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A CALL TO DEEP DEVOTION: Prayer & Fasting



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"This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." Mark 5:29 (NKJV)

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A Call to Deep Devotion: Prayer and Fasting Guide

So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." Mark 9:29 (NKJV)

Why we are entering into a covenant of prayer and fasting

Throughout Biblical history, whenever something of significance was facing the people of God, whether a big decision, or some potential calamity, God's people, under divine direction, would proclaim a solemn assembly for prayer and fasting. It was a time that the people came together in one mind, one spirit, and as one body to seek the Lord's wisdom, guidance, and deliverance. It was a time when they realized that they must turn down their appetites, for food and other things, so that they could turn up their hearts to seek the Lord.

If there were ever a time that God's people need God's wisdom, guidance, and deliverance, it is certainly now. The COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic has impacted millions of people around the world, and caused deaths that have devastated hundreds of thousands of families right here in America. As of this publication, nearly 7,000 people in Michigan have died as a result of it, including the first child to die from COVID-19 in Michigan, Skylar Herbert, a five-year-old child from our Metropolitan Church of God congregation.

This pandemic has caused incredible devastation to our economy, with the effects felt throughout our cities across the State of Michigan. This unsettling pandemic has exposed the raw nerves and frustrations of many people, as the uncertainty of its spread and impact don't appear to have a short-term, foreseeable end. Our churches are in various states of in-person gathering and/or meeting in a virtual fashion. People in our congregations are in conflict among themselves and with their pastoral leadership about coming back together in person. There is confusion about how many people can gather, and how they can while practicing social distancing.

Because of the isolation, relationships are being strained within the homes, and those who are single are dealing with incredible loneliness. Depression is growing in our families, congregations, and with our pastoral leadership. The strain of this is spilling into our communities as sadly people have been attacked and even killed for simply asking someone to comply with wearing a mask to enter into stores or restaurants. The whole dynamic of schooling, both elementary and secondary, is in a state of total confusion, as institutions are struggling with how to provide education. This is causing strain, especially with those who work but have children of school age at home. People are actually faced with the prospect of quitting their jobs to deal with at-home schooling. Some school districts have even found themselves inadequately prepared to provide the materials that children need for online

learning. Our universities are struggling to deal with the fallout, and they are being devastated by growing numbers of students testing positive when they gather on campuses. This and more due to this pandemic.

If the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic were all that we were facing, it would be bad enough. We are faced with the daily barrage of protests across the country and around the world, largely precipitated by the unjust killings of African-Americans and people of Hispanic descent. People are facing off in protests and counter-protests, often armed with deadly weapons and passionate hatred and violence toward each other. Issues of race, including heated, often violent, arguments about racism and privilege expose pain and struggle that have existed in our culture for centuries. Cities, including several major cities, have experienced destruction and looting, as the angry protests continue to rage. People are lining up behind political lines, demonizing those who are opposed to their views of the protests and issues. Seemingly every day a new organization or group comes on the scene to stir up more unrest, while seeking to leverage the chaos of the situation for their cause. Political candidates, seeking to keep or grasp power in the highest offices of the land, are stoking the fires of anger and violence with their campaign rhetoric. More people are dying, including at the hands of the police in many cities, and protestors and counter-protestors are killing themselves and police. Police officers are being ambushed in several places. As with the pandemic, there seems to be no foreseeable short-term end in sight.

If the pandemic and the unrest in the culture were all that we were facing, it would be more than enough. On top of those issues, we are struggling through one of the most divisive political climates we have seen in decades. Much of it is impacted by the pandemic and the protests and violence due to racial divisions. Yet, we face, in just a few short weeks, a major election where the Presidency, one half of the Senate, the entire House of Representatives, several Governorships, and many state and local positions are being decided. Each of those contests are being impacted by the pandemic and the racial unrest, as well as political party platforms that are at odds with each other. They also are greatly impacted by the current economy, which has become a major issue, along with healthcare and education issues. This election will impact this country for decades to come, as we face the reality that whoever wins this Presidential election will impact the makeup of the Supreme Court for decades. This will affect issues for the church and the state in ways that will be society altering. This is causing great angst and anger in the culture on top of everything else. Whoever wins, the culture will be basically split down the middle, and who knows how that will play out over time.

Each of these issues individually is enough to generate a need for prayer and fasting. Yet, as I write this call to deep devotion, there are headlines that resonate in many of our hearts and minds, and certainly impact the Church of God from a larger perspective. 2020 has seen major weather and climate-impact events that regardless of your position on climate change, certainly are overwhelming. Michigan has largely been spared from disastrous storms, like the hurricanes that have devastated much of the deep south. We have, however, seen heavy rains cause two major dams to burst, flooding several areas in the greater-Midland area, leading to incredible damage to communities like Sanford. Wildfires, out of control and growing worse from dry conditions and high winds, are literally destroying millions of acres and thousands of homes, wilderness areas, and burning down whole communities. Thousands

of people have lost everything but their lives, and the death toll is unknown in many areas due to the inaccessibility of those areas. Still reeling from Hurricane Laura in the Gulf of Mexico, the people in some of our southern states are bracing for the impact of Hurricane Sally. The bottom line in all of this is that there is trouble on every hand.

With all of this going on, what should be the response of the Church, in particular the Church of God? How should the Church of God in Michigan respond? Our response to much of this has been mixed, and in some cases very constructive and faithful. In some cases, the responses have been not as constructive and faithful. There is a great need for a press towards unity and for us to earnestly, and in one accord, seek the Lord for His divine intervention. I am convinced that the division, destruction, deception, disease, and darkness of the culture indicate a demonic influence at work. The depth of these things indicate that this influence has been operating for a long time in various ways, and the symptoms are revealing a deep disease of sin. The challenge to us is much like what King David dealt with in Psalm 11:3 (NKJV), when he posed a powerfully challenging question, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” His faithful answer came forth in the following verses, when he reminded God’s people that God is still on His throne. He tests the righteous and brings destruction on the wicked. He loves the righteous and favors us with His countenance.

Jesus lets us know We can fast and pray, because there are some demonic influences that will only come out through prayer and fasting. Thus, I am calling the Church of God in Michigan, and anyone else who wants to join us, to a deep devotion of prayer and fasting. This Call to Deep Devotion will be a 40 Day call to prayer and fasting that hopefully will unite us deeper in Christ as we seek God’s power to break the grip of the enemy on our culture and the church. The target is to see God’s powerful hand and outstretched arm deliver us from the enemy, and bring **revival** in the church and in this culture like never before.

The Structure of the Fasting Covenant

The fast will begin on Monday, September 21, at 12:00 Noon, and be in effect until Friday, October 30, at Noon. The fast will involve several parts. I am asking everyone who is willing to participate in as much of the overall fast as possible. This is a very serious commitment that I am asking you to make, I know, but the issues that we are seeking the Lord’s help with are very serious and threatening. The components of the fast are as follows:

1. For those who are able, and who feel led, a 40-Day, 21-Day, 7-Day, 3-Day, or 1-Day per week fast from solid food. If you have a medical condition or take medication which requires food, please don’t attempt to fast completely from solid food without consulting your physician about it. When you fast, please drink plenty of water.
2. A schedule for 1-Day per week fasting will be provided based upon the first letter of your last name.
3. A purification fast, involving a complete dietary change, based on the Daniel Fast. The details will be given below.
4. A fasting of certain activities at least one day per week, to coincide with the above-mentioned day of complete fasting.
5. For those who cannot fast from food, I am asking that you fast from TV and social media for that day, or longer.

The Benefits of Fasting

The spiritual discipline of fasting is a gift from God to us. It was a discipline that was practiced regularly by the people of God, and by the Lord Jesus Christ. When He was about to begin His earthly ministry, knowing the seriousness of His mission, He went into the wilderness and fasted and prayed for 40 days and 40 nights. Even Jesus needed the communion with the Heavenly Father that only comes when we are willing to deny our flesh and tune our spirit to the voice of God. Fasting will take your attention off of you and put it squarely on the Lord. It will put you in touch with who you really are, and who God really is. It will help you to realize that indeed, as Christ told the Devil, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that flows from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4.

Fasting has many benefits for the healing and strengthening of the mind, body, and spirit. Fasting will clear the thought processes, because it will restore the equilibrium in your body, and improve circulation to the brain. Fasting, combined with proper diet, exercise, and rest, has a tremendous healing effect on the body, the mind, and the soul. It will sensitize you to hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking clearly to you through the Word of God. Fasting also communicates to God how serious you are about what you are seeking. If we are willing to deny ourselves from food, to change our bad habits, to refrain from certain activities for a period of time, God will respond to our faithfulness. Too many illustrations from the Lord’s word demonstrate how fasting and prayer work to affect the deliverance of God. Our lives, our families, our church, our neighborhoods, our city, and our nation need the mighty hand and the outstretched arm of the Lord.

The Complete Fast

LAST NAME	DAY
A - F	MONDAY
G - K	TUESDAY
L - P	WEDNESDAY
R - V	THURSDAY
W - Z	FRIDAY

According to the above schedule, we are asking that you perform a complete solid food fast on the day that corresponds to the first letter of your last name. Our objective with the fasting and prayer is to have as much round the clock coverage as possible. On this schedule, Saturdays and Sundays are purposely omitted as days of fasting. Please use these days to come together as a family. Have a nice meal, fellowship together, play board games, have a Bible study. Whatever you do, endeavor to do it as a family.

The complete fast is to include all solid foods. All beverages are acceptable, except soda pop and sweetened teas. Try to drink distilled and/or purified water, which will help your body flush out the toxins that will be released into your system that have been stored up in your cells. Again, if you have a medical condition, like diabetes, please do not attempt to fast completely without the advice of your physician. If you cannot fast completely, please substitute some act of service above your normal service to God.

