes missed in the Great Commission (verses 19-20 are known as the Great Commission). The word translated as "go" in verse 19 is perhaps better understood to mean "as you are going." The implication of this distinction is that Jesus' command to go and make disciples isn't a one time directive that involves Christians "going" somewhere else to make disciples, but that as we go along in life we should naturally make disciples of Jesus wherever we are, in whatever we are doing. Jesus didn't think that making disciples was a job that should be reserved for religious leaders working in churches or seminaries, but was instead something that all of His followers should be doing...wherever they go!

### **Application**

- What is your own understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus?
- Is there a difference between being a Christian and a disciple of Jesus?
- What would it look like for you start the process of making a disciple?
- Is there anyone God has already placed in your life that you could use your influence to direct them towards a closer relationship with Jesus?

## DAY 5 ... January 13, 2023

### Read Romans 8:26-30

The work of Jesus Christ was never intended to be a historical event that merely occurred and then passed, no longer affecting peoples' lives. The completion of His work on earth was just the beginning of a much larger plan to bring redemption into the lives of believers. He was the "firstborn" among all of the Christians that were to follow after Him, those who were to be His brothers and sisters.

God's plan for our lives goes beyond merely "saving" us from hell. He has a plan to conform us into the glorious image of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is why we continue to need God's grace even after we become Christians. This is what the Apostle Paul was referring to when he challenged the church in Philippians 2:12 to "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Paul's point was not that the believers should *work* for their salvation (this would be the opposite of grace) he was challenging them to develop the gifts God had given them beginning with their salvation. We see this emphasis in the next verse, "...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose." While the Father's work is always primary in our lives, it doesn't mean that we should be entirely passive waiting for something to happen. God desires to use our lives for His glory just like He used the life of our older brother in the faith, Jesus.

### Application

- Today, pray that God will give you courage in the knowledge that God's plan for us will not be overcome.
- What are some of the gifts that God has given you that you need to develop for His glory?
- Ask God what His plans for your life are and how you can work out the salvation that He freely gave you by His grace.
- Are there people in your life you need to share the good news of salvation with? Pray and ask God for opportunities to talk with them.

## **DAY 6 ...** *January 14, 2023*

### **Read Matthew 6:9-13**

Have you ever noticed the contrast Jesus makes in this prayer? He prays for God's will to be done on earth "as it is in heaven"; the implication is that there are times when God's will on earth is not occurring to the same degree that it is in heaven. In heaven, God's will is always perfectly done; there is no sin or pain. But on earth, people have been given the freedom to act apart from God, and the sin that has resulted from our misuse of that freedom is not God's will. Sin is not our Father's will. He allows it to happen, but it is not what God desires.

When we undergo difficulties, it isn't because God has rejected us, but because the world has rejected God. In the beginning of the Lord's prayer, we are asking God to bring His Kingdom from heaven, where His will is perfectly done, to earth where His will is often resisted. The rest of the prayer involves asking God to work in our lives so that we can be a part of His Kingdom. One aspect of being in God's Kingdom is that we are trying to expand his Kingdom to include more people. When you encounter people in life who aren't interested in God's Kingdom it is important to recognize that they aren't rejecting YOU, they are rejecting God. But if God wants to keep giving the world opportunities to respond to Him, we should follow His example.

### **Application**

- Today, pray that God will strengthen you to do His will in a world that has rebelled against Him.
- What are some areas of your life where you sense that God's will is (or isn't) being done on earth as it is in heaven? Give God glory for the positive things and ask for His help for the areas that are falling short.
- Throughout the day, stop and pray the Lord's prayer as a reminder to yourself of God's desire to expand His kingdom. Specifically ask the Lord to help you have the courage to give people a second chance (or more) to respond to the gospel even if they have rejected it in the past.

**DAY 7 ...** *January 15, 2023*

**Read Matthew 4:18-22**

When Jesus came to Peter, Andrew, James, and John and invited them to become His disciples He used language that they understood. "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." With one sentence Jesus created a kind of picture of what it means to be His disciple. We are followers of Jesus who are supposed to invite other people to become followers of Jesus.

