

First Baptist Church of Los Angeles



**The Way Forward...
Prayer & Devotional Journey
January 6 – January 26, 2019**

January 6, 2019

Dear Friend:

Happy New Year! As I look back on 2018, in my little sphere of the world, it was a tough year. Death, disappointment, rejection, sickness, relational discord, and violence ravaged the lives of many people I know, including myself. It was painful to watch. Painful to experience and endure. But love, joy, peace, hope, faith, and the promise of a new year remain. I am praying that in 2019 for God to make beauty out of the ashes—and in those prayers I feel nothing but hope for the year ahead. Regardless of what happens this year, I'm expecting God to continue to do great things, even when I don't see or realize what God is going. I believe God and I believe that God has already initiated the miracle for you and me in 2019. And I'm hopeful that with this fresh start, our faith will only continue to strengthen and grow. Today, I want to invite you to feed your faith in 2019 by joining me in this 21 Day Prayer and Devotional Journey for the Way Forward for your personal walk with God and for the corporate life of First Baptist Church. This journey will help you and I to hit the reset button on our walk with Jesus. Each day's thought and prayer challenge revolve around one area of focus, but you can feel free to add to it as you feel led by the Spirit.

I have been privileged to share this journey with you for four years now at your Interim Pastor. We have been on this transitional journey together for just over four years. Transitions have a way of showing up in all of our lives. Transitions are mental and emotional transformations that we all undergo to relinquish old arrangements and embrace new ones. Transitions start with an ending and end with a beginning. Yes, it has been a long transition. I see, however, through God's eyes, the eyes of faith that the transition is drawing to a close and First Baptist is on the precipice of new beginnings in 2019. I believe this will be an incredible year for you personally and corporately as a community of faith. Ready to have an incredible year? Let's get started!

In the past, I have invited you to join me in a tradition that I have embraced over the years of fasting throughout most of January. It is my way of resetting my spiritual compass and bringing about change and discipline in every area of my life. I am also discerning of the fact that some of our members because of physical reasons are not able to participate fully in the Daniel Fast.

For those who are not able to join me in some form of consistent and disciplined fast during this 21-day period, I offer some alternative way to connect with us by connecting with us on Wednesdays for one, two or three hours during the day from 6am to 6pm. For example, you could fast from breakfast time to lunch time or from lunch time to dinner time. What matters is that we are all on one accord and dedicating our lives to God by drawing near to God in prayer and fasting. Dedicating a time of fasting and praying will bring us into alignment with what God desires to do with this congregation as God prepares us what lies ahead beyond the transition into new beginnings.

As we journey together over these three weeks in inspiration and prayer, I hope you will be encouraged and strengthened by the devotionals. Each daily devotion is intended to enrich our understanding God's purpose in transition and transformation so that from a personal and a corporate perspective you can know and move forward in your pursuit your purpose and destiny as followers of Jesus.

I pray that you will experience the presence and power of God in an extraordinary way as you commit yourself to God over the next 21 days. May God continue to bless you and enlarge you as you seek God first.

With Hope,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Norm Bullock" followed by a horizontal line.

Norman Bullock
Interim Pastor

Day 1 – January 6, 2019
The Way Forward...By Spending Time Alone with God
2 Samuel 7:18-22

This passage from 2 Samuel inspires us to follow in King David's footsteps. He spent time alone with God, offering praise and thanksgiving. He would also listen as the Lord revealed truth and offered insight about the future. Because of what he learned, David was able to set goals and stay aligned with them.

It is good to get away to a secluded place, perhaps in the mountains in our desire for solitude, but often times we can create a quiet place, a secret place in some special location in our homes. It is in the quiet places, where we can be silent, listening intently for God's voice. Where we can ask God to speak to us regarding our future and can be assured that God answers us in prayer. Most often, His guidance is experienced as a prodding or conviction in the heart. When that happens, be sure to write down what you're "hearing" so you can review it later.

In order to stay on the path God intends for our lives, we should plan times to stop, ask, and listen for guidance. The world throws confusing messages at us all day long, and we need to check our course frequently. Conversations with the Lord are vital for a thriving life of godly impact. Let's discuss how to establish aims in this manner. First, come before the throne of Almighty God with a repentant heart, praise, and thanksgiving. Then, ask God for direction in areas such as spiritual life, career, and family. In silence, wait patiently and attentively—as you read and meditate upon God's Word and actively listen for God to speak.

Prayerful Thought: What do you do to spend time alone with God? When God speaks to us in prayer, record the goals God inspired by journaling. The things God communicates can so impact our choices and so greatly bless us. You will find that spending time alone with God will prepare you for the Way Forward.

Day 2 – January 7, 2019

The Way Forward... To Experiencing God's Presence In Your Life

John 14:23

Life is busy and filled with distractions. It's so easy to get caught up in our cares, errands and worries that we lose sight of what matters most.