The Purification Fast

Many of us don't realize that we are eating ourselves into disease and premature death by the foods and drinks that we put into our bodies. God, in His infinite wisdom, put on earth the foods and drink that we are to consume that will allow the body to grow, to function, to fight disease, and to age properly. It is clearly spelled out in **(Genesis 1:29 NASB) Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you."** On this diet of raw fruit and vegetables, with help from the tree of life, man was set to live forever in perfect health. Sin messed all of that up, and we no longer have access to the tree of life. Even without that access, however, Adam, and the succeeding six generations all lived over 900 years of age, and there is no record of them developing sickness. Why, because they ate raw fruit and vegetables, they extended themselves in physical activity, and they rested properly.

God shortened this life span to 120 years, because of the wickedness in the heart of man. But even in this, it was not God's design that we should be sick. Man started to do two things after the flood, cook food and eat animal flesh. By the end of the next seven generations, the life span went from over 900 years to about 120 years. Even then, there were not many cases of disease and sickness, because they still ate a lot of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes. These things, especially raw fruit and vegetables were the food that God made for our bodies to consume, to get proper nutrition and to ward off illness and disease. He gave us this wonderfully, and fearfully made body, with an immune system to ward off every virus and bacteria that there is out there, but only if we give it the fuel that it needs to function.

Many of the diseases that affect the body of Christ today, heart disease, coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, strokes, diabetes, glaucoma, cancer, and others have their root cause in what we eat. Many of the foods that we consider good, foods that we grew up loving, are only good in the mouth and deadly in the cells, the bloodstream, and the vital organs of the body. This purification fast is designed to help you eliminate from your diet, for the next 40 days, those harmful foods. We are asking that you covenant with us to try it for, to see if you will indeed feel better than you have for years. Your body needs vitamins, minerals, Phyto-nutrients, and enzymes to function properly. It will be an adjustment, and a sacrifice, but is good health and deliverance from affliction worth some sacrifice? We are asking that during this 40 day fast you eliminate, or drastically reduce, the following food groups:

1. Red Meats (Eliminate or drastically reduce beef and pork)
2. Ice cream, frozen yogurt (Ouch, I know!!!)
3. Any processed sugar (white or brown) or foods with processed sugar
4. Any white flour or processed foods with enriched flour
5. Any added salt or processed foods with high sodium content
6. Any sweetened beverage, except Gatorade, Vitamin Water, etc. that can help with vitamin and electrolytes
7. Any "junk" foods, like cookies, chips, pies, cakes, candy, etc.

We are asking you to eat heartily of all the raw vegetables and fruits that you want. Please attempt to make at least 50% of your diet raw fruit and vegetables, with more emphasis on the vegetables. If you are diabetic, please be very careful to make your concentration in vegetables, because fruit does contain a lot of natural sugar. Please take care in adding some cooked foods, like whole wheat or vegetable pastas, natural rice or cauliflower rice, sweet potatoes, squash, and white and yellow potatoes, and lean cuts of meat and fish. Please use fresh ingredients, not processed foods. Processed foods contain things like preservatives, partially hydrogenated oils, and other animal by products, all of which are harmful to the body, and defeat the purpose of the purification fast. Please be creative with salads and fruit dishes. Another critical part of the purification fast is water. Please drink at least 8 glasses of distilled or purified water a day (provided there are no medical conditions regulating the intake of fluids, like congestive heart failure). With this, please seek your physician's advice on how much water to drink.). It is very helpful to drink distilled or purified water if available. You want to avoid the micro bacteria and chemicals that can cause great harm to the body over time from tap and well water.

We are asking that you eat from the following food areas:

1. Chicken, turkey, and fish (not shellfish like shrimp, crab, or lobster)
2. Dark green leafy lettuces (no iceberg) and vegetables, like romaine, green leaf lettuce, red leaf lettuce, Boston Bibb lettuce, escarole, radicchio, spinach, greens, endive, etc. Please eat these raw. Cooking these above 118 degrees changes the composition of the vitamins, minerals, and enzymes, limiting their effectiveness.
3. Any vegetable, such as, peppers, carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, celery, eggplant, onions, mushrooms, cabbage, green beans, peas, corn, turnips, etc. The more of these you eat raw the better.
4. Any fruit, such as, apples, pears, peaches, plums, dates and figs (no sulfites), raisins, prunes, star fruit, kiwi, melons, bananas, grapes, pineapple, etc.
5. Cook whole wheat pasta, natural rice and/or cauliflower rice, potatoes, yams, whole grain breads, be sparing with oils, butter, and eggs. Feel free to eat nuts of all kinds, and air popped popcorn without loading it up with butter and salt.
6. Please feel free to use honey, in moderation, mustard, lemon juice, vinegar and olive oil, in moderation for salad dressing. Please cut down on using store bought salad dressings. Make your own, without the partially hydrogenated oils and preservatives. Use herbs and spices for flavoring. Do not use salt or processed sugar. You may use (natural brown or Turbinado, and other low-carb sweeteners like Monk Fruit) in moderation.
7. Please drink at least 64 ounces of distilled or purified water (unless advised not to by your doctor). Feel free to drink any natural fruit or vegetable juice, but be mindful of the sugar (carbohydrate count in them). Feel free to drink teas without sugar and coffee.

If you are in doubt about a food item, please refer to the above listing of foods not to eat. If what you are checking on doesn't fit into any of those categories, please feel free to eat of it.

It is also suggested that you engage in some form of moderate exercise like walking, stretching, etc. Please consult your physician, however, before beginning an exercise program.

The Fast from Selected Activities

During the day of your complete fast, we are asking that you limit your intake of TV and social media sites, phone games, and internet surfing unless job-related. Instead, spend this time in prayer and devotion. Attitude and focus are crucial during fasting and prayer times. We need to give our souls, our minds, and our bodies a break from the world and its ways.

Fasting, whether from food or activities, requires sacrifice and commitment. It is never easy, and the moment we purpose in our hearts to do it, the enemy is right there to put all the reasons in our heads why we can't. If we peel back the layers of this onion skin, we will find that our reasons are more excuses than reasons. We must always stand firm on the promise of God that greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world. You are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you (Romans 8). The Lord is calling for His people to push away from old habits, to push away from the desires of the flesh, to deny our cravings and focus ourselves on Him, body, mind, and spirit. This will position us squarely in His will to experience the Lordship of Christ in our lives, and to affect His glory in our culture for revival. To experience His Lordship means submission to His will. This cannot be done unless we are willing to replace our will with His will. It requires a giving of yourself, not grudgingly, but joyfully. God loves a cheerful giver.

The Structure of the Prayer Covenant

Just as the covenant to fast starts on Monday, September 21, and runs through Friday, October 30, so does the prayer covenant. We are asking that you dedicate yourself to prayer daily, diligently, and delightfully. Our intent with this covenant of prayer and fasting is to allow us to be surrendered, individually and collectively, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. It is also to see the Lord honor our fast and sabbath devotion as He promised in Isaiah 58, when He shared through the Prophet the kind of fast that gets His attention. As such, we are asking for you to pray earnestly for some very specific things. We are asking God to breakdown strongholds. We are asking God to mend up relationships in our families, in our communities and country, and in the church. We are asking God to bring the powerful gifts of healing back into the church, so that our churches become God's healing station here on earth. The healing is not just physical, but in every area of our lives. We want God to remove sickness and disease from families and community, with a very specific focus on the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic and the feared Flu Season coming soon. We want to see power over cancer, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and other sicknesses in our families, churches, and communities. We are asking God to deliver our loved ones who don't know Christ as Savior and Lord. These are in addition to your normal prayer requests. We are asking you to make a very strong effort to pray daily and powerfully. Our hope is that you will begin to dedicate yourselves to prayer at all times. Earnestly entreat the Lord for His delivering power, His mighty hand, and His outstretched arm to intervene with power from on high. Prayer doesn't always have to be the formal, cold prayers that we often hear recited out of habit. Take time to talk with God from the depths of your heart. Share with Him yourself, just as you are. Share with Him your desires, and allow Him to transform you and your desires into His loving and perfect will.

The Areas of Covenant Prayer

As you enter into your prayers, whether in the morning or another part of the day, try starting with a praise song or hymn unto the Lord. Lift up His name in praise, to experience the movement of the Holy Spirit in covenant with you in prayer.

Throughout the 40 Days of this Call to Deep Devotion, there will be many types of prayers provided. I hope that you will pray them in addition to your normal prayers. As we each focus on them daily, it will help to unite us and lift up a concerted effort to the Lord for our fast to be heard on high. There will be several prayers of confession, praise, thanksgiving, and petition provided, along with devotional materials. As we progress through the later parts of the call, there will be specific devotions and prayers focused on the areas of Isaiah 58 that the Lord God revealed get His attention with our fast.

Pray for whatever petition the Lord lays on your heart through the day. Pray specifically for each person that comes to your mind, and each situation that you become aware of during your day.

End each day with thanks and praise to God. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Spend some time thanking and praising Him for His Kingdom, His Power, and His Glory. Before you drift off to sleep, ask Him to even inhabit your dreams and give you songs in the night.

Summary

Prayer is the glue that holds our lives together in covenant with God. While fasting lets God know that we are serious enough to deny our flesh, prayer lets God know we acknowledge that our only help and hope comes from Him. It is our way of saying to God that if He doesn't answer our prayers, in whatever way He sees fit, that they just won't get answered. It is an affirmation of complete trust in and love for the Lord. It is our petitions to Him and our waiting upon Him for the answers to our petitions. It is communion with Him, heart to heart. It is vital to us and our relationship with God. It is so vital that we are told that when we don't know how to pray as we should that the Holy Spirit helps us and prays for us, with groaning that we don't understand, but God does. We must make time for prayer. We need desperately to come together in this covenant of prayer, if we want God to bless us with His delivering power. Our churches, our families, our cities, country, and our culture earnestly need us to pray and to fast for the Lord to intervene. Revivals have sprung up because people fasted and prayed. We are looking for a great revival in the church. It can start right here with us. Please covenant with us, and God, to pray this revival down from heaven? We cannot do it without you. We must be unified in this endeavor. If we believe that our health is worth fighting for, if we believe that our families are worth fighting for, if we believe that our church is worth fighting for, if we believe that the kingdom is worth fighting for, let us then **PRAY** and **FAST** as if lives depended on it, because they do!!!

