

SEVEN DAYS OF FASTING

PREPARING FOR THE NEW



VAN MOODY

FASTING – AN INTRODUCTION

In 2 Timothy 2:20-21 the apostle Paul writes, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these words in his letter to Timothy, *“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”*

Here, we discover the type of people God uses. It is important to note God uses people who are cleansed, those who flee from sin and those who seek godliness. Are you surprised it's not necessarily the gifted, the talented, the well-educated, or the Bible scholar?

In Paul's illustration to Timothy, the great house is representative of the church (believers) and God uses cleansed people to share the good news, the Gospel of Christ, to the world. Believers must determine the vessel they will be – honorable (gold and silver) or dishonorable (wood and clay). And while it is true God is sovereign and can do whatever he wants with the “vessels” wouldn't you rather be accountable as a clean vessel used for honor rather than dishonor?

Verse 21 states clearly we are accountable and responsible for cleansing ourselves. Paul isn't saying we can atone for our sins, only Christ in his finished work can do that, but He has provided the means for us to do so. Just like water and soap cleans us from dirt, the blood of Jesus applied to our lives cleanses us from sins. How? We must choose to walk in His way, confessing our sins whenever we become defiled.

As cleansed people, we are “sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.” When sanctified, believers are “set apart” for special use, and not just any use, but one useful to the LORD and prepared to join Him in His good works. The only way we can live up to that standard is to keep ourselves cleansed, ready and willing.

As we embark together on this seven day period of fasting and consecration, let's explore how we can keep ourselves as “vessels for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