On a very basic level, to be successful at fishing you just need two things: you need to know where the fish are located and you need a strategy to catch those fish. These principles hold true for the Christian life as well. We need to find places where we can connect with other people and then we need to identify how we can strategically connect with those people so that we can invite them into a closer relationship with Jesus. Fishing for people might seem overwhelming or awkward, but that doesn't mean that it is impossible. If you don't know where to start, just remember that the best way to learn how to fish is by fishing! The more you talk with people about Jesus, the better you will get at it. Often times people are afraid to talk about Jesus because they are afraid of rejection. With this in mind, fishing for fish provides us with a helpful perspective. Even world class experts at fishing don't catch a fish every time they throw out their line. As followers of Jesus, we can't worry about the results. It isn't our job to make the "fish" follow Jesus, our job is to obey Jesus and extend the invitation.

**Application**

- Who was the fisherman (or woman) who invited you to become a follower of Jesus?
- What was it about them that gave them influence in your life?
- Can you think of a local "fishing hole" where you could connect with some people and talk with them about Jesus?
- How could you strategically bring up Jesus in a conversation with those people? (Remember, results aren't your responsibility they are up to God.)

## **DAY 8** ... *January 16, 2023*

### **Read Philippians 3:7-14, Matthew 13:44-46**

Paul had every earthly thing he could want before becoming a Christian. He was at the top of his social order, a well-educated scholar, and was known for being a very religious man among the Jews. Still, when Jesus called him, Paul left it all behind. He didn't just drop his old life—he fled from it. Paul considered everything apart from Christ to be worthless, and he embraced everything that came with following Jesus. For Paul, that meant persecution and hardships (read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 for a list of his hardships). But he didn't care; he wanted to know Christ, and was willing to endure anything for that goal.

Paul's attitude is reminiscent of the man in Jesus' parable who found treasure hidden in a field (in Matthew 13:44). Even though he had to sell all that he had in order to buy that field, Jesus says the man did so with great joy because he knew what he was about to receive was worth far more than what he had to sell. As you present Jesus to other people, do you tend to worry about what they might have to give up to become a Christian? If so, it is good to remember the example of Paul and the man in Jesus' parable. In the parable, no one told the man to do anything, no one made the man do anything, the value of the treasure compelled him to action. Jesus is a treasure so valuable that people have been sacrificing everything in order to have him. When you tell people about Jesus you aren't creating a burden for them, you are presenting the opportunity of a lifetime!

### **Application**

- Today, pray for an attitude like Paul's, that you would follow wherever Jesus leads, no matter how difficult your circumstances may become.
- If you are being completely honest, in your private moments of reflection, do you feel like being a follower of Jesus is a burden or something for which you are profoundly grateful?
- Is there anything that you need to sacrifice so that you can experience all that God has in mind for you?
- When you present Jesus to other people what should you remember about Jesus' parable from Matthew 13?

**DAY 9 ...** *January 17, 2023*

**Read Matthew 13:24-30**

When God created the universe, it was perfectly good. Eventually sin would appear, and when it did, it would be like weeds popping up and infesting a perfectly manicured garden. God could have destroyed the whole garden, but He didn't. One day He will bring judgment on the world in fire, but until that day His salvation plan reaches out to as many as possible. As you think about the problems in our world it can be easy to focus on all the weeds we see and have a sense of being overwhelmed by all the sin around us. In moments when we feel discouraged, we must remember that God has a plan and He is focused on the good harvest He is able to see.

Our God is patient and wants to allow as many people as possible to come into a relationship with Him. This does not mean that God overlooks wickedness, He is waiting for the Day of Judgment when He will look over humanity and determine which of us are citizens of His Kingdom, and which of us are rebels. This is why, as we engage with the world around us, we must remember they are not our enemies they are victims of the Enemy. It cost God's Son His very life in order that we could be spared destruction, so we must trust God's wisdom in waiting until the right time for the Day of Judgment.

**Application**

- Where do you stand with Jesus? Are you part of His Kingdom?
  
- When you get angry with the way people in our culture are rejecting Jesus, what are some practical ways you can remind yourself that God loves those people and sent his Son to die for them?
  