Focus Scriptures (Please read these focus scriptures each day)

(Isaiah 58 NASB)

¹"Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their transgression, And to the house of Jacob their sins. ² "Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness, and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God. ³ 'Why have we fasted and Thou dost not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and Thou dost not notice?' Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, and drive hard all your workers. ⁴ "Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high. ⁵ "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed, and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD? ⁶ "Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? ⁷ "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ "Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ "Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ And if you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday. ¹¹ "And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. ¹² "And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell. ¹³ "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word, ¹⁴ Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

(2 Chronicles 7:12-14 NASB)

¹² Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. ¹³ "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Daily Devotionals

Day 1: (Devotional Provided by Rev. Kevin Spencer, Pastor, First Church of God, Monroe, MI)

A Spiritual Refreshing, Psalm 23

From time to time everyone needs spiritual refreshing. A time of fasting and prayer to revitalize us, stabilize us, and replenish our weary souls, especially in the time and seasons we are challenged with. The hustle and bustle of life and the demands that are placed on us are uniquely different for everyone, but the Psalmist David reminds us how truly important fasting and prayer really is. The poetry of the Psalms is filled with encouraging memoirs and through the good, bad and indifferent times and challenges that David faced, he knew where to find rest and solitude. David wrote in Psalm 23 that it is God that leads us into safe places of restoration for HIS name sake. David knew that even in the darkest of days that God's Comfort was always available. David found the only place where his table would be full, God's anointing would be upon him, and his cup would be replenished, where goodness and mercy are his companions for life. God's word is filled with many examples and reasons why Fasting and Prayer are essential. I pray that you find the Spiritual Disciplines of fasting and prayer invigorating, enriching, and refreshing. Are the Spiritual Disciplines of fasting and prayer essential in your life? Do you intentionally seek a time of Spiritual Refreshing?

Matthew 6:33 “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

2 Peter 3:18 “...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”

(Please read the Focus Scriptures today, and pray for God's invigoration, enriching, and refreshing in every part of your life)

Day 2: (Devotional Provided by Rev. Dr. David Aukerman, Pastor, Mt. Haley Church of God, Midland, MI)

Fasting, Foster, and Facebook

“It is sobering to realize that the very first statement Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive (Matt. 6:16-18). To use good things to our own ends is always the sign of false religion. How easy it is to take something like fasting and try to use it to get God to do what we want. At times there is such stress upon the blessings and benefits of fasting that we would be tempted to believe that with a little fast we could have the world, including God, eating out of our hands. Fasting must forever center on God.” (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, revised edition 1989)

Fasting is a discipline that reveals the deep interconnectedness of body and spirit. Richard Foster's chapter on fasting in *Celebration of Discipline* drives home this point repeatedly. Abstaining from food for a period of time is, on the face of things, a physical activity (or non-activity). But the ways in which our spirits are intertwined with our bodies are numerous and often invisible, and fasting begins to reveal and to loosen those entangling tendrils.

At the end of this chapter, Foster gives five suggestions for fasting from things other than food:

1. Fast from people: let us not “just devour people” but learn to be content in solitude.
2. Fast from the media: let us eliminate “enough distractions for a long enough period of time to concentrate.”
3. Fast from the telephone: let us not be obligated “to answer that gadget every time it rings.”
4. Fast from billboards: let us replace the temptation to get “more, more, more” with the call to become “less, less, less”
5. Fast from our gluttonous consumer culture that we find so comfortable: “we need times when we go among Christ’s favorites – the broken, the bruised, the dispossessed – not to preach to them but to learn from them.”

Confession time: I have a problem with Facebook. In the midst of my computer work – writing sermons, communicating via email, reading news articles, doing research – I often find myself opening a new browser tab and checking Facebook to see what new things are going on in people’s lives. I find it very easy to lose myself by scrolling through that endless supply of stories, images, videos, memes, and opinions. The most dangerous effect of this habit is that it breaks my concentration. My physical ability to sit with a project or a train of thought is hampered because of this internal urge to refresh my Facebook news feed. I know that my attention span is much shorter now than before social media became part of my life. Perhaps a fast from checking Facebook in the middle of the day is in order for me. What’s amazing to me is that all five of Foster’s suggestions speak directly to the social media phenomenon which developed decades after he wrote those words. What is your relationship to social media? How does that reveal the connection between your body and spirit? Does one of Foster’s five suggestions strike you more deeply than the others? What might God be communicating to you? (Please read the focus scriptures today and pray for the Lord to strengthen you to be a good steward of your time, your mind and heart, and your expressions)

Day 3: (*Devotional Provided by Rev. Dr. David Aukerman, Pastor, Mt. Haley Church of God, Midland, MI*)

Praying while Walking a Labyrinth

One of my favorite spiritual practices is walking a labyrinth. A few years ago, I discovered that an Episcopal church in our city has an outdoor labyrinth which is open to the public. I have made many trips to that spot in order to slow down, empty my mind, and encounter God in prayer. “Labyrinths seem to have developed around the twelfth century as a substitute for making a pilgrimage to a holy site.” (Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, revised edition 2015) This historical Christian practice connects our bodies and our spirits as we move slowly through the labyrinth.

A labyrinth is not a maze, although it contains many twists and turns. There is only one path in a labyrinth: only one entrance and only one exit. It is impossible to get lost in a labyrinth. But in reality, “getting lost” is kind of the point. When I enter the labyrinth at our neighboring Episcopal church, I set aside all the concerns, stresses, and worries that I brought with me. I take slow, deliberate steps. I try to focus my mind and heart on the Lord. When other thoughts creep into my attention, I acknowledge them and then release them. Sometimes I will choose a focusing thought on which to keep my attention centered, such as “your kingdom come” or “your grace is sufficient.” Sometimes I will pray the Lord’s Prayer

while I walk. Gradually, over time, the labyrinth teaches me how to keep my mind and body focused on one goal: experiencing the presence of God while moving forward, one step at a time.

The brilliance of the labyrinth is that each step draws me a few feet closer to the center of the design, but it doesn't always feel that way. Sometimes the path leads me very close to the center, but then it turns another direction and leads me to the outside edges of the labyrinth. In those moments, walking the labyrinth feels like an exercise in futility, because it would be easier just to step across the path's boundary into the center, where a bench awaits me to sit and rest and pray. But the path is long, winding, and circuitous. The way is not always direct, at least to my understanding. When I walk the labyrinth, I am practicing "getting lost" with both my body and my spirit. I lose my sense of direction by turning frequently and walking in circles. And I lose my preoccupation with the cares and concerns of the day.

Every time, I am reminded that God is present with me in the midst of my wandering. God joins me on the path; God meets me at the center; God accompanies me on the way back to the "real" world. Walking a labyrinth is a beautiful, peaceful, embodied form of prayer. You can find a labyrinth in your vicinity by visiting labyrinthlocator.com. Or, if a life-sized labyrinth is not available near you, you can visit <https://www.labyrinthsociety.org/download-a-labyrinth> for a number of virtual or printable options. (Please read the Focus Scriptures today and pray for the peace of God to pour over, in, through, and around your life)

Day 4: (Devotional Provided by Rev. Leo Robinson II, Pastor, Good Church, Flint, MI)

#ToyStore 1 John 2:15-17

It's interesting how when I take my kids to the toy store that they are overly excited before we even get inside. They run inside the store and play with everything they can reach. My daughter plays with the new princess doll that accompanies the new princess movie. My son, on the other hand, plays with everything that's not pink. It's very cool to see their faces as they play with all of the toys. As a father, I am happy because they are happy. As the time goes by way too quickly and it's time to leave, their joy quickly becomes depression. Their happiness turns into sadness. I turn from the greatest father to the evil man who is forcing them to leave toy paradise. I have to remind them of what I said before we ever entered the toy store-they can only pick one toy, and we were not going to stay all day. Even though they both have one new toy, they are still sad. Their emotions are based off what they are leaving behind.

Deeper:

I believe we enter this world with the same mind as a child going into a toy store. We try to have fun with everything we can touch. We try to go up and down the aisles of life while living life recklessly. We are surrounded by "toys." We become permanently attached to temporary things. Many people will choose to stay inside the toy store, while a few will choose to go with the Father. My children eventually follow me, and they quickly get over what they left behind. They know that I care more about them than the strangers in the toy store. They know I love them more than that princess doll or the power ranger.

Don't be distracted with the things that you can't take with you when you leave this world. Don't choose the Toy Store over your HOME. This life is temporary!! Don't get depressed

about the things you are giving up. Don't get sad about the things being left behind. Your Father loves you, and He has prepared a better place for you. #ToyStore

What are some things that are still hard to let go of? Also, identify those things that you thought you left behind but they seem to have resurfaced. Don't make permanent decisions on temporary circumstances. (Please read the Focus Scriptures Today and ask the Lord to help you hold on to what is precious cargo in our life and the strength to let go of those things that are hard to let go but don't help you or anyone else around you)

Day 5: (Devotional Provided by Rev. Leo Robinson II, Pastor, Good Church, Flint, MI)

#RunThroughTheFinishLine 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

I know it's hard to believe, but I was on the track team. Believe it or not, I threw the shot put and discus. I would often overhear my coach yell, "RUN THROUGH THE FINISH LINE" to the runners. He would notice them slowing down right before the finish line. He warned them that they could create a bad habit of quitting before they finished. The idea that still sticks with me is how passionately he explained that the last few steps could cost you the entire race.

Deeper:

How many times do we start projects or classes stronger than when we finish them, if we even bother to finish them? I had a bad habit of starting projects but not finishing them. I had a bad habit of finishing things weaker than I started them. I would probably be much further ahead in some areas of my life if only I would have applied those golden words of my coach, "RUN THROUGH THE FINISH LINE."