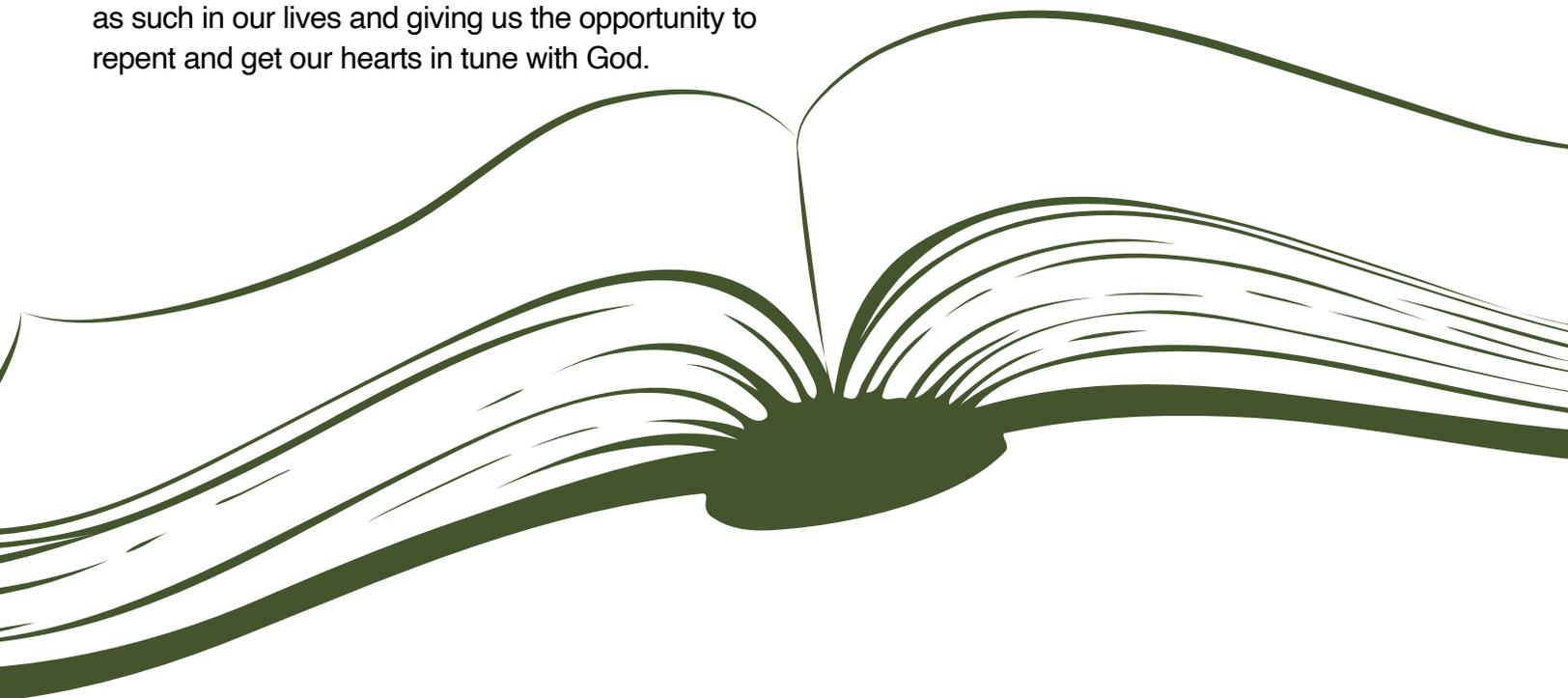


THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

In Scripture, there is an interesting pattern. In each instance, just before God does a new thing or moves in a new and unique way, his people have a period of fasting and consecration. Take a look at Exodus 19:10, *“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes.’”* In the next verse, the Lord goes on to explain why, *“And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.”* The Lord himself was about to come down in sight of all the people and speak to Moses – certainly a new thing – and the Lord called for consecration of the people.

Fasting often comes with consecration as it fuels longing for the Lord, enhances our need, and punctuates our prayerful pleas for more of God. Fasting amplifies our pining for God, our hunger for Jesus and our yearning to experience his power in our lives. But fasting also has the ability to work in a very different way – exposing our idols, especially those that have gone unrecognized as such in our lives and giving us the opportunity to repent and get our hearts in tune with God.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus signified fasting as beneficial and rewarding for believers when He said, *“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”* (Matthew 6:17-18). Fasting helps us gain a fresh perspective and allows us to rely on God anew. It shows our seriousness in regard to our relationship with God. In Scripture, fasting is often presented regarding food, but it can also be anything given up for a short time so our attention can be better focused on God and our relationship with Him. It is always for a limited time, such as our seven days of fasting here, and is designed to redirect us toward God and draw us into deep fellowship with Him. Most importantly, fasting is not intended as a way to get God to see our point of view but rather to turn our attention to God to change us.



THE CONSECRATION CONNECTION

Fasting is nearly always aligned with consecration - setting ourselves apart from all unclean things which sully our relationship with God. In Scripture it is likened to sanctification and holiness. In Exodus 19:10, the consecration of the people is coupled with “let them wash their clothes” which is symbolic in the Bible of a new beginning with God. They were to cleanse themselves so they could truly follow God in what was coming. God was about to do a new thing and He wanted them to be ready.

As believers, the Word tells us to be holy and separate from the world, consecrated. It is crucial to our relationship with God, as well

as those in our world. Consecration is the concept Paul speaks of in his letter to the Romans (12:1-2) *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* Fasting leads us in the act of consecration, allowing us to identify and remove idols, to deepen our relationship with God by separating ourselves from sin and living our lives for the glory of God.