There's an interesting story at the end of Luke chapter two about when Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem for Passover when He was twelve years old. After the festival was over, they left to go home, supposing He was with them.

I wonder how many times we suppose God's with us when we've wandered off to do our own thing?

Now here's the interesting part. Mary and Joseph had traveled a day's journey before they realized Jesus wasn't with them and then it took three days to find Him. Three days! The message here is that it's easier to lose that special presence of God than it is to get it back once we've lost it.

We need to be careful to remain in the presence of God. When we do, we make God feel at home in our hearts.

This simply starts with being obedient to His Word. A commitment to turn from behavior that offends God is the number one sign of spiritual maturity. It shows you care about what He thinks.

That means you choose to be generous toward others, you learn to forgive, let go of your offenses and live in peace. When we choose to be intentional with our words, giving thanks to God and lifting up others, we'll feel connected to God all throughout the day.

Prayerful Thought: Father, thank You for making Your home in my heart. I need Your presence today, Lord. Help me to honor You with my thoughts and my words and to be a blessing to those around me. I can do this today in the following ways...

Day 3 – January 8, 2019
The Way Forward... To Fulfilling Your Purpose in Life
Proverbs 29:18

What is the vision that God's placed in your heart? I'm not asking if you have one, I already know it's there because God gives all of us visions and dreams.

I've seen people do all kinds of things that contributed to them fulfilling their purpose in life. Some people bury them so deep in their hearts in order to protect them from the criticism of others. Some people set them out of sight, so they don't have to think about them anymore. And some people finally just give up on their dreams because it hurts too much to hold on.

If your dream needs a jump-start, there are two things I want you to remember. First, you need to get a vision that's clear. And second, you must keep your vision in front of you at all times.

But having a vision doesn't mean that it will instantly appear. God's as interested in the process of vision as He is in the end result.

The apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:11-13 that he had learned how to be content and satisfied to the point where he was not disturbed by whatever state he was in. In other words, he never allowed himself to get upset with where he was at the moment, he was always looking forward to where he could be.

That means you, like Paul, need to find a balance between contentment and ambition. Here's the key: Learn to enjoy where you are on the way to where you're going.

When you have a dream or a vision, you have to keep it in front of you. If it helps, write it down. And remember, God will help you live the dream He's given you, step-by-step, one day at a time.

Prayerful Thought: Jesus, even though I don't always feel like it and life tries to get me to quit, I believe You have a great plan for my life. I choose to trust You to help me live the dream You've given me more than I trust my circumstances. Today, I will fulfill your purpose in moving forward by...

Day 4 – January 9, 2019
The Way Forward... With Love
John 13:31-35

As Christians, we are called to show others love. Jesus told His disciples, "By this shall all [men] know that you are My disciples, if you love one another [if you keep on

showing love among yourselves]" (John 13:35).

So many people see love as 'just a feeling,' but it's so much more than that. True love shows itself through action.

And this action doesn't have to be impossible and overwhelming. One of the best ways to show the love of Jesus is through simple, everyday action,

- Like giving a small gift to someone or striking up a conversation with a downcast individual who needs a friend.
- Or giving a bag of groceries to the single mom who lives down the street and is struggling to put food on the table.
- Showing love can even be as simple as smiling and saying hello to a person you pass on the street, in the hall, or at the store.

There are many ways to demonstrate the love of Christ. When you show His love to someone else, it can soften that person's heart, and before you know it, they'll be finding ways to reach out and show love to others, and so on and so on. So celebrate God's love and let Him lead you. Is He putting someone on your heart right now?

I want my love for Jesus to be reflected in the way I show love for others, even those who may be difficult to love. If I can soften one hard heart with the love of God, maybe that person will soften another's heart with love, then that one will reach out to others, and so on and so on... And soon we'll have a love revolution!

Prayerful Thought: God, I want my love for You to be reflected in the way I show love for others. Show me ways to move forward and demonstrate love to anyone and everyone that You bring across my path. I will first demonstrate my love to God by...

I will then demonstrate love to others today by...

Day 5 – January 10, 2019
The Way Forward...By Faith
Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:1-6 and Proverbs 3:1-8

Nehemiah was overwhelmed after hearing about the “great distress” of the people living in his homeland. How “the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.” Burdened by this disturbing news, Nehemiah committed this crisis to God.

Then, when Nehemiah came before King Artaxerxes, he sensed that something was bothering Nehemiah. When pressed for a reason, Nehemiah revealed his concerns about Jerusalem, and his desire to help his people. But what to do? How to respond?

After a silent prayer, Nehemiah boldly requested that the king send him to Judah to rebuild the wall.

Perhaps surprisingly, the king granted his request. His only concerns? The length of the journey and how long Nehemiah would be gone.