- Pray for people in your life who may not be ready for the Day of Judgment. Ask God to give you opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with them.

## **DAY 10** ... *January 18, 2023*

### **Read Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 12:37-38**

Many Christians have heard the phrase, "Blessed to be a blessing." This idea comes from verse three in our passage. In it we see God's strategy for reaching all the people of the world. God says, "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Originally, God shared these words with Abram (who became Abraham), but they certainly apply to us as well. God's plan for reaching the entire world is to bless us so deeply that others will look at our relationship with God and want it for themselves too!

One of the best examples of this dynamic is found in the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. In verse 38 the phrase "many other people" refers to non-Jews (primarily the Egyptians, but perhaps other non-Jewish people) joining the Jewish nation as they departed from Egypt. Why did these people want to go with the Jews to Canaan? The Bible doesn't explicitly tell us, but it stands to reason that after seeing the ten plagues, there were people in Egypt who came to realize that the God of Israel was powerful and was the one true God. The children of Israel didn't want to endure the oppression of pharaoh, but God worked in the midst of their suffering to bless the people in a way that made others want to follow their God too.

### **Application**

- As you think about your life can you think of a time when God blessed you (perhaps even in the midst of suffering like the Israelites experienced) and it caused other people to take notice?
  
- Can you think of a time when your own relationship with God was encouraged when you saw how God blessed someone else?
  
- You have been blessed, what might it look like for you to be a blessing?

**DAY 11 ...** *January 19, 2023*

**Read Matthew 25:14-30**

God has given each of us responsibilities in accordance with our abilities. In His love for us He asks us to do what we can, and that is all He calls us to. We will never be asked to do more than we are able or be tested beyond what we can bear. But God does know how He has gifted each of us, and we can be certain that if He asks us to do something, we are capable of it. When Jesus returns we will have to give account for how we used the gifts and abilities He gave us. How will He find us?

The servants in Jesus' parable were functioning as stewards for their master. They understood the money they were managing did not belong to them. God views us as stewards, too. He has given us our time, our abilities, and even our very life so that we can invest it for the sake of His kingdom. One of the ways we can invest the resources God has given us is through GO Time and blessing other people. When it comes to this area of your relationship with God, how are you investing the gifts that God has given to you? Are you using your time and influence for the advancement of His kingdom or your own kingdom?

**Application**

- How has God specially gifted you? What are some of the resources and abilities he has entrusted you to steward?
  
- What are ways that you believe He has called you to use those gifts to bless those around you?
  
- What can you do to remind yourself that your abilities and everything you own belong to God?
  
- How have the gifts God has given you been a blessing to other people in your life?

## DAY 12 ... January 20, 2023

### Read 1 John 5:10-13

God's salvation is assured to us through Jesus Christ. It is by His blood and work alone that we are saved. Continued rebellion in unbelief is the only act that could keep God's gift from being received. But for those who do believe in the name of Jesus Christ, we have the gift of life. This life is not only a rich relationship with God in this life, but an everlasting time with Him in the next. We are told that we should have confidence in our salvation; it will not be taken from us—it is a gift that will not be returned. Because of Christ, we are indisputably and forever God's chosen ones.

Our salvation is not based on the good things we do, but on what Jesus has done for us. In much the same way that a wedding ring does not make us married to another person, but is evidence we are married to them. Our good works are evidence of Jesus having saved us, not the reason He is going to save us. It is important for us to consider this pattern when we think about sharing Jesus with other people. God saved us *despite* our sinful past and He is still interested in saving other people. Have you ever made an assumption about another person's lack of interest in Jesus and held back from sharing the gospel with them? If our salvation was given to us by grace shouldn't we be willing to share that grace with others? Even if their lives would lead us to believe that they aren't interested in Jesus?

### Application

- Today, pray to God in thanks for how He has reconciled you to Himself.
- What does your salvation mean to you? Do you feel assured of that salvation?
- What are the implications of how God saved you for sharing the gospel with other people?
- We were saved even though we didn't "deserve" it. Are there people in your life you need to tell about Jesus even though they also don't "deserve" it?