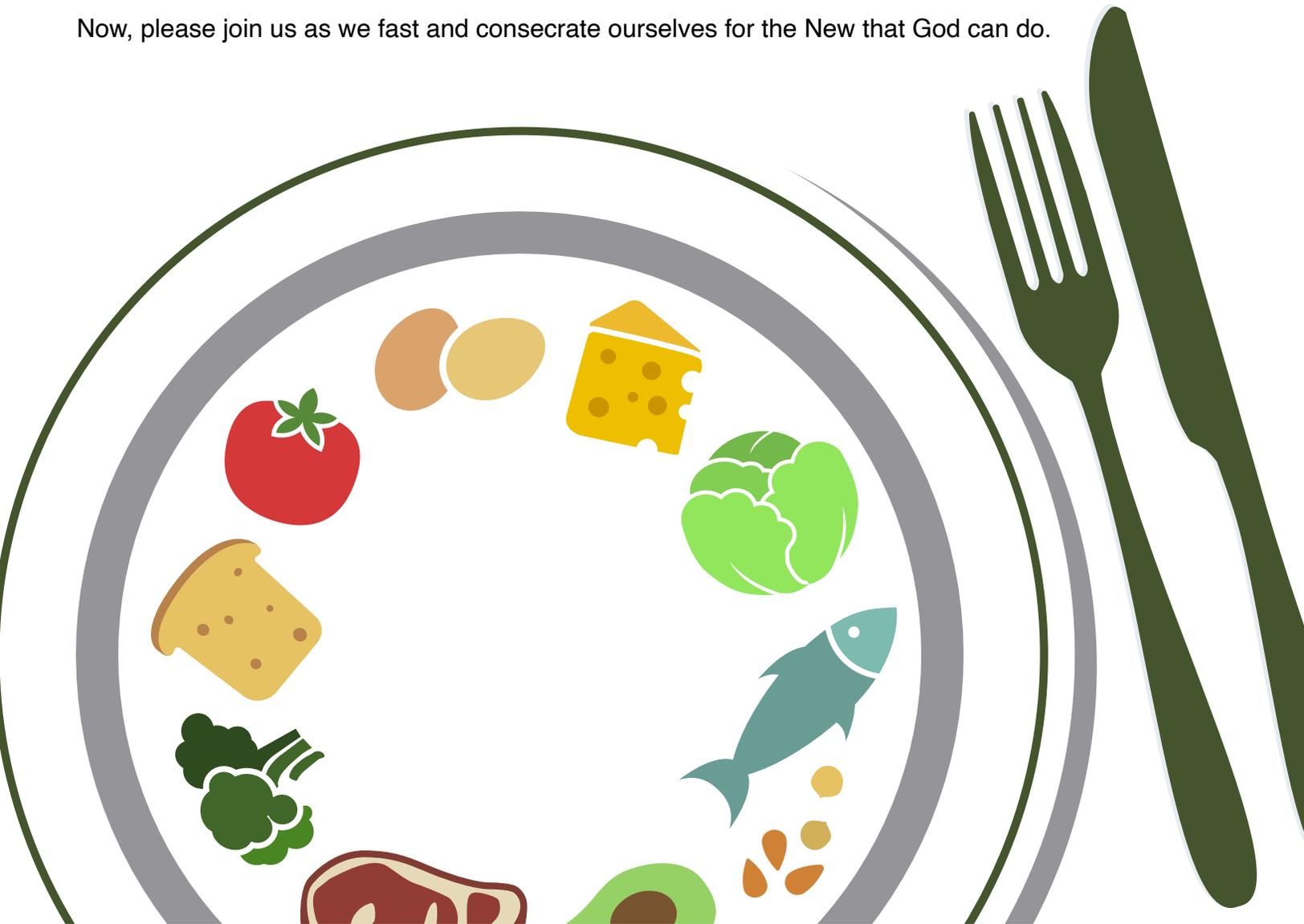
DEFINING YOUR FAST

As you join us in seven days of fasting and consecration as we prepare for God to work in new and unique ways, define your fast here.

What will you fast for seven days? _____

What would like to see God do in your life? In the lives of those you love? In your organization? In your church? _____

Now, please join us as we fast and consecrate ourselves for the New that God can do.



DAY 1

THE WORD AND WILL OF GOD

Reading for the Day – Joshua 3

KEY VERSE

*“And Joshua said to the people, ‘Sanctify yourselves,
for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.’”*

Joshua 3:5

DAY 1

In Joshua 3, we find the Israelites along the banks of the Jordan River, camped, awaiting a crossing. The river was a flood stage, making the crossing impossible without God's divine intervention. Joshua instructs the people to sanctify themselves in preparation for whatever God plans to do.