What a challenging situation! Nehemiah had no idea what lay ahead. He had no personal experience in any aspect of this project yet needed to give an answer. So, he committed the situation to God, believing that He would guide his thoughts and give the answer he needed.

Having prayed, he then provided “a definite time.” What was the basis for this projection? Ultimately, he had to trust God, knowing that he had sought Him about the problem.

How often we might find ourselves in similar situations. Asked to do things for which we have no prior experience. Needing to describe how we would act in situations with many unknowns. What should we do?

Prayerful Thought: Following Nehemiah’s example, we should start by having a strong relationship with God. Confident in God’s presence. Basing our lives on God’s Word. As we commit our needs to God, we should have faith that God will guide us, but always staying sensitive to God. Always trusting, confident that God will direct our steps.

Father, I commit these situations to You:

Thank You for guiding me. Thank You for Your help. I trust You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Day 6 – January 11, 2019
The Way Forward...Through Endurance
Galatians 6:6-9

In the world we live in, we are going to have all kinds of problems, frustrations and difficulties. That's just life. So knowing this, what do we do?

We must remain steadfast and persevere. In other words, the answer is never give up! No matter what's going on in our lives, the victory is in refusing to quit.

Keep in mind that in the heat of our struggles, the Holy Spirit is probably doing His greatest work within us. He is not moved by the circumstances. If you and I really trust Him, we shouldn't be either! He's not in our lives for good times only, but for the difficult times as well.

He will lead us through anything if we'll just hang in there and follow Him. This means being diligent in prayer, relentless in our resolve, unwavering in faith, and determined to stand firmly on God's Word and His promises to us.

So many times we can be sidetracked by how slowly things seem to be going. In fact, the enemy loves to point that out! But remember, that's when God may be doing some of His greatest work. You see, it's not all about you and me. The Lord's work in us is preparation for the work He wants to do through us!

I know life can be hard sometimes. But I also know that God will help us if we remain steadfast. Let's stand on Galatians 6:9: "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up" (NLT).

Prayerful Thought: So let me ask that question again: What do we do? My answer is, never give up! What's your answer?

God, I believe that You are at work in my life, even during difficult times. I choose today to remain steadfast and to never give up in obedience to You and through endurance through your strength, move forward.

Day 7 – January 12, 2019
The Way Forward...Through Transformed Thinking
Romans 12:1-2

Have you ever heard the saying "a mind is a terrible thing to waste"? Our minds have so much capacity for good, to learn, create, think and grow, and it's a tragedy when we don't use them to their highest potential.

There was a time in my life when I allowed too many damaging thoughts to enter my mind, negative, tormenting, guilty, unforgiving, shameful and accusing thoughts. The problem was that I had no idea I could control my thoughts or choose which thoughts I focused on and believed in.

I didn't realize that if I was thinking something that wasn't true, I had the power to stop. No one ever told me I could win in my mind. Has anyone ever told you? If not, then I'm here today to tell you that you don't have to let your thoughts control you. You can choose to think and focus on God-thoughts!

Romans 12:2 says to "let God transform you, by changing the way you think." God wants to help you win the battle in your mind. But what does that look like on a practical level?

Here's what has worked countless times for me and what I know will work for you too: The next time you're wrestling in your mind, I want you to stop and find something specific that you can thank God for. Tell Him how grateful you are for His goodness and all the rich ways He's blessed your life. As you're diligent to do this, you will see your life begin to change and things will get better and better.

It's my hope and prayer that you will know the power God has given you and that every day in your thoughts, you will walk in the fullness of His love for you!

Prayerful Thought: God, I want to experience Your power in my thought life. I choose to focus on Your goodness and Your love for me. No matter what negative thought comes my way, I know that You are so much bigger and better. I will move forward today by thinking and acting differently about:

Day 8 – January 13, 2019
The Way Forward...Through Persistent Prayer
Matthew 7:7-8

About twenty years ago, this next sentence changed my life: "You do not have because you do not ask God." My pastor growing up used this quote many times and it has grown on me. This short verse opened a door for me to discover the life-changing power of persistent prayer.

At that time in my life, I was stressed out about a lot of different things. I was trying to make my ministry grow, trying to make other people do the things I wanted, trying to basically do absolutely everything on my own. As you can probably guess, it wasn't working!

As a burned-out, frustrated young Christian, I realized one day that living in my own strength was useless. I needed to take my problems to God. In other words, I needed to pray more!

When we understand God's love for us and God's plan for us, then we can begin to realize the doors that God wants to open for us. But we'll only realize these things when we're constantly talking with God, listening to God's voice, and growing deeper in our relationship with God.

In Matthew 7:7 (AMP), Jesus tells us, "Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking [reverently] and [the door] will be opened to you."