**DAY 13 ...** *January 21, 2023*

### **Read 1 Chronicles 16:23-36**

When we think about telling other people about Jesus we often think about having a “plan” for sharing the gospel. Perhaps we will use the Bridge Illustration, the Romans Road or some other evangelistic strategy (if you aren’t familiar with these terms consider looking them up). Each of these techniques has their place and can be useful for sharing the gospel, and yet 1 Chronicles 16 reminds us that on some basic level our only responsibility is to declare the glory of God to others. We are simply pointing out what is obvious all around us! When we look at creation and how awesome it is, we can’t imagine that it just “happened” to come into existence. We intuitively know that there was a Creator behind everything and we marvel at all that we see around us.

From this perspective, evangelism isn’t about convincing someone of something, we are simply pointing out how inspiring our God is. In this sense, worship and praise is the greatest form of evangelism that exists. As people come to see who our God is and compare Him to the other “gods” of this world, they will see a difference. Through creation our God is making known how marvelous He truly is. Our God’s glorious creation is an invitation for everyone to humble themselves and acknowledge who the one true King is. When we take the lead in praising God for everything we see around us it can draw others to consider that our God deserves praise as well.

### **Application**

- When we consider the vastness of beauty of creation it causes us to naturally consider who is behind (created) all that we see. What are you particularly grateful for in our natural world?
- Why do you think there is a connection between our worship and others learning about Jesus?
- Can you think of a time where you shared with a non-Christian about something you are grateful God has done? What was the result of that interaction?
- Is there someone in your life right now who you need to talk to about the greatness of God?

## **DAY 14** ... *January 22, 2023*

### **Read James 1:2-8**

We are told in this passage that we are to have a joyous attitude even in the midst of many trials. But for what reason are we to “count it all as joy”? Because we know that these trials are used by God to refine and strengthen our faith. Character is molded through adversity, and perseverance is produced by pushing through misfortune. If this is true, then our prayers should not place the highest priority on requesting that God end our problems, but that He would teach us how to work through them in a way that produces righteousness.

In the Old Testament Joseph experienced a great deal of suffering as a result of his brothers mistreating him. As he endured these trials it would have been easy for Joseph to become bitter against not only his brothers, but also against God himself. Instead of becoming bitter, Joseph recognized that God was at work in his life and circumstances. He rose to a position of power in Egypt and when a famine broke out in the region he was able to save his entire family. When given the opportunity to destroy the lives of his brothers (he literally could have had them killed), he told them in Genesis 50:20, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” God didn’t cause the evil things to happen to us in our past, but He is able to redeem them so they can be used for good in our future.

### **Application**

- Today, ask God to show you how to embrace His peace and joy when circumstances become difficult. Pray that He will give you a heart that will be teachable in the difficult moments. Take a moment and think about some of the painful memories you have in your own life and ask God to show you how He was working in your life.
  
- Joseph’s testimony of God’s faithfulness in the midst of suffering brought his brothers into a closer relationship with God. Are there people in your life who might be encouraged by your testimony of God’s faithfulness in the midst of suffering?

**DAY 15 ...** *January 23, 2023*

**Read 1 Peter 4:12-19**

In the United States Christians are not being persecuted as they were in the early days of the church. It is unlikely that anyone would be arrested or executed now for their belief in Jesus Christ, but there are still difficulties associated with being a Christian. One is the resistance we receive from those around us. Jesus told us that it would be this way. In John 15:20 He said, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."

Peter experienced this sort of persecution in his own life; ultimately, he died because of his faith in Jesus (according to church history he was crucified upside down). As followers of Christ we are called to stand out in a dark world and act rightly no matter our circumstances. Sometimes this will result in being mocked for our values or scorned for holding beliefs in faith. Peter tells us not to be surprised when these moments of suffering come upon us. He then reminds us that when we are mistreated even in these little ways, we participate in the suffering of Christ and will also participate in His glory.

**Application**

- When you think about the persecution that Christians around the world are currently experiencing, how does their example inspire you?
  