We all need to apply this concept daily. What if we ran through the finish line each day? What if we ended this life by running through the FINISH LINE? What if we increased in strength instead of becoming weaker? Can you imagine what your day would look like if you gave it your all? Can you imagine what your relationships would like if you ran with passion to end strong? Can you imagine the members of your church watching you run with a passion to complete something greater than you started? If I told you that our spiritual COACH stands at the end of the track yelling at us, "RUN THROUGH THE FINISH LINE"? Not only is HE waiting for us, but also, HE is RUNNING with us. So, let's get together and #RUNTHROUGHTHE FINISHLINE. Whatever you do, do it unto the KING! (Please read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Day 6: (Devotional Provided by Min. Sharon Richardson)

Isaiah 58:1 (NKJV) "Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

Now is a good time to fast. There are millions crying out in anguish in our nation due to unjust killings, wildfires, hurricanes, flooding, protesting, looting, Covid-19 Coronavirus, unemployment, company closures, and the upcoming elections. These issues are constantly being videoed, televised, twittered, and visualized in the news and social media. Many voices are being raised. Now is a good time for the Church of God to be a voice crying out against our transgressions as God's people and for the sins of our nation. At one time the USA was

considered a Christian nation, but that is no longer true in today's corrupt society. Our nation and the church today need a prophet that will be light and salt in this dark, bland culture. Since the church is the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16 NKJV), we must lead the way by acknowledging and repenting of our sins/transgressions. The time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17 NKJV) We the Church must be held accountable for our sins of commission and omission - our transgressions which is the cause of our light becoming dim and our salt becoming tasteless, in fact mostly useless. We must be the voice of Truth and we must speak up for justice. We must rescue the perishing and intercede for our nation.

Prayer: We are in anguish for sinning and falling short of your glory. We cry aloud to You for mercy. We pray that your Holy Spirit will give us godly sorrow for our transgressions and Your Word be a light within us to expose the sin and darkness in our own hearts. Deliver us for denying or justifying the sin The Word and your prophets reveal within us. Help us to remove the plank that is in our eyes so we can then see clearly to address, in love, our brothers and sisters sin issues. Help us to confess our sins one to another and pray for one another (James 5:16). Forgive our sins then please give us opportunities to lift our voices as the Body of Christ like a trumpet and call out sin within ourselves, among ourselves and the sins of our nation so that we will live as your Holy people and serve you with power through the fruit of the Spirit. Amen. (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Day 7: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Confession Prayer 1: Confession Prayer: Precious Heavenly Father, I fall before You in humble submission, today, acknowledging Your awesome perfection, and my frail humanity. I thank You for the victory over sin and the grave that was given to me by grace, as I have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Dear God, I confess my limitations to You, however, as I endeavor to live holy before You today. Lord, I specifically confess my faults to You today: Weaknesses, Personality Quirks, Bad Attitudes, Personal Agendas, Bad Habits:

Through this confession, Lord, I pray for Your forgiveness, Your cleansing of my fleshly nature through the Holy Spirit to live in victory through walking in the Spirit today. Please strengthen me not to fall into any of these tricks and traps of the enemy today. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray, Amen!

Day 8: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Confession Prayer 2: Precious Heavenly Father, I fall before You in humble submission, today, acknowledging Your awesome perfection, and my frail humanity. I thank You for the victory over sin and the grave that was given to me by grace, as I have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Dear God, I confess my limitations to You, however, as I

endeavor to live holy before You today. Lord, I confess my failures to You today: Sins of Commission: (Things that I did that I know are sinful), Sins of Omission: (Things that I didn't do that I know I should have):

Through this confession, Lord, I pray for Your forgiveness, Your cleansing of my fleshly nature through the Holy Spirit, to live in victory through walking in the Spirit today. Please strengthen me not to fall into any of these tricks and traps of the enemy today. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray, Amen!

Day 9: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Confession Prayer 3: Precious Heavenly Father, I fall before You in humble submission, today, acknowledging Your awesome perfection, and my frail humanity. I thank You for the victory over sin and the grave that was given to me by grace, as I have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Dear God, I confess my limitations to You, however, as I endeavor to live holy before You today. Lord, I confess my fears to You today: About situations, circumstances, loved ones I haven't fully entrusted to You, uncertainties, doubts, prejudices, the future:

Through this confession, Lord, I pray for Your forgiveness, Your cleansing of my fleshly nature through the Holy Spirit, to live in victory through walking in the Spirit today. Please strengthen me not to fall into any of these tricks and traps of the enemy today. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray, Amen!

Day 10: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Confession Prayer 4: Precious Heavenly Father, I fall before You in humble submission, today, acknowledging Your awesome perfection, and my frail humanity. I thank You for the victory over sin and the grave that was given to me by grace, as I have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Dear God, I confess my limitations to You, however, as I endeavor to live holy before You today. Lord, I confess my frustrations to You today: The feelings I have about the culture situations going on, the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic, the election season, etc.

Through this confession, Lord, I pray for Your forgiveness, Your cleansing of my fleshly nature through the Holy Spirit, to live in victory through walking in the Spirit today. Please strengthen me not to fall into any of these tricks and traps of the enemy today. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray, Amen!

Day 11: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Confession Prayer 5: Precious Heavenly Father, I fall before You in humble submission, today, acknowledging Your awesome perfection, and my frail humanity. I thank You for the victory over sin and the grave that was given to me by grace, as I have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Dear God, I confess my limitations to You, however, as I endeavor to live holy before You today. Lord, I confess my foolishness to You today: Things I've done without Your Spirit's leading, or Misunderstanding / mishandling the Word of God:

Through this confession, Lord, I pray for Your forgiveness, Your cleansing of my fleshly nature through the Holy Spirit, to live in victory through walking in the Spirit today. Please strengthen me not to fall into any of these tricks and traps of the enemy today.

Lord, I confess my total faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of my life today, and I boldly, and deliberately put on the whole armor of God. I put on the girdle of truth, confessing that Jesus is the truth. I put on the breastplate of righteousness, confessing that Jesus is my righteousness. I shod my feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, confessing that Jesus is the Gospel and the Prince of Peace. I take up the shield of faith with which I quench the fiery darts of the enemy, confession that Jesus is the author and the finisher of my faith. I wield the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, confessing that Jesus, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us, and now I behold His glory in my new life. I put on the helmet of salvation, confessing that Jesus is my Savior through His precious blood. Please accept my prayers of confession, and shape me, Lord, indeed mold me, today, more in the image of Your Son, Jesus Christ. It is in that mighty name, Jesus Christ, that I pray, Amen.

Day 12 (*Devotional Provided by Minister Sharon Richardson*)

Isaiah 58:2a *“Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;”* (NRSV)

Most Christians have some kind of daily devotion, but sometimes our daily devotions are half-hearted and our prayers ritualistic. We delight to know God's ways. But do we truly practice righteousness and truly forsake not the ordinance of our God? We desire to practice righteousness, but while striving to achieve our own righteousness we may become self-righteous. Isaiah 64:6 says that our righteousness is like filthy rags in God's Holy sight. As we venture through this season of prayer and fasting, let us fast from our self-righteous attitudes. We have no authority to judge others (James 4:11, 12). Only God knows the hearts of those we are tempted to judge and HE knows our hearts too! He knows whether we truly delight in Him or not. We should cry out to God as Isaiah did in 64:8 “But now O Lord you are our Father; we are the clay and you our potter and we are the works of your hand.” God alone can make us righteous and help us practice righteousness.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Since God has called us to be ambassadors for Christ, our ministry should be reconciling others to God (2 Corinthians 5:20) and teaching them His ordinances while we work towards peace and unity. One of God's ordinances is very pertinent for the upcoming elections. Romans 13:1-2 (NKJV) tells God's people to let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the *ordinance* of God and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. Saints, let's not forsake this particular ordinance as we exercise our right to vote. No matter who is elected, we are to pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1, 2) and practice righteousness, forsaking not the ordinance of God. After all, God IS in control and HE Is the real ruler because Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Prayer: Daily Lord help us to seek after you, delighting to know you more and more. We confess that our ways are not your ways and our thoughts are not your thoughts. Purify us so that we are able to practice righteousness and forsake not any of your ordinances. We thank you for making us the righteousness of God in Christ. We praise you for this glorious, marvelous position! As we delight ourselves in You, we trust You will truly give us the desires of our heart according to Your Word. Amen. (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Day 13: (Please Read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Prayers of Praise: Hallow the Names of the Lord 1

Lift up the names of the Lord in prayer and praise Him for what they mean to you. Dear Lord God, You are:

El Shaddai - God Almighty

El Roi – The God Who Sees Me

El Olam – The Most High God

El Elyon – The Everlasting God

El Echad – The One God

El Hanne'eman – The Faithful God

El Emet – The God of Truth

El Gibbor – The Mighty God

El De'ot – The God of Knowledge

El Hakkavod – The God of Glory

El Hakkadosh – The Holy God

El Hannora – The Awesome God

Elohim – The God of Power and Might

Immanuel – The God Who is With Us

Day 14: (Please Read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Prayers of Praise: Hallow the Names of the Lord 2

Lift up the names of the Lord in prayer and praise Him for what they mean to you because you have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Dear Lord God, You are:

Jehovah Sabbaoth – The Lord of Hosts

Jehovah Tsidkenu – The Lord our Righteousness

Jehovah Makkadeshem – The Lord our Sanctifier

Jehovah Shalom – The Lord our Peace

Jehovah Rapha – The Lord our Healer

Jehovah Nissi – The Lord our Banner

Jehovah Jireh – The Lord our Provider

Jehovah Rohi – The Lord our Shepherd

Jehovah Shammah – The Lord Who is Present

Theos Agape estin – God is Love

Day 15: (Please Read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Prayer of Praise: Praise the Lord for His Awesome Works