So many times, when we reach the end of our rope, we turn to prayer, but when our prayers are not instantly answered, we give up. Today, I want to encourage you to not only pray, but to pray persistently. Don't stress out trying to make things happen on your own. Give it all to God as you pray.

Remember, God promises that when we seek God, we will find God. Let's pray and seek God with all our hearts.

Prayerful Thought: God, remind me to bring my problems to You. I'm tired of living in my own strength. I need Your guidance and Your direction. Today, I will seek you and trust you as I move forward in giving the following problem to you:

Day 9 – January 14, 2019
The Way Forward...With Joy
I Peter 1:8-9; Isaiah 35:10; Philippians 4:4-8

In these days following Christmas, joy is still fresh on all of our minds. Emmanuel has come. God is with us. Joy has entered the world, and that joy is the very presence of God. Today, pray for God to fill you with His great joy. Ask God to help you learn to receive and live out of this great gift. Thank Him for sending His son to be born in a manger and bring joy to the world.

From the moment your feet hit the floor, he'll do all that he can to distract you, to overwhelm you, to frustrate you, and to stir up worry and strife. Often his ways are subtle, other times they're more clear. It's what he does best. Stealing. Killing. Destroying.

We have a choice of who we listen to and what we believe. Recognize who is at the root of it all, and push past his lies, step over his traps. God gives us the power through His Holy Spirit to live free from the entanglement of sin. He gives us the power to live strong. He gives wisdom and discernment to make the right choices. He gives joy deep inside. He offers the assurance, that no matter what we face, He is with us. Debbie McDaniel shares with us Eight Reminders of God's Joy being constantly available to us:

- 1) *"The joy of the Lord is my strength." Neh.8:10*
- 2) *Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." 1 John 4:4*
- 3) *"No weapon that is formed against you will prosper..." Is.54:17*
- 4) *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10*
- 5) *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Rom.15:13*
- 6) *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." James 1:2*
- 7) *"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Ps.118:24*
- 8) *"For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Is. 55:12*

Prayerful Thought: God, at the start of each day, help us to recognize you above all else. Enlighten the eyes of our heart that we might see you, and notice how you're at work through our lives. Give us wisdom to make the best choices, fill us with a desire to seek after you more than anything else in this world. Let your Spirit and power breathe in us, through us, again, fresh and new. Thank you that you are greater than anything we may face in our day. Thank you that your presence goes with us, and that your joy is never dependent on our circumstances, but it is our true and lasting strength, no matter what we're up against. Lord, I choose to rejoice in:

Day 10 – January 15, 2019
The Way Forward...With Courage
2 Corinthians 8:5-9

One morning I was having my quiet time alone with God, and I said to the Lord, "God, how can You stand seeing all the pain, starving children, hatred, racism, genocide, injustice, degradation, poverty, in the world and not do something?"

I didn't say it as a complaint or because I was questioning God's integrity, and I don't even know that I was really expecting to get an answer, but I just asked God. Immediately God's answer came back: "I work through people. I'm waiting for My people to arise and do something."

You and I are part of the body of Christ, and it's going to take everyone doing their part to change this our community, to change our world. God wants to work through us, and He's calling us to be courageous and get to work.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul talked about how the churches in Macedonia gave, saying, "But first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us [as His agents] by the will of God [entirely disregarding their personal interests, they gave as much as they possibly could, having put themselves at our disposal to be directed by the will of God]."

That just amazes me, because they didn't just give their money, they gave themselves. God's calling us to live the same way. God is looking for courageous people to stand up and speak truth to power. Will you be the one who stand us and does something meaningful that speaks to justice?

Prayerful Thought: God, I invite You to work through me. I choose to lay down selfishness and pick up courage and love so that I can be used by You to change the world. What is something you can do today to change the world around you?

Day 11 – January 16, 2019
The Way Forward...With Patience
Romans 8:24-30

We live in a culture that wants everything and wants it yesterday. Most of us have heard the phrase, "Patience is a virtue." Sure, patience is a noble and desirable trait – but is that all? For the Christian, isn't patience a necessity? Don't we define our lives by waiting for Jesus to return, by waiting to meet Him in glory?

Does our ability to satisfy our wants in the moment take away the blessing of learning how to wait well? If I can't wait well for things like purchasing groceries at a store or getting a cup of coffee from Starbucks, how will I wait well for eternity? Much of life is about waiting!

Regardless of what we're waiting for, it's easy to feel discontent when things aren't going as planned and our dreams are delayed—especially when questions of "Why?" and "How long?" remain unanswered.

God uses seasons of waiting to teach us patience and make us more like himself. When we wait faithfully with unmet longings, we become a powerful picture of the bride of Christ waiting for the day when he returns and God's kingdom reigns.