- In your own life how important is Jesus to you? Is He worth being mocked for? Is He worth losing a friendship? Is He worth losing a job or experiencing financial hardship?
  
- Ask the Lord to give you boldness to share the gospel with others even if it might lead to you being persecuted or rejected.

## **DAY 16** ... *January 24, 2023*

### **Read Matthew 10:32-39**

Because Jesus is usually depicted as a loving, wise teacher we may forget that He is also the Master whom we serve. Forgetting that we are servants can lead to getting Christianity backwards; we start to believe that Jesus is here to serve and follow us and that our desires and goals are His desires and goals. Instead of viewing ourselves as His servants, we begin to view Jesus as our servant. We begin to believe that it is His job to answer all of our prayers and to make our lives easy. But the call of Christ is a call to submission—to give up our dreams to follow His will for our lives.

Being a Christian is about more than simply having the special “password” that gets us into heaven, it is about following Jesus and doing what He tells us to do. In John 14:21 Jesus said that we demonstrate our love for Him by obeying His commands. Are there any areas in your life where you have been rejecting his leadership in your life? Jesus invited us as His disciples to take up our cross daily and follow Him. Because the cross is an instrument of death, there are serious implications to this invitation. If we are going to follow Jesus it will require total devotion and commitment.

### **Application**

- Is there anything in your life that you have ‘held out’ from God? Anything that you know is your own goal but not Christ’s?
- What does it mean for him to be your Master and you to be His servant? Why is it so tempting to reverse things in that relationship?
- When it comes to talking with other people about Jesus are you hoping that someone else will do it?
- If you are Jesus’ servant and He has told you to share the good news with others why are you holding back? Ask God to help you in this area.

**DAY 17 ...** January 25, 2023

## **Read Psalm 42**

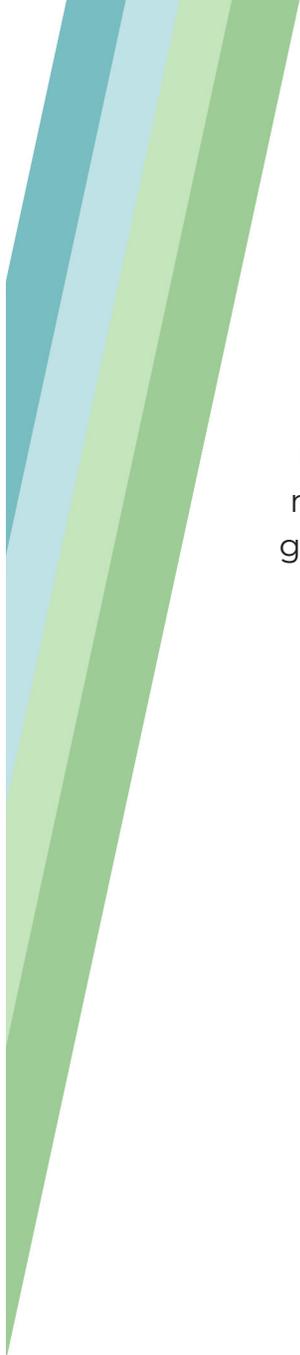
A legend is told about a young man who came to the great Greek philosopher Socrates. The man approached Socrates and casually said, "O great Socrates, I have come to you for knowledge." The philosopher told the young man he understood and then asked the young man to follow him as he walked to the sea. The young man didn't understand what Socrates was doing, but he followed him all the way to the edge of the sea and then eventually followed him into the water. Suddenly, Socrates grabbed the young man by the shoulders and dunked him under the water for 30 seconds. When he finally let the young man up for air, Socrates asked him to repeat what he wanted. "I want knowledge, O great one," he sputtered.

Socrates immediately dunked him under the water again, only this time he held him underwater a little longer. This process was repeated several times and each time Socrates would ask "What do you want?" and each time the young man would respond "I want knowledge." Finally, after this had gone on for some time, the philosopher once more asked, "What do you want?" The young man gasped, "Air. I want air!" "Good," answered Socrates. "Now, when you want knowledge as much as you wanted air, you shall have it."