Joshua then informs the people of God's instructions. The priests are to carry the Ark of the Covenant into the river and the people are to follow in obedience. Once the priest entered the Jordan, the Lord had promised to stop the water so the Israelites could safely pass on dry land. The Israelites had arrived at their present location in faith following God's Word and the Spirit's guidance. Like these heroes of the faith, we are called on to do the same, to pass through our own "wilderness" obedient to the Word of God and the Spirit's leading. The way may seem treacherous at times, but in faith, we must follow. To do so, we must sanctify ourselves continually, putting away sin, and keeping our relationship with God pure, consecrated.

How obedient are you to the Word and Will of God? Are you willing to take the new steps of faith needed to follow God's leading? For the Israelites, crossing the Jordan River at Flood stage to enter the Promised Land after 40 years in the wilderness was a frightening, albeit exciting prospect, which required obedience and faith. Joshua gave them the command, "*Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.*" With the consecration, they were assured the promised "wonders." It would be a

new beginning, starting with God opening the Jordan River for them to pass. The Scripture records that as soon as the priests touched the water, the flooding flow was stopped, and "*The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.*"

It would be first of many wonders God would perform on their behalf as He led them in conquering the Promised Land. The miraculous parting of the Jordan River came only after the people followed the command to "Sanctify yourselves."

Like the ancient Israelites, we too must put away sin, separate ourselves, and be cleansed, so we can follow God and experience the "wonders" He has for us. What is required? Obedience to the Word and Will of God, consecration of ourselves, and the faith to truly follow God along new paths on which we have never before traveled. God's Will is not a secret or a mystery, it is revealed to us by God's Word as we seek Him. Knowing God's Will for our lives has as its foundation who we are in relation to Christ – in our sanctification. It is based in our continually becoming the people God desires us to be – people who are conformed to the example Jesus provided for us. When we are in obedience to Him, consecrated to Him, then He will guide, and we will have the faith to follow wherever He leads.

DAY 2

GOD'S LAW

Reading for the Day - 2 Chronicles 34-35

KEY VERSES

"...because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you," says the Lord."

2 Chronicles 34:27

"After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. But he sent messengers to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you." Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am severely wounded." His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem. So he died, and was buried in one of the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah. And to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations. They made it a custom in Israel; and indeed they are written in the Laments." 2

DAY 2

As 2 Chronicles 34, opens we see Josiah crowned King of Judah at eight years' old. When he is 20, he begins his quest to remove all the idols from the kingdom. Six years in, he begins restoration of the temple, during which *"Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses."*

While that may sound like good news, it was anything but, in truth, the people of God had drifted so far from what God required the Book of the Law had been lost. They were living lives that didn't line up with God's law and didn't even recognize it until the Book of the Law was found.

The truth is God's law never went anywhere. The law of God is always in our midst, always at work, then and now. The people of God had drifted so far from it, they failed to recognize its power to bless them when they obeyed and punish them when they fell short.

When Shaphan, secretary to King Josiah, read the Book aloud to the King, the Bible records "When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes" (v.20). While tearing of robes may seem unfamiliar to believers in the 21st Century, for the Jews it was an ancient tradition connected with grief, loss, mourning, and humility, a powerful expression of a broken heart at the time.

Josiah realized the extent to which the nation had fallen away from God and was overwhelmed with sorrow understanding, *"Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word*

of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book." After inquiring of the Lord, the prophet Huldah informs Josiah punishment is coming to Judah but not in his time, because God saw his "heart was tender" and his actions, "you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you."

Josiah doubled his efforts, calling the nation back to God spiritually and they began to prosper. Later, he tries to win a battle physically and is killed, thus ending his godly reign. The lesson for us today as we fast and consecrate ourselves for God's new thing, we must ask, "How far have we drifted?" Are we like the kingdom of Judah, having lost our direction and the guidance provided by the Word? So often we believe physical strength or mental prowess is the answer when they are not (though God can use either). The real answer is ultimately found in whether or not we are right in the spirit. Are we showing sorrow for our sins, and responding with a repentant heart to God, so that we can be right in spirit, following the Word of the Lord and the guidance of His Spirit?

As believers today, keeping the spiritual law of the Lord means believing and acting in accordance with His Word. When we do, we are right in spirit, submitting to God, and in doing so, we find ourselves overflowing with attitudes and behaviors which please God.