Waiting is a part of life, it always has been and it always will be. However, God promises that we won't have to wait forever. Galatians 6:9 tells us: *And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.* Notice that Paul tells us not to grow weary in doing good. In other words, we are not to give up. We're to continue doing good. We're to continue to pray, continue to worship, continue to believe, and continue to wait for our miracle.

Prayerful Thought: We can be impatient about many things, but it's in our faithfulness that God is able to bless us through our patience. Just think about that. What if you did give up? What does that get you? Probably nothing. The only sure way to fail is to give up. But your due season will come... If you don't give up. Release whatever you're feeling impatient about into God's hands and trust that God's timing is perfect. What are you impatient about? What is God telling you about that situation?

Day 12 – January 17, 2019
The Way Forward...By Serving Others
Matthew 25:31-46

I once heard a story about an evangelist in a large urban city, who was walking around telling people, "Jesus loves you. Jesus loves you." He was handing out Gospel tracts, and one lady said, "You know what? Your sermon and Gospel tract isn't going to fill my belly." See, sometimes we need to show people God's love by meeting their physical

needs and then we can share the Gospel of Christ.

Jesus spoke about the importance of meeting people's physical needs. In Matthew, He said that when we feed the hungry, or give water to the thirsty, or clothe the needy, or care for the sick, it's like we're doing those things for Him. He showed us how helping someone in a practical way can create a wonderful opportunity to share the Gospel with someone.

When someone can see God's love in action in a real way in their own life, it is much easier for them to believe our message that God loves them.

So what does this look like practically? It could start with something small, like giving a hug to someone nearby who feels unloved. From there, you could go on to support ministries that help the sick, thirsty and hungry. Maybe you could volunteer at the church's food pantry on Friday mornings or our outreach in the community or take a mission trip to serve the needy in another country. The possibilities are endless when you make a decision to serve others not only through words, but also through practical action.

Prayerful Thought: Lord, I want to put action behind my words. Show me how I can practically help the people You bring across my path so they can experience the power of Your love. I will do the following this week to demonstrate my love in serving others...

Day 13 – January 18, 2019
The Way Forward...By Being at Peace with God
John 16:33; Philippians 4:7-8

Having an attitude of peace and calm is priceless. It's an attitude that says, 'I'm trusting God,' and it speaks powerfully to people. But it takes time, focus, and the grace of God to be consistently peaceful.

Too often our stress level is tied up in our circumstances. You could be stressed because you're always busy or you're struggling financially or because you're not getting along with someone you love.

To conquer the stress in our lives, we need to learn to practice the peace that's been provided for us by the overcoming power of Jesus.

One way to develop consistent peace is to learn to live 'in the now.' We can spend a lot of time thinking about the past or wondering what the future holds, but we can't accomplish anything unless our mind is focused on today.

The Bible tells us that God gives us grace for each day that we live. I believe God's

grace is the power that enables and energizes us to do what we need to do - and He gives it generously, as we need it.

Every day we need to say, 'God has given me today. I will rejoice and be glad in it.'

If you can learn to trust God 'in the now,' receiving His grace as you need it, you can become a truly peaceful person - and that's powerful.

Further, when your mind is focused on God and God's perspective of your life instead of you and your perspective of your life, you will live in 'in the now.'

Philippians 4:8 "...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." Paul is saying here that we need to learn how to think right thoughts on purpose

Prayerful Thought: God, I know that You have overcome any and every obstacle, so I ask You to help me live in the peace that You've provided for me. Show me how to trust You as I live 'in the now.' I choose to focus on you today by...

Day 14 – January 19, 2019
The Way Forward...From Where You Are to Where God Is
Genesis 13:14-17

It seems that life always has its ways of bringing us to a place where we need to make a fresh start.

In the Bible, Abram found himself in that very place when his nephew Lot chose the best land in the area, leaving Abram with the less desirable land. But God didn't abandon Abram. Instead He showed up and gave Abram a bold new vision.

I like what the Lord told Abram after he and Lot parted ways. He told him, 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are.'

It's that phrase, "look from the place where you are," that stirs me. That's the point of a fresh start, a new beginning. God Himself will bring us to that point occasionally.

You might be there right now. Maybe you want to break a bad habit or revive a lost dream. Maybe you want to get a handle on your finances, start a new ministry, renew your marriage, start your own business, write a book, whatever it is, God could be telling you to get started right now. This could be your new beginning!

After God told Abram to look from that place, the next thing He told him was, 'Arise,

walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you' (Genesis 13:17 NKJV).

God could be telling you right now to get up and get on with your dream or vision, your assignment, your life, because He is giving it to you. Your part is to walk it out.

Do what you need to do. It may not be easy. It might take some time. But trust God and go for whatever it is. Look from the place where you are right now - and go!

Prayerful Thought: God, regardless of what's happened in the past, help me to look up from where I am now. I thank You for Your new beginning for me. I will boldly step into it and walk out Your calling for me. What has happened in the past that God is saying to you now to change course and walk it out?