The glory of the creation

The scope and power of His Salvation Plan

His mercy

His grace

His patience

The Gospel Stories of Jesus Christ

The Cross of Calvary

The Blood of Jesus Shed for us

The Word of God, both Old and New Testaments

The Holy Spirit Who lives within us

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit in us and the Church

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit as evidence of our Christian walk and witness

Day 16: (Please Read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Prayer of Thanksgiving: Dear Heavenly Father, I have so much to thank you for. I am reminded that every good and perfect give comes from You above. I lift up my thanks to you for these things and all that You have done for me, my family, and all those I love. Thank You for:

Your Grace and Your Mercy

Your Love so unconditional

Your Joy and Your Peace

Your Patience and Your Kindness

Your Goodness and Your Faithfulness

Your Gentleness

Self-Control

Your Direction in my life

Thank You, Jesus, for being the Way, the Truth, and the Life that:

Thank You, Jesus, for Your precious blood that

Bought my salvation... Insured my sanctification... Brought me near to You

Cleansed my conscience of dead works to serve the Living God

Combines with my testimony to empower me to overcome

Thank You, Lord, for Your Holy Spirit

For gifts, fruit, comforting, counseling, teaching, guiding, and Intercession for me

Thank You, Lord, for the Word of God that is light, a two-edged sword, and the Truth

For Your daily provisions of food, clothing, shelter, protection, and all that I have in life

For the Hope I have in You, Jesus, the Hope of Glory

For my family, my friends, and my neighbors

For the growth You have brought into my life through all of my life's experiences

For the Witnesses in Your Word

For the Witnesses I have in my life

For the testimonies You have polished in me

For the victories I have experienced because of You

For encouraging me when I am discouraged

For chastening me when I am disobedient

For correcting me when I am wrong

For forgiving me when I have strayed

For placing me in Your service

For equipping me to serve You

For giving me a church to worship in and serve You through

For giving me the privilege of approaching You in prayer.

Thank You, Lord, for putting up with me and all of my ways, while You attempt to remake me in Your image. It is in heart-felt gratitude and humble acknowledgment that I thank You for all that You have done. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!

Day 17: (Please Read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Covenant Prayer: Precious Heavenly Father, **today** I commit myself, in covenant with You, that in accordance to Your word, and in the name of Jesus Christ, that I will make my best effort to:

- Honor You as the Creator and Ruler of all things
- Honor Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of my life
- Honor the Holy Spirit as Your holy presence in my life, and remember that my body is the temple of Your Holy Spirit
- Be holy in all of my ways before You
- Maintain complete and **rock-solid** faith in You and Your word
- Read, meditate on, and study Your word to show myself approved by You
- Submit myself to anything that Your Spirit reveals to me from Your word
- Live out Your 10 Commandments completely
- Not harbor any sin in my life, but to confess it, repent of it, and live free from it
- Pray earnestly my wants, for others, for Your Kingdom, and for Your will to be done
- Witness about Jesus Christ to everyone You put in my path
- Worship You by exercising the gifts that You have given me
- Endeavor to grow in grace, bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit, of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control
- Be a good steward of everything You have given me, and to be a cheerful giver
- Treat others as if I am entertaining angels unaware
- Love everyone, even my enemies
- Cherish the relationships that I have, and share Your love in them
- Actively participate in the ministry of the church where You have planted me
- Dwell in unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ
- Have on the full armor of God so that I will be able to withstand the attacks of the evil one: to have my loins gird about with truth; to have on the breastplate of righteousness; to have my feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; to take up the shield of faith; to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; and to take on the helmet of salvation
- Endeavor to be like Christ, to have an attitude (mind) like His, of sacrificial love
- Press through my trials, temptations, and tribulations by trusting in You
- Guard my mind by dwelling on whatever things are true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good report, whatever is excellent and worthy of praise
- Give You thanks and praise in all things
- Increase in hope as I see the day of the Lord drawing one more day closer

Day 18: (Please Read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Prayer of Expectant Faith in God: Precious Heavenly Father, I exalt You in prayer, as I lift up my deepest burdens, my heartfelt desires, my painful struggles, my lingering needs, my dreams and aspirations in life, my unsaved loved ones, my difficult situations, and all other things in my life, in my family, in my church, on my job, in my community, in this world. I

lift them up in full expectant faith to You, because I know that You love me with a perfect love, You have saved me by the blood of Jesus Christ, You have given me adoption as Your child, and You are able to do exceeding abundantly beyond everything I can think or even imagine. I faithful hope and expect that, according to Your perfect will in each request, You will answer because I know that there is nothing that is too hard for You. You have done scores of miracles, including saving a wretch like me. I wait expectantly for You to do the mighty, the miraculous, the awesome. Glorify Yourself in these situations in my life, Lord, and cause my testimony of Your awesome power and deliverance to give proof to Your word, and draw people to Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 19: (Please Read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Prayers of Focus 1: Precious Heavenly Father, I thank You for Your love for me and the trust that You have placed in to do your work here on earth. Lord, as I examine Your word, and its awesome truth, I marvel that You have chosen to use an earthen vessel like me to share it with those who are bound up in sin, and under the curse of death. I thank You that You see something in me that I can't always see in myself, and that you look beyond my faults and failures to see the transformation and the victory that You can bring about in and through me. Holy God, I want to fulfill Your Great Commission and Your Great Commandment, to the best of what You can cause my ability to be. I therefore submit myself to You today so that You can use me as You see fit.

Lord, I recognize that as a human being I have limitations. I submit myself and all of my limitations to You today. This includes my past mistakes, faults, struggles, sins, and anything else that hindered me in the past. I thank You for washing those away with the blood of Jesus Christ and completely forgiving me of them. I pray that You would help me to remember that I am forgiven for my past, and give me the discernment and strength to see the enemy for who he is. When the devil attacks me for what I used to be before You saved me, please empower me to rebuke Him in the name of Jesus Christ, and not to relive, re-confess, and remorse over things that you have already cast into the sea of forgetfulness. Please help me to immediately return my focus upon Your Great Commission and Your Great Commandment for this day.

Lord, I pray that You would lead me into the depth of the storehouse of Your knowledge, and through the Two Great Witnesses of Your Word and Your Holy Spirit, please give me the keys of Your truth that will bind and loose on earth, as in heaven. Let my words be truthful, my personal witness holy, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit evident in my life. Lord, I pray that You would embolden me to proclaim Your Gospel to everyone You put in my path. Give me the words to say, give me the examples to share, give me the references to quote, or whatever else is needed for the time or the situation. Lord, my desire is Your desire, to see every lost soul saved in Jesus Christ, so I pray that You will favor me so that I will not waste the opportunities that You bring my way to share the Gospel. Give me constant awareness of this mission field that I am on, and help me to boldly carry the Gospel message everywhere You send me. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 20: (Please Read the Focus Scriptures Today)

Prayer of Focus 2: Dear God, I pray that You would fitly join me in the Body of Christ as You see fit, with whatever gifts You desire, and strengthen me to submit myself to where and how You place me. Favor me to bear fruit here, where I am planted. Please, Lord, bless our church to be one, in our focus, in our prayers, and in our desire to fulfill Your Great Commission and Great Commandment. Give our church boldness to preach this great Gospel in every place that You have given us to claim for You. Give us favor with God and man, and give us a reach far beyond our grasp. Lord, we pray also that You would send the signs, the wonders, the gifts of healing that would give powerful testimony to the Gospel that we are carrying. Precious God, I realize that Your Word tells me that if I regard sin in my heart that You will not answer my prayers. I confess my faults before You today. Lord, even though I have given these over to You in confession, I acknowledge that I face challenges often in my life, and I might struggle with the following:

Attitudes that I know don't always line up with Your Word or Your desires

Feelings that I know can hinder the free flow of Your Holy Spirit power

Agendas that I know are not the agenda that You have for the lost souls around me

Activities that I engage in that I know I wouldn't do if Christ were right next to me

Habits that I easily fall back into that I haven't been able to fully submit to You

Sinful Struggles that I haven't submitted to the blood of Jesus Christ

Lord, my desire is that You would remove every hindrance, so that I may be fully and powerfully used as Your ambassador in this world that so desperately needs You. Please Lord, fully remake me in Your image, and please use me until I may profess like Paul, that I have fought a good fight, I have run the race, I have finished my course, and now there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which You will reward to me on that day, because I do love Your appearing. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 21: (Please Read the Focus Scripture Today)

Prayer of Discipline: Precious Heavenly Father, I glorify Your blessed name, El-Roi, The God Who Sees. You see and know everything about me. You know my weaknesses and my limitations. You also see, Dear Lord, that I love you with my whole heart. Lord, I desire to have discipline in my prayer life, whereby my praying turns from duty to delight. Please give me the power, in the inner person, to bring my flesh under the subjection of Your Precious Holy Spirit. Lord, strengthen me to place prayer as the first priority of my life, and in doing so, please show me all the things that I have placed before seeking Your face. Bless me with the strength to forsake them, and seek You above all things. Empower me, also Lord, to daily commit time to pray earnestly with You, and to submit myself completely to You. Finally, Lord, bless me with the wisdom to know how to pray with You each day, so that my prayer time is fruitful, transforming, and powerful. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 22: (Please Read the Focus Scripture Today)

Preparation and Prayer of Quietness:

Preparation: Turn off your TV, radio, computer, music and else that can make noise (even Christian music). Put away newspapers, magazines, Bibles, Devotional books, or any other printed materials. Go to a room in your house where you can be alone and quiet. If this is not possible, go to a park, by a river or stream, a library, or any place where you can find peace and quiet. Empty your mind of all distractions, cares, burdens, struggles, troubles, or anything else that can hinder you from listening for the voice of God. Be aware that the devil will try to distract you here, because He doesn't want you to hear the voice of God. The devil wants you to go off on your own understanding. When he attempts this, rebuke him in the name of Jesus Christ, and then get quiet again. Start off with 15 minutes or more of quietness. When you pray your petitions, you should also develop the habit of pausing in quietness after each prayer you pray, so that if God is ready to respond instantly to your prayer, you won't miss what He has to say to you. When God has finished speaking to you, write down what He has said, and do what He has instructed you to do, to the letter, without doubting. You will be blessed greatly.