DAY 3

GOD'S FAVOR

Reading for the Day – Nehemiah 1-2

KEY VERSES

“So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said: “I pray, Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.”

Nehemiah 1:4-7

DAY 3

As the book of Nehemiah opens, we meet Nehemiah, an influential official (cupbearer) in the Persian Court with direct access to King Artaxerxes. Having just received a report from the Jews who have returned to Judah following the Babylonian Captivity which stated, *“Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire (v.3),”* Nehemiah is distraught.

He immediately entered a period of mourning, weeping, fasting, and prayer. He begins with thanksgiving to God and then fervently asks God to hear his prayer. Notice what comes next – a prayer of repentance for the children of Israel, his family, and himself. Why? Nehemiah knew asking God for big things required Nehemiah to consecrate himself. To do so he confessed their shortcomings – acting corruptly before the Lord and failing to keep the Lord’s commandments.

As we enter Day 3 of fasting, let’s examine how have we acted wickedly before the Lord and been unfaithful in following the commands and the decrees of the Lord? What do we need to confess? What do we need to learn?

Nehemiah knew the Jews had a pattern of sinning against God, but more importantly, he knew if the pattern was to change, they would have to repent and rely on God. Nehemiah began his prayer with confession and then called on God to keep His promises to His people when they repented and returned to Him.

We, too, can do the same, in the face of opposition. Confess, repent, and consecrate ourselves as we commit to follow God and trust Him wholeheartedly. Nehemiah reminds us of the importance of nurturing our relationship with God, Who is always with us, by keeping our eyes fixed on Him and His promises.

As our relationship with God grows, we are able to experience His favor, His grace, which coupled with our honest confession and genuine commitment gives us hope. It is God’s favor which then provides us with the power and strength to change a community, a city, and even the world, all humanly impossible without God.

DAY 4

GOD'S GLORY

Reading for the Day – Isaiah 59-61

KEY VERSES:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

Isaiah 61:1-3

DAY 4

Isaiah 59 follows on the previous chapter's theme – fasting – and begins with a harsh reminder, *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear (v. 2).”* The premise is clear, sin separates us from God and the only remedy for that separation is spiritual reformation. How do we find restoration of our relationship with God? The healing of our relationship with God comes via honest introspection with ourselves and God regarding our spiritual condition.

In Chapter 60, Isaiah shifts his tone to the new glory God wants to reveal and in Chapter 61 to the time of God's favor. This future glory, the time of the Lord's favor, brings praise rather than despair, beauty instead of ashes, and gladness in place of mourning, but it only comes after there is confession and repentance. God desires to bring about the promises of Isaiah 61 in our lives, but we must first acknowledge and confess our sins and iniquities which have separated us from God. Isaiah 61: 1-3 may sound familiar as you read them as they are Messianic prophecy quoted by Jesus early in His earthly ministry. In Luke 4:17-12, Jesus quotes these words essentially announcing Himself as the Messiah as well as the future glorious kingdom and the time of God's favor. Even so, it is crucial to note that Jesus' Messianic declaration is preceded by John the Baptist's ministry of repentance.

The Messiah is to preach the good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, and free the captives. What do these individuals have in common? They are people who are meek, humble, and ready to accept His message and His gift of salvation and freedom in Him. Those who are prideful, self-sufficient, and self-righteous are not listed. Why? All who come to Jesus to accept God's grace and mercy must be humbled and see their need.

Humility is defined as meekness, unpretentiousness, or the absence of self. It is not an outward characteristic, but an attitude of the heart. Humility is to admit we are without spiritual worth, unable to save ourselves, without the grace and mercy of God and Christ's ultimate sacrifice. When we do, we become new creations in Christ, exchanging our worthlessness for His worthiness, and find ourselves the recipients of God's favor with infinite opportunities to glory in the grace of God as members of His glorious kingdom.

What is God's glory? While difficult to define, the scriptures identify it as God's magnificence, His greatness, which is worthy of all praise (Psalm