Day 15 – January 20, 2019
The Way Forward...From Vision to Victory
Deuteronomy 28:13

I've had some great victories in my life. God has set me free from so many old sins, bondages and habits. The thrill of freedom I've experienced is absolutely amazing, and it's something God wants all of us to experience.

I still have battles I need to win and obstacles to overcome, and I'm sure you do too. I encourage you to pick one thing you'd like to start working on today.

Next, start visualizing your victory today. Think about what your life will look like when you're free.

I use Deuteronomy 28 as an incentive. I encourage you to read the whole chapter. It basically says that if you obey God, He will bless you, and if you disobey God, you will be cursed. Now that's a powerful incentive, wouldn't you agree?

I enjoy partnering with God in becoming more than a conqueror. In fact, I think the most exciting journey in life is simply saying, "God, I want to change. I want to be transformed. I want to please You."

When you get into that frame of mind, you can get free from one thing and go on to another thing and another thing and pretty soon, you'll start to realize that you have some real authority in Christ.

Don't live your life without the thrill of growing and changing or you'll miss out on the good things God can do through you.

Take some time today to visualize the person you want to be and start pursuing God's freedom. Because one day at a time, you and God can do anything!

Prayerful Thought: God, I believe that I can experience the victory that comes in the transforming work that you can do through me to change and become more than an conqueror. Today, I visualize the free person I can be in You. Empower me as I live to please You and walk in the authority You've given me. This is the life that that I am now visualizing because of my freedom in you...

Day 16 – January 21, 2019
The Way Forward...By Cleaning Our Spiritual House
Romans 8:5-6

Have you ever looked up at your ceiling fan blades or in the deep recesses of your couch cushions and noticed the filth that builds up over time? Even though we might clean on a regular basis, there are times when we need to go...a little deeper. We realize that what appeared to be clean on the surface was in all actuality, quite filthy. The same thing can happen spiritually. As we go about our daily lives, there are things that can build up over time.

Even if we regularly worship, pray and read our Bible, the different pressures and cares of this world can quietly build up, and end up consuming our lives. Without even realizing it, we can lose our peace, our joy, and our passion for the things of God. Our service to God, which used to fill us with life and excitement, becomes a duty that we must fulfill.

Through this period of reflection, inspiration, prayer and fasting, there is some deep cleaning that God performs that helps us take our mind off of the things of this world and instead have a refreshed focus on the things of the Spirit. It is an incredibly effective way to get into the nooks and crannies of our soul and bring all those dusty old habits, broken mindsets and rusty attitudes out into the light of God's truth. In our daily spiritual discipline – prayer, fasting, and repentance, our service to God returns to something we want to do rather than something we have to do.

Prayerful Thought: As you pray and fast today, ask God to show you any areas where you could use a refreshed spiritual focus. Like David, in Psalm 51:10-12, pray that God will cleanse your heart, renew your spirit, and restore the joy of your salvation. Pray with confidence, knowing that God wants to fill you with God's life and peace. What will be your first task in cleaning your house?

Day 17 – January 22, 2019
The Way Forward...Through Spiritual Hunger
Mark 1:12-13

Even Jesus disconnected from the world to fast and pray. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke speak of Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. They also describe other times Jesus pulled away from the demands of the crowds, His ministry and even His closest friends to pray.

There are times that we, too, need to pull away from the things of the world and focus on God. “The things of the world” can certainly include more than just food. In fact, in our world, it is more likely to be television, movies, Facebook, Twitter, cell phones and internet that keep us “tuned in” to the world. None of these things are wrong in and of themselves, but they are avenues for a mental and spiritual “crowd” to gather around us and drown out the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is a means of disconnecting from the distractions of daily life and consciously choosing to bring God into greater focus. Giving up physical nourishment is the first step in engaging that process. If you think about it, though, we nourish our souls as well as our bodies. We do so through reading, talking, socializing, playing and leisure. When we fill our souls up with all those things, we don’t feel a hunger for God.

During this time of prayer and fasting, we are sure to feel physical hunger, but let’s be intentional about cultivating spiritual hunger as well. Let’s draw away from the crowds, and lay aside for a season the activities we use to nourish our souls. Instead let’s allow ourselves to enter a state of spiritual hunger – a hunger for righteousness. Jesus said that being spiritually hungry is a blessed state, because we can be sure of being filled with food that truly satisfies our deepest needs. (Matthew 5:6)

Prayerful Thought: During this time, you will find that being still before the Lord will set you in a place of increased strength, peace and hunger for God. Are you disconnected from the things that nourish your body and soul? What do you need to deny yourself so that this can be a powerful time in your life?