Prayer of Quietness: Precious Heavenly Father, I desire to hear from You today. You know all about me, my needs, my desires, my situations, my circumstances, indeed everything about me. Your Holy Spirit has already made my intercessions for me, and Jesus has been interceding for me as He sits at Your right hand. I have also prayed to You today. Lord, what I need most of all is to hear from You, so that I will know You as I am known by You. Teach me, correct me, guide me, comfort me, fellowship with me, by speaking with Your still small voice. Lord, please remove distractions from around me, and strengthen me to settle my mind, my spirit, and my flesh so that I can clearly hear You. Lord, I humbly bow, I eagerly listen, and I am ready for what You have to say to me. Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray, Amen!

Day 23: (Please Read the Focus Scripture Today)

Vision Prayer: Awesome Lord Jesus, I praise You for all Your mighty work of redemption, and for Who You are. For indeed You are the Author and Perfecter of my faith. You are my Rock of Ages. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Lord Jesus, above all things I want to see You. I want to be able to look unto the hills from whence my help comes. I know that my help comes from You, the Lord, the Maker of the heavens and the earth. I want to see You as You are, in all of Your glory. Please, Lord Jesus, give me perfect vision, in the inner person, to be able to see You with the clearest vision that I can have on this side of glory. Let me see You in Your awesome splendor; let me behold, with the eyes of my soul, Your magnificent power to overcome every foe.

Dear Lord Jesus, give me ever increasing clarity in my vision of You, so that the eyes of my soul are never diverted away from You regardless of whatever storms arise. Give me a transforming vision of You that lifts me above my situations and circumstances, a vision that carries me beyond my impediments and obstacles, and that elevates me over my temptations and my persecutions. Lord Jesus, I want to see You clearly to know You intimately, and to

serve You completely. Please bless me, Lord, through my prayers, and my resolve in these prayers, to be so riveted in my beholding of You that I will be able to walk on water, if necessary, to come to You. In Your awesome and wonderful name, Lord Jesus, I pray, Amen!

Day 24: (Please Read the Focus Scripture for Today)

Prayers of Petition 1: *Personal and Family*

Begin to pray for the Lord to take control of your life. Ask God to help you bring your thoughts under the dominion of His will. Ask God to control your feelings, your actions, your words. Ask Him to lead you and guide you through the day. Ask Him to hide you behind the cross of Christ. Ask Him to anoint your study of His word, to illumine your understanding through the working of His Holy Spirit. Ask Him to take control over your relationships, to make you the best Christian you can be, the best husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend, parent or child, brother or sister, or brother or sister in Christ. Ask Him reveal to you your gifts and your area of service in the church. Ask God to make the use of your gift a spiritual passion that you must exercise in the name of Jesus Christ.

Pray individually and specifically over every member of your immediate family, whether near or far. And pray that all your family members will find themselves saved, sanctified, and serving the Lord.

Pray for yourself, that God would clearly show you where He wants you to serve in the body, and pray that He will reveal it to others in the church for confirmation.

Pray for the Lord's provisions in your life, in the lives of your family, in the lives of the people in the church. Pray that God would bless jobs and incomes of these people, and that they would have the stewardship necessary to handle what God blesses them with, wisely.

Pray for your own attitudes and prejudices that God would check them and bring you to the point where you don't lean to your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path.

Pray that God would cover you with the whole armor of God. Pray that you would have your loins gird about with truth, that you would have on the breastplate of righteousness, that you would have your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace, that you would have on the helmet of salvation, that you would be holding up the shield of faith, that you would be able to freely wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In short, pray that you would be entirely covered by Christ.

Day 25: (Please Read the Focus Scripture for Today)

Prayers of Petition 2: *Our Church, Our Pastors, Our Leadership, Our Ministries*

Pray for your church. Pray for the Pastor that he or she will be a pastor after God's own heart. Pray that he or she will have wisdom and direction from God to wisely shepherd the church. Pray for the anointing in the Word of God, to preach, teach, and live it in all holiness and truth. Pray that he will be a true shepherd, caring for the flock, and feeding them with the Word of God. Pray for your Pastor's family, to be able to balance family and ministry, under the guidance and help of the Lord, so that neither is neglected. Pray that the Lord would

continue to refine the vision for your church, and that He would bring the people and the resources necessary to fulfill the vision.

Please pray for the church to have a fiery burden for the Lord to bring revival into your church and the Church, powerfully, so that the culture is transformed for Jesus Christ.

Please pray for conviction to fall upon the whole Church to submit ourselves to the gift of unity that we have through the blood of Jesus Christ and the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Pray for the ministers, leaders, and ministries of your church, and that the Lord would continually supply every need for powerful witness and ministry.

Pray for the families in the church. Pray that the Lord would restore the relationships that you know are in trouble. Pray specifically that the Lord would soften hearts, change minds, and heal up broken relationships.

Pray for strife in the church. Pray for the Lord to heal up all those situations in the church, over the years, that have caused people to leave this fellowship. Pray that God would do a mighty work in the lives of all those involved. Pray that the Holy Spirit would bring conviction to those involved so that they would confess and seek forgiveness from those they have hurt. Pray that those who were hurt would forgive and forget.

Pray that those who have wandered from the faith and the church over the years, for whatever the reason, would feel the urge to come back and seek restoration in the fellowship of the body of Christ here. Pray also that they would come back with a desire to love and serve.

Pray for the growth of the church, both in Christian maturity and in numbers.

Pray that God would bless the vision and the goals of the church to be fulfilled. Pray that He would soften the hearts of those whom we will be calling upon to help us realize the vision, so that they will give of their resources to help us.

Pray for the Church of God in Michigan, Anderson, Indiana, and around the world, and for all of those blood washed Christians who are standing up for the truth of God's word. Pray for Pastors in your city, in your state, and across the US, that they would preach, teach, and live the word in all holiness and truth.

Day 26: (Please Read the Focus Scripture for Today)

Prayers of Petition 3: *The Coronavirus Pandemic & Sickness / Diseases*

Pray for any other people you know who is dealing with illness, whether due to the COVID-19 Coronavirus or any other affliction. Please pray that the Lord will powerfully and miraculously heal them.

Pray for a safe, effective vaccine for the Coronavirus, as well as safe and effective treatments for those who have contracted it.

Pray for frontline workers in this pandemic, the medical personnel (doctors, nurses, and other staff persons) in hospitals, nursing homes, rehab centers, and doctor's offices and clinics. Pray also for paramedics and ambulance drivers who are first responders with ill and afflicted people.

Please pray for those safety workers, like police and fire, who deal with significant issues each day in addition to the pandemic.

Please pray for the powerful Holy Spirit gift of healing to be in the church, miraculously, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Pray for every name on your church's sick and shut in list, individually, that God would heal them, that He would deliver them, that He would restore them to the fellowship. Pray for their care givers, for their strength and encouragement.

Pray for God's people to have the strength to make good choices and develop good habits with diet, exercise, and rest to promote better health.

Please pray for the Lord to comfort those who have lost loved ones through this pandemic, whether they lost them because of the virus or other causes.

Day 27: (Please Read the Focus Scripture for Today)

Prayers of Petition 4: *The Racial Unrest & The Violence*

Dear Precious Lord, throughout Your Holy Word You clearly state how Your heart is for the oppressed and those who face injustice. For so long, Lord, there have been many who have been treated unjustly, punished unfairly and/or inequitably, and marginalized in so many ways. The anger has exploded because of many incidents across our land, and around the world. Lord, we believe that there is a long-standing stronghold of the enemy of our souls. We need You to break the grip of racism and hatred. We need You to expose and eradicate injustice, inequity, and oppression. We need You to move powerfully in Your Church and in this culture to bring forth Your glory and providence. Lord, help us all to know that we are all created in Your image, and we all are atoned for by the blood of Jesus Christ. Help us to know that You will deal with those who practice the sins that have ravaged our land and our peoples for so long. Dear Lord, please pour the restoring and redeeming water of Your Holy Spirit to quench the fires of hatred, violence, anger, bitterness, unhealthy and unproductive protests and counter-protests, and any other expressions that fan the flames of unrest. Father God, please help each of us to see in our own lives the feeling, thoughts, expressions, and actions that are hurtful to others and fan the fires of hatred and racism. Lord, we need You to deliver us, to revive Your Church to live out Your Holy Word through Your Holy Spirit. Help us, Lord, for we need You. It is in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray, Amen!

Day 28: (Please Read the Focus Scripture for Today)

Prayers of Petition 5: *The Economy*

Dear Lord God, the scriptures indicate in so many places that You own everything in this world. You have all power and authority over everything. You are our Provider. Lord, the pandemic we are struggling through has devastated our economy, and people all around the world are dealing with its impact. People are hurting, hungry, losing hope, and struggling to find the help they need. People have lost jobs, and the impact on so many families has been great, Lord. We need Your help. Lord, would you please bring deliverance from the pandemic, and restoration to our economy. Lord, would you cut through the political wrangling so that aid can be given to the many people who need it, and need it desperately.

Lord, would you empower Your Church to be burdened to minister to people in such a way that we become the hands and feet of Jesus Christ to help lift their burdens and help their families. Lord, please burden us to be ambassadors of good will with a good Word from you and help that reaching the places of the needs around us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ that I pray, Amen!

Day 29: (Please Read the Focus Scripture for Today)

Prayers of Petition 6: *Education, the Election, and the Entertainment Industry*

Please pray for the systems of education across our country. Our school systems are overburdened, understaffed, underfunded, and overwhelmed in trying to educate our children. Please pray that the Lord will give wisdom and the necessary resources to those who set policy, pass laws and regulations, and administer our school systems so that they will be able to provide sound and equitable education to our children.

Please pray for those teachers, aides, and school staff persons as they attempt to educate our children. That the Lord will help them to manage well the challenges of in-person and/or online classes, so that our children will receive the best education they can. Pray that the Lord will burden our schools and governments so that they provide equitable and quality education to all of our school districts and students.