This story reminds us of an attitude that exists throughout many American churches today. People claim that they want to grow in their faith, but they aren't particularly desperate to make the growth happen. This is why Psalm 42 is so important; it is a psalm about desperation. If your mental picture of the deer in Psalm 42 is a cute little Bambi like fawn casually taking a drink simply because he was a tad thirsty, you will miss the point of the psalm. In ancient Israel there were seasons when major sections of their land became overwhelmingly dry. A deer in one of those seasons would be drinking with urgency because they didn't know when their next drink would be.

### **Application**

- As you think about your life with God, how desperate are you to grow?
  
- We must be desperate for God like a drowning man is desperate for air. Most of us would say that we *should* grow, but how much do you really



*want* to grow? How dissatisfied are you with the current condition of your life? What would you be willing to do to get the kind of life with God that you want? How much do you really want God?

- The Bible is clear that God is available to each of us, but until we become desperate it is unlikely that we will ever truly mean what we read in verse 2, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

**DAY 18 ...** *January 26, 2023*

### **Read Acts 13:1-12**

Many Christians believe that so long as they are doing the things God wants them to do their lives will be comfortable and happy. The thinking goes that Christians only experience pain and suffering if they have disobeyed God and are outside of His will for their lives. This view of the world is challenged by our passage from Acts 13. After all, the Holy Spirit specifically designated Paul and Barnabas to go and share the gospel. These men were certainly in God's will and yet even though these men are doing exactly what God wants them to do, they experience resistance and persecution. How does this make sense?

Acts 13 reminds us that faithful followers of Jesus are not exempt from suffering. Opposition wasn't a sign that Paul and Barnabas had done something wrong, it was a sign that Satan was trying to keep them from doing the work God had commissioned them to do. Jesus never once sinned and yet much of his life was defined by persecution. If we believe that suffering is a sign that we have done something wrong, how do we explain Jesus' life and ministry? God's will for Paul and Barnabas took them into a place of struggle and in the midst of their difficulty God showed Himself to be faithful. In our own lives, we must be prepared to follow this example. Often times, when we experience heartache and challenges it isn't a sign that we have done something wrong, but instead that we are doing something right!

### **Application**

- In your own life, do you ever struggle with thinking that so long as you are doing what God wants things in your life will go well?
  
- What are some of the things that you take away from this story that speak to your own life?
  
- Are you prepared to experience opposition if you share Jesus with other people?

## **DAY 19** ... *January 27, 2023*

### **Read Mark 1:35-39**

Jesus is the single most significant human in all of history. No one else has had such a dramatic influence on individuals, groups, or nations. He is responsible for Christianity, the largest world religion, and He features in several others, such as Islam and Baha'i. His teachings have inspired generation after generation; His character is admired as the most honorable and moral of any person in history. Put simply, no one has ever been as important as Jesus.

And yet, Jesus was not one to bask in His own notoriety. He often went off into solitary places to be alone and pray. He wasn't driven by the agenda of the people, he was focused on pleasing his Father and spending time alone with him. Jesus' power for ministry came from the connection he had with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In this passage Jesus gives us an example to follow, instead of letting the needs of others (even the legitimate ones) determine our schedule, we must make spending time with our Father in heaven our priority.

### **Application**

- We are all called to do great things for God's Kingdom, no matter how small they may seem. But like Jesus, we must remember that we aren't going to get anywhere without our Father in heaven. What are some of the practical things you do spend time with your Heavenly Father?
  
- During this season of prayer and fasting is it possible for you to get alone with God the way Jesus did?
  
- Today, pray that God will remind you of his vital importance in your life, and show you how to further depend on his power.

## DAY 20 ... *January 28, 2023*

### Read 2 Peter 1:1-11

There is no other reason, basis, or cause for the Christian life than the work of Christ. It is by His power and His life that we are able to live a godly life. This godly life is referred to in the passage as “participation in the divine nature.” The divine nature is the essence of God. It is holiness. By our knowledge of His saving power, our corruption is washed away and we can follow after Christ to achieve holiness. But because our knowledge of Christ is so essential to our participation in His nature, it is vital that we truly do know Him.