Day 18 – January 23, 2019
The Way Forward...By Making the Most of Your Time
Ephesians 5:15-21

Time really does fly, doesn't it? On the other hand, in some situations, it may seem like time crawls! No matter how fast or slow it feels like time goes by, each of us only has a certain amount of time on this earth. With that in mind, I want to ask you, what are you

doing with your time?

Time is such a gift from God! I see every day how God takes God's time to make us what God wants us to be. And then, in God's mercy and grace, God gives us time to get in agreement with what God's doing in our lives so we can experience God's goodness. What a loving God!

So, ask yourself, "Am I in agreement with what God is doing in me? Or, am I struggling and fighting, impatiently trying to do things my way?"

I can assure you, if you're struggling with God, you're just wasting your time, but if you're in agreement with Him, you're using your time for great things.

Remember, God is gracious. God takes God's time. We might think God's taking too long when, in His goodness, God is just waiting for us to line up with the work God's doing in us. God won't rush. God is patient. Our struggling only delays our progress.

So maybe this is a good time to change your outlook and start looking ahead to a new way of doing things, a new vision for life, a renewed faith and trust in the One who is always at work in us, and always for our good.

My encouragement to you is to trust God and spend your time getting in agreement with what He is doing in your life. Let Him define your purpose. Know in your heart that He has great plans, and no matter how much time He takes, He loves you, and He always has your best interest at heart.

Prayerful Thought: Lord, I want to spend my time agreeing with, not fighting, the great work You are accomplishing in me. I thank You that when I start to waste time, You always remind me that You love me and that Your timing is always best. What task or opportunity is God leading you to seize today?

Day 19 – January 24, 2019
The Way Forward...Living Above the Line
Proverbs 23:7; Philippians 4:8

These passages of scripture from Proverbs and Philippians shows us how important it is to think healthy, positive thoughts about ourselves and about God. I attended a conference last year about the power of living above the line. This concept is in pursuing an attitude where love, joy, trust, grace and purpose dominates our lives and thinking. This type of living is in direct opposite to living below the line which is a life of living in fear, pride, anger, unforgiveness and toxic thoughts. You cannot love life if you're always thinking negative thoughts. If you struggle with this, I encourage you to make up your mind to work toward changing your way of thinking. I've found the best

way to become a positive thinker is to ask God for a lot of help, and to ask for it often.

That's really the hardest part of being set free from negativism: admitting that it's a problem and asking God for help. But once you do that, you can overcome it because according to the Bible, you're a new person in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Many people are afraid to hope because they've been hurt so much in life. Their philosophy is: "If I don't expect anything good to happen, I won't be disappointed if it doesn't."

That's how I used to think. I had encountered so much disappointment and I was afraid to be positive. When I began to study the Word and trust God to restore me, I realized my negative thoughts had to go.

We need to practice positive thoughts in every situation. If you're going through a difficult time, expect that God will work things out for your good. As a Christian, it's time for you to fight for your thoughts, because your mind won't automatically come into agreement with God's plans.

I encourage you to spend time examining His Word and comparing it to your thought life. Give God time to help you put your thoughts in line with His. He showed me how to be a more positive person, and He'll show you how to be one too.

Prayerful Thought: God, I admit that I struggle with negative thoughts and I need Your help. Line my thoughts up with Your Word. In every situation, remind me that You will work things out for my good. What situation are you going to change from thinking below the line to one of thinking above the line?

Day 20 – January 25, 2019

The Way Forward...With the Power of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:8

In Acts 1:8 Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will also come upon us, giving us power (ability, efficiency and might) to be Christ's witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Many Christians follow all the "right" rules, but wonder: "Is this all there is?" As a young Christian, I experienced that same emptiness. Doing the right things brought temporary happiness but not deep, satisfying joy.

I cried out: "God, something is missing!" To my surprise, I heard the audible voice of God and I knew He was about to move in my life.

Only a few hours later Jesus filled me with the presence of the Holy Spirit in a way that I

had never before experienced, and everything changed. I felt His power in my life in a new way.

When you spend time with God daily and receive His Holy Spirit, you're not signing up for a scary, weird experience. You are simply receiving His power to be more like Jesus and His wisdom to walk through ordinary events.

Don't be afraid of new things, just make sure they are biblical. I believe that God desires to take you to new heights in Him through the power of daily interaction with His Holy Spirit. He is knocking at the door of your heart. Will you open it wide and welcome Him?

Prayerful Thought: God, I want to live as a Christian who is filled with the power of Your Holy Spirit. Show me how to live in the deep, satisfying joy that comes from being filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. I thank You for the power and the wisdom to walk through every day and every situation. What area in your life do you need the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen and empower you?