Please pray for students in our schools, whether public or private, to press through the difficulties and make the effort to learn. Pray that the Lord will give them grace and strength to learn and grow. Pray that there would be good, healthy connection with the students and their teachers throughout this challenging school year and beyond.

Please pray for our colleges and universities, including the instructors, leaders, staffs, and infrastructures. Please pray that as they deal with the impact of the pandemic, that people will use wisdom and restraint when they gather for school related events and social events, so that they will not spread this pandemic further.

Please pray for this incredibly important election season and major election coming in November. Please pray that the Lord would take control of the hearts, minds, and lives of the people and politicians in this country, so that His will be done. Please pray that people would stop lining up with anger, resentment, hatred, and hostility against each other because they are on the opposite sides of political parties and issues. Please pray that those who are running for offices across the land will understand the trust that they have as leaders and know that they are put in place by You. Please pray that they will take that trust seriously and understand that you will hold them accountable for how they govern.

Please pray that the hand of the devil would be broken off of this country, so that division would be cast down. Please pray that this would happen in the church as well, as many in the church have been acting just like the rest of the culture in lining up against others and promoting the hate and anger of the culture.

Please pray that however these elections turn out that God's will and way would be done in our country. Please pray that we would indeed become a country that lives up to the motto we have espoused by not exemplified, "In God we trust!"

Please pray that God would bring divine deliverance over the entertainment and social media of this culture. Please pray that the strongholds of darkness and death would be broken, and that conviction would fall upon the land. Please pray that people would reject those media and programming that promote sexual sin, darkness, demonic activity, and violence.

Please pray that God would stir in the hearts of the people of our culture to seek after Him and bring healing to our land.

Day 30: (Please Read the Focus Scripture for Today)

Prayers of Petition 7: *The Natural Disasters Impacting Us*

Please pray for the Lord to move mightily to deliver us from the natural disasters that seem to hit us one right after another for several years.

Pray for those people and places that have been devastated by the hurricanes that have hit in several places here and around the globe. Please pray that they will get the help and resources they need to recover.

Please pray for those who have are dealing with the wildfires that are burning down millions of acres, destroying homes and cities, and taking lives along the west coast. Please pray that people will stop arguing about global warming and start praying for divine deliverance.

Please pray for those who are dealing with tornados and other storms that have brought great destruction to many locations in the country.

Please pray for those who are dealing with flooding, including those here in Michigan who are still recovering from the effects of two dams bursting.

Please pray for those who are dealing with earthquakes, mudslides, and other natural disasters, that the Lord would bring comfort and help to them all.

Please pray for the church to be visible and active in bringing help and comfort to those who are hurting and devastated by complete loss of homes and belongings.

Day 31: (Devotional Provided by Minister Sharon Richardson)

Isaiah 58:2b NKJV - They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God.

We delight in approaching God whenever we want our needs/desires met. But are we praying for justice in these hate-filled times? How can God use us to mete out justice in a culture that has historically proven itself to be unjust and unequal? Let's confess to God that things are not right or equal in our country. Let's ask God to show us how we can make a better difference in our: churches, courts, companies and culture. We long to see justice reign within our localities, states, federal government agencies, schools, and society. We pray for just men and women to be in leadership at all levels in our society. If we make these confessions to God that we have not been just in all our doings, then we can take delight in approaching God knowing what HE has already done for us.

Jesus Christ has justified us freely by HIS Grace through the redemption that he bought for us and brought to us! Jesus is not only just, but HE is the justifier of the one who has faith in

Him (Romans 3:24-26). Shouldn't we extend to others the same grace that HE extends to us? As we fast and pray during this season, ask God to bring justice to all the victims of violence, cruelty, prejudice, hate and apathy. Ask God to comfort and restore those who have suffered loss of loved ones, jobs and property due to loss of income and or disasters. Ask God to restore those who have lost faith in Him because of the heartache, pain, and suffering they experienced and they blame God for their plight. Our heart should go out to all those who are suffering and we should extend them our love and support when possible. We should delight in approaching God with their concerns as well as our own concerns.

Prayer: Lord you are the Just One, the Holy One who cares all about us. Help us to show your love to those around us who need it the most. If we have been victimized, help us to trust You, forgive and overcome evil with good. If we have been the victimizers, help us to give restitution if possible and work to be reconciled to those we have wronged. By your power Lord, may our church/country execute true justice in our land by showing mercy and compassion to everyone. May widows, fatherless, aliens, and the poor no longer be oppressed. Cleanse our hearts from any plans to do evil against our brothers and sisters. We take delight in approaching you because you care all about us. Make us more and more like Jesus, Amen.

Day 32: (Devotional Provided by Min. Sharon Richardson)

Isaiah 58: 3a “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” NRSV

Do you ever feel like God is not answering your prayers, even after you have fasted? If so, we may need to examine our motives. Oftentimes our attitude is one of “God you owe me because I...” and we are not humble at heart. Psalm 66:8 (NKJV) says: If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear. Hebrews 4:12, 13 tells us that God's word is living and powerful...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Our hearts are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must account. Love must be our motive when fasting and praying. 1 Corinthians 13: 2b, 3 (NKJV) says: “Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, am I nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” God is love and He wants the church to be a human extension of His love.

If God's love is in us, we will cry aloud and spare not. His Love sends us to the Father in intercession for all souls – those in the church, our family/friends, and for the nation/world. Many of these souls are held captive by sin; they are obsessed, depressed, repressed and oppressed due to all the social ills of our society. We must pray for us/them to be released from being in bondage to self – self-abasement, self-absorbed, self-doubt, self-hate, self-centeredness, self-willed, self-abuse, self-serving, self-aggrandizement, self-aggression, self-conceitedness, self-destruction, self-pity and self-righteousness. God will notice our prayers and fasting after we have been emptied of “self.” But let's also long for Christ's return and wait for Christ's revelation. After HE has been revealed, we shall be like Him; and everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:2-3 NKJV).

Dear Lord, when we have hidden motives and attitudes in our heart, You are aware of them all. We humbly desire to be pure in our motives and attitudes when we approach Your throne of Grace so that our prayers raised to You are unhindered. By the power

of the Holy Spirit, show us our secret sins/errors of our ways; help us to confess them and repent. We desire to see change in ourselves and in our nation. Help us to be used to right the wrongs we see; to make a difference for the good of our land and for your Glory. We want You to hear and notice our prayers. We plead, the blood to cover all our sins as we trust in Christ who is our “Mercy Seat.” Hear our prayer O Lord. Amen. (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Day 33: (Devotional Provided by Min. Sharon Richardson)

Isaiah 58:3b-4 NIV “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

When we fast, are we totally consecrated to God? Have we laid aside all of our self-interest while we fast? There was a reference in the NKJV for Isaiah 58:4 that pointed to 1 Kings 21:9-10. This scripture is referenced to Jezebel writing letters to proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honors among the people. Two men who were scoundrels bore false witness against Naboth. This false testimony caused him to be stoned so that he died, just so her husband Ahaz could possess Naboth’s vineyard. Wow! That passage epitomizes “in the day of your fast you find pleasure and exploit all your workers.” God knows all about us so we need to daily ask Him to cleanse our hearts and motives when we fast/pray. We must offer our petitions to Him in the right spirit; we should pray “Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done.”

We should pray and fast regarding the up-coming elections. There is much debate and strife regarding who should be our next president. We should pray that the United States of American remain a united country. Pray our leader will not fuel strife, bigotry and racism. Pray that all US citizens will be treated with respect, dignity and as equals. Pray that he will have a heart of compassion, be empathetic, kind and wise. He should lead by serving the people and being a good example in moral character. Leaders can bring a nation to ruin, just think about Pharaoh of Egypt. Although leaders are important, Proverbs says that righteousness exalts a nation but, sin is a reproach to any people (Proverbs 14:34). Fasting about a righteous petition demonstrates our earnestness for God’s help and resources. We want our prayers to be answered. We are to confess our trespasses to one another and pray for one another that we may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16).

Prayer: Let us pray in the Spirit and with the understanding (1 Corinthians 14:15). Let us pray lifting holy hands without wrath and doubting (1 Timothy 2:14). Make your people to be one in You (John 17:11). We are one nation under God, indivisible; Lord we pray for liberty and justice for all. We pray for the current president and for the future leader that you ordain to lead us whether we vote for that candidate or not. We pray for continued prosperity, technological advances, ecological conservationism/restoration and peace within our country. In Jesus Name, Amen. (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Day 34: (Devotional Provided by Min. Sharon Richardson)

Isaiah 58:5-7 CEB 5. Is *this* the kind of fast I choose, a day of self-affliction, of bending one's head like a reed and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 6. Isn't this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke? 7. Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family?

The Lord asks Isaiah a question in verse 5. I pondered what is the message in the question that God raised? The Holy Spirit pointed out to me that what we call a fast is often the actions that we self-initiate such as choosing a day of self-affliction, bending one's head like a reed, or laying down in mourning clothes in dust and ashes. Do these actions accomplish any change? Will these postures alone mete out justice or make a real difference in the lives of others? God answers His own question in verses 6 and 7. God wants those who are in control or in position to release wicked restraints, untie the ropes of a yoke, to set free the mistreated and every yoke broken. In order to practically address these wicked restraints, we must acknowledge the major ones. People have been wickedly restrained by: racist law enforcement tactics and racial profiling; unjust fines and or excessive sentencing in the courts; unequal quality in primary education; unequal pay; unequal health care; racist hiring practices and/or promotions; and red-lining, discrimination in housing policies, higher interest rates on loans and insurances to name a few. The kind of fast God wants is to end all of these kinds of wickedness!

In what small way can God use the Church of God to make a positive difference in stopping these wicked restraints? What can we do to untie the ropes of the yoke? What must we do to set the mistreated free? First let's break the yoke of mental-oppression by proclaiming the Good News – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are called to preach the gospel to the poor; heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and offer insight to the spiritually blind (Luke 4:18). Souls are what really matter and Black souls' matter too! The Truth will set souls free. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the only one who can truly set souls free. By learning to accept one another (receive in spite of the differences) just as Christ received us, we bring glory to God; we promote reconciliation by overcoming the natural tendency to exclude those who are not like us. Individually we should share bread or anything of substance with the hungry. We must not ignore the needs of the homeless and the naked; we must supply them resources. We cannot run from responsibility from our family's needs. When we cry out loud, unselfishly share the gospel and our resources, we can begin to untie the ropes of the yoke.

Help us Lord to fast the way you choose. Give us a kingdom focus and a strategy as we proceed to do the greater works that You said we could do in your Name. Through your anointing, break all yokes and bring the oppressed complete deliverance. In Jesus Name, Amen. (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

Day 35: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

6 "Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? 7 "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

The Lord spoke clearly through the Prophet Isaiah to His people about their fasting, and why He was not moved by their efforts. He made it clear that they didn't really take it seriously, because they didn't have a burden but more of a ritual. They didn't demonstrate that their hearts were troubled by what troubled His heart. They cried out and complained about their circumstances, and they thought that if they fasted, God would deliver them. Their fasts were all about themselves, however, and demonstrated no concern for those oppressed people that God cares about. He then told them how a fast that gets His attention and moves Him to act should be done. He made it clear the kind of things they should set their hearts on and passionately desire to see God move upon. He shared with them what He would do if they would simply fast so that He would take notice.

We need to understand that God wants us to fast in His Church today, just like He wanted Israel to fast in Isaiah's day. Our fasts should have the same burdens that God cares about, spelled out in this prophecy. Why, because all of the things He pointed out are still around us today, and we need to care about them and seek His deliverance for them. We need to humble ourselves and seek His powerful hand and outstretched arm to move upon us and the culture around us for healing. The forces of evil around us and throughout this world are behind the injustice and oppression and pain that is in our culture. We need God to move upon them, and He will if we really want Him to enough to fast and pray. God will not give us the "want to," we must supply that. If we supply the "want to," God will supply the "can do!"

Dear Lord God, help us to really have the burden for the things that touch Your heart. You care about those who are under the bonds of wickedness and suffer under the yolks of injustice. You want us to forsake those things that we say and do which are fed by the forces of darkness and that are passed down from generation to generation. You want us to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless poor, clothe the naked, and be a help to our own families. You want us to care about the downtrodden and seek to help them. When we fast to do those things, You have promised to deliver and empower and restore. Help us to set our hearts, minds, and hands to this type of fasting and submission. Empower us in it, and bless us through it we pray, in the precious and powerful name of Jesus Christ, Amen!

Day 36: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

6 "Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke?"

Please meditate on this scripture today, and in prayer, ask the Lord to reveal to you the bonds of wickedness that need to be loosened so that people can be set free from them. They are all around us, and sometimes they are right in us and in our families. Sexual sin, pornography, addictions, abuse, and so many more. Ask the Lord to remove those bonds of wickedness in

your life and in the lives of people you know. Ask the Lord to remove them from the culture around us. Determine to forsake, with His help, any that you know are binding you.

Please ask to see clearly in prayer who are the oppressed, and those who are the victims of injustice, prejudice, racism, systems that perpetrate inequities and enslave people in despair and struggle. Ask the Lord to intervene and bring deliverance to our culture so that everyone who is oppressed will be set free from that oppression. Pray that the Lord will break every yoke that harnesses people to sin, injustice, division, deception, destruction, and everything that is not of You, so that people can be yoked together with Jesus Christ.

Day 37 (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

⁸ "Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ "Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'

The Lord God has always dealt with His people in a conditional way. He many times over states that “if” we will certain things “then” He will do things that will bring His favor and blessings. This is a powerful set of blessings that He will bring if we will fast to reach His heart. He promised that our light would break out like the dawn. The light that we have is Jesus Christ, Who is the light of the world. Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, that we are the light of the world. He said that no one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bushel. But it is put on a lampstand and give light to the world around it. God promises to cause our light to shine like the dawn in a dark world.

He also promised to bring our recovery quickly forward. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see Him quickly bring forth recovery to our lives, our families, our churches, our communities, this country? If we want that recovery, it is within our grasp through our heartfelt fasting and prayer. He promised that our righteousness would go before us and the glory of the Lord would be our rear guard. Wow! He is literally saying that He, God our Righteousness (Jehovah Tsidkenu) would go before us, and that His glory, His Shekinah presence would guard us from behind. There is no force of darkness on earth and below the earth that can stand up to the righteousness and glory of God. He promised to answer when we call, and come when we cry, and say to us, “Here I am.” All of this if we will desire to fast to reach His heart.

Dear Lord, we want our light to shine like the dawn. We want our recovery to come speedily. We want our righteousness to go before us. We want your glory to be our rear guard. We want to be able to call and you answer. We want you to let us know that you are with us when we cry. Please give us the heart and the strength to do be the people who have a heart for You and the things You want in and from us, so that we can experience all the blessings and glory that You desire to pour upon us. Help your people Lord. It is in the name of Jesus Christ that I pray, Amen!

Day 38: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

...If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,¹⁰ And if you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday.¹¹ "And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.¹² "And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell.

The Lord made it clear in this prophecy that it is within our power to make some significant changes. We can remove the yokes of injustice and oppression from our lives, our families, our churches, and our communities. We can stop the finger pointing which seems to dominate so much of our culture today. We can guard our tongues and stop speaking wickedness. We can give ourselves over to feed the hungry and satisfy the desires of the afflicted for deliverance and healing. We just need to depend on Him and do what He have empowered us to do. We are His Church, and we can do anything God can do through us. We just have to have the desire and put for the effort. If we do, He has promised to cause our light to dispel darkness and make the gloom that has settled over us become brightness like the noonday. He has promised to guide us. He has promised to satisfy our desires in the scorched, dry places of life. He has promised to bring strength to our bones. He has promised to make us like a well-watered garden springing with life, beauty, and refreshing. He has promised to make us like a spring whose waters never fail. He has promised to empower us to rebuild the ancient ruins (what would that mean for so many of our churches that have been in decline?). He has promised to make us repairers of the breach and restorers of the streets in which to dwell? Glory to God! Don't we want God to do that in and through us? He will if we are willing to fast, pray, and seek Him in this way.

Dear Lord, please, please, please help us to desire this and seek to do all that we can to bring this healing to culture around us. Pour though us and into us. Restore and prosper us. Raise up your church to help raise up the culture, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!

Day 39: (Please read the Focus Scripture today)

¹³ "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word,¹⁴ Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The sabbath has always been important to the Lord. It is interesting that He added this to the prophecy of fasting. The sabbath has certainly changed over the centuries and certainly in the last several years. God has always considered it a time when His people would set aside their working and striving and seek to honor Him on this holy day. Theologians debate whether this is Friday, Saturday, or Sunday. The day is not as important as the honoring of the Lord by taking a sabbath (rest) from our labors and our own desires and pleasures to connect with

him. If we delight in the Lord, He has promised to bless us. Sabbath has become for many a short visit to church or online or TV, when we feel like being bothered. Where is the delight in the Lord and in His ways? Is it a wonder that the church is in decline? If we will take delight in Him, He has promised to made us ride on the heights. He has promised to feed us with the heritage of Jacob. This has so many wonderful implications for us, if we are willing to worship and honor the Lord with sabbath. Pray, fast, get quiet before Him. Spend time in fellowship with His people around His word. Share and experience His love.

**Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
In the beauty of holiness, in the beauty of holiness.
Glory to the Father, abounding in mercy!
Be joyful, all ye people, and magnify Jehovah.**

Refrain:

**Oh, glory, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
Oh, come before His presence and glorify His name.**

**Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
In the beauty of holiness, in the beauty of holiness.
Glory be to Jesus, our gracious Redeemer!
We praise Him, for He loved us, and brought a great salvation.**

**Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
In the beauty of holiness, in the beauty of holiness.
Glory to the Spirit, the Holy Revealer!
We praise Him for the light of the truth He shines within us.**

Robert Lowry, published 1873, Public Domain

Day 40: (Please read the Focus Scriptures today)

"If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV)

Here is another great if / then promise of God. If you are familiar with the story, you know that it is part of God's response to King Solomon's prayer for help in leading Israel as their king. But it is so true for us today, as we can see around us that God has shut up the heavens with no rain (physically and spiritually). We can see that the locusts of oppression have devoured much of the land and our people. We can see pestilence in every direction. Do we want God to help us? If so, He made it real plain what we should do. We are the people who are called by His name. We are the Church of God! We must HUMBLE OURSELVES in every way we can, especially in fasting. We must PRAY, and I mean really pray until hell itself feels the power of our prayers. We must SEEK HIS FACE, and stop trusting the arm of flesh and those who promise fleshly answers to spiritual problems. We must TURN FROM

OUR WICKED WAYS. We must be willing to forsake sin, repent, and trust the Lord. We must be willing to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Then, God has promised to HEAR FROM HEAVEN. God has promised to FORGIVE OUR SINS. God has promised to HEAL OUR LAND! It is within our grasp, if we want to grasp it. Let us press towards the Lord and experience His divine power.

Thank You, Precious Lord, for helping us to make it though this Call to Deep Devotion, as we have fasted and prayed over these 40 days. Please, Lord, move on us, in us, through us, around us, and if necessary, in spite of us, to bring forth Your glory and power. Lord, we want and expect that You will deliver on Your promises if we will be the people You have called us to be and do what You have given us to do. It is in the mighty name of Jesus Christ that we thank You and praise You. We dedicate ourselves afresh to You. Use us as You see fit, and let the light that shines through us brighten this dark world around us. In the great and glorious name of Jesus Christ we pray and thank You, Amen!

CELEBRATE THE LORD, FOR HIS DIVINE GLORY AND HIS AWESOMENESS!