People sometimes wear bracelets that say W.W.J.D.? What would Jesus do? This is a wonderful sentiment, but often it can be hard to know what Jesus would actually do in a given situation. Where would Jesus work? What kinds of food would Jesus eat? How often would Jesus exercise? Would Jesus ever go to the movies? How are we as Christians supposed to discern what Jesus would do in situations that are not directly answered in the Bible? Fortunately for us, we have been given the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16) through the Holy Spirit. This means that even when we face situations in the modern era that Jesus never faced (would Jesus buy a computer?), we actually have access to Jesus and He can tell us what He would do.

### Application

- It is easy to know of a person—everyone knows of the president or a famous movie star—but it is very difficult to actually get to know a person. What is your relationship with Jesus? Have you met Him? Have you gotten to know Him?
- Today, pray that Jesus will reveal Himself to you, that you would know Him as we know one another, not just impersonal information about Him.

## DAY 21 ... January 29, 2023

### Read 1 Peter 3:13-18

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." It is interesting that Peter assumes followers of Jesus will be approached and asked about the hope that they have. As Christians, our lives are supposed to impact other people in a positive way that leaves them wondering what makes us so different and how they can be more like us. Their questions about our behavior are a sign that we are doing something right.

Of course, there is a corollary to Peter's words in verse fifteen. If no one is asking us about the way we are living as Christians, we might be doing something wrong. This is why Go Time isn't something that is reserved for the most experienced and most educated Christians in our church. Go Time is for all of us! **We simply have to be aware of a need and be intentional to bring the love of Jesus into that environment.** Sometimes, we will have a chance to talk about Jesus in those situations, but more often than not we will let our actions do the talking. As Francis of Assisi, taught his followers, "Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words."

### Application

- Do you know of a person who is living out 1 Peter 3:15? What is about their life that would lead others to ask them about "the reason for the hope that you have"?
- How would you explain your "reason" for hope?
- Are there needs you are aware of where you could be intentional to bring the love of Jesus in that situation?

## FASTING APPENDIX

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

**Here are ten ways you & your family can participate in this fast:** *(Please note that if you have had any recent health problems or are taking medications, you should consult your doctor before participating in an extended fast.)*

1. All meals for 21 days
2. Two meals a day for 21 days
3. One meal a day for 21 days
4. All meals one day a week for 3 weeks
5. A Daniel Fast (Only eat nuts, grains, fruits, and vegetables for 21 days)
6. Television for 21 days
7. Coffee or caffeine for 21 days
8. Video games for 21 days
9. Social media for 21 days
10. Desserts, sweets, soft drinks, or chocolate for 21 days

### **If you choose to fast during these 21 days, here are some steps you should take to prepare you for your fast:**

- The week before you begin your fast you will want to gradually decrease the amount of caffeine, sugar, and processed foods you eat. Your body will actually go into withdrawal for those things during the first few days of the fast and it will be easier to manage if you have already begun to wean yourself off of them.
- Make sure you are drinking lots of water. Fasting has many wonderful health benefits, purifying us of the toxins that have accumulated in our bodies, but we need to be fully hydrated to realize the benefits of this.
- Most importantly set aside two or three goals you have for your fast. In addition to praying for God's direction and blessing for BRCC, what are you going to specifically pray for during this fast? Praying

over these goals on a daily basis (if not hourly) will be an incredible blessing to you during your fast.

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

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

- The first few days of your fast will be the most difficult. Our enemy will try to convince you that you can't do it and that your body is shutting down without food. Don't believe him! You will initially experience some difficult physiological and psychological symptoms as your body gets used to going without food, but remember they will get better as you continue your fast. Many men and women in our congregation have successfully completed extended fasts and you can do it too!
- Jesus said "man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." During your fast be sure to read from the Bible on a daily basis. It will encourage you and will feed your soul spiritually.
- Fasting is not just about avoiding food, it is about drawing near to God. Use the time you would have spent eating to spend time with God. (Whether this be in prayer, singing Christian songs or reading the Bible or a devotional book.)
- Consider taking the money that you would have spent on your food (approximately \$3.50 per meal) and set it aside to feed those in our community who are in need.



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