Day 21 - January 26, 2019
The Way Forward...To an Abundant Life
John 10:7-17

In the face of dwindling attendance, many churches respond by enthusiastically pouncing on visitors with radical hospitality—fresh bread, coffee mugs, a schedule of upcoming events, information about the nursery and Sunday School. It's very nice—for those visiting the church. Yet fewer and fewer Americans are visitors; some studies, including one from the Pew Research Center, say less than 20 percent will ever attend church. Given this reality, our efforts at becoming a “welcoming church” may be inadequate if we are waiting until people enter the church doors.

I pray we each find the courage to venture outside of our church comfort zones to introduce Christ to others. We can be the hands, feet, ears, and voice of Jesus in the neighborhoods near our church and home, at a homeless shelter or school, or in a coffee shop, grocery store, or even a bar, and extend invitations to worship. *Then*, we can all be a part of the Greeters Ministry or the Hospitality Ministry which leads to an abundant life.

Prayerful Thought: As you go about your life today, consider three people you might invite to worship with you next week. Who will you invite? Also, what is your understanding of Abundant life living here on earth?

Appendix Fasting

Question: I have never fasted before?

Answer: Consult your doctor first! Fasting is not the removal of all food from your diet. Fasting is learning to discipline your mind, body and spirit to remove “something” you know hinders your ability to function at your highest capacity, from your life or diet.

Question: Is fasting biblical?

Answer: Fasting is biblical. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, fasting was used by the people of God to prepare for a spiritual challenge, hear God’s voice before making a major decision, and for removing destructive forces in your life.

The Daniel Fast

The Daniel Fast (Taken from the book of Daniel). When Daniel was captured by the Babylonians, he asked of the Babylonians if he, along with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, could fast eating only fruits and vegetables so they would be prepared to confront the Babylonian king.

The Daniel Fast is a partial fast where some foods are eaten - fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes while others are restricted. Most people use this method of fasting for 21 consecutive days or by setting aside some time throughout this period for fasting and prayer.

FOODS TO ENJOY ON THE DANIEL FAST

- All vegetables (including potatoes)—fresh, frozen, dried* or juiced*.
- All fruit—fresh, frozen, dried* or juiced*.
- All whole grains--amaranth, barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa, millet, and whole wheat pasta.
- All nuts & seeds – almonds, cashews, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, pine nuts, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds and unsweetened nut butters*.
- All legumes – dried or canned*; black beans, black eyed peas, cannellini beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), great northern beans, kidney beans, lentils, pinto beans, and split peas.
- All quality oils – avocado, coconut, grapeseed, olive, peanut, sesame, and walnut.
- Beverages– water only: distilled, filtered and spring water.
- Other* – unsweetened almond milk, coconut milk, rice milk, or soy milk; herbs, spices, salt, pepper, unsweetened coconut flakes, seasonings, Bragg’s Liquid Aminos, soy products, and tofu. *For packaged food check the ingredients list to ensure there are no added sugars, chemicals or preservatives.

FOODS TO AVOID ON THE DANIEL FAST

- All meat & animal products – bacon, beef, buffalo, eggs, fish, lamb, poultry, pork and animal sausage casing.
- All dairy products – butter, cheese, cream, milk, and yogurt.
- All sweeteners – agave nectar, artificial sweeteners, brown rice syrup, cane juice, honey, molasses, raw sugar, syrups, stevia, and sugar.
- All leavened bread & yeast – baked goods and Ezekiel bread (if it contains yeast and honey).
- All refined & processed food products – artificial flavorings, chemicals, food additives, preservatives, white flour, and white rice.
- All deep-fried foods – chips, French fries, and potato chips.
- All solid fats – lard, margarine, and shortening.
- Beverages – alcohol, carbonated drinks, coffee, energy drinks, herbal tea

We invite you to seek God for the name(s) of brothers and/or sisters whom you trust to serve as your accountability partner(s) through this journey. This is the person(s) who will pray with and for you, as you do the same for him/her. This is also the person(s) whom you will contact when and if challenging times arise and you feel too weak to fulfill your commitment. We likewise recommend you to make this a time of family commitment. This is a great time for parents to teach and learn from children, even as spouses, siblings and extended family members strengthen their familial bonds through spiritual formation. If you have medical concerns that may challenge your ability to participate in this fast, please consult your physician before engaging in this effort. We must employ wisdom, even though we embody zeal.

Suggestions for Fasting

1. Set your objective: Why are you fasting? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in the reasons why you should fast so your prayers can be more specific.
2. Make your commitment: Pray about how long you should fast (one day, one week etc.), what kind of fast (no food, eating vegetables and grains only, no meat, no television, no social media, no phone etc.), and how much time will be devoted to prayer, meditation, and study of God's word. Set your schedule for the same time each day so nothing else can interfere with your time with God.
3. Prepare yourself spiritually, mentally, and physically: Repent and seek forgiveness from God for sins, forgive others; meditation on God's Word while avoiding and turning away from worldly desires; if taking medication, please consult your physician first before beginning a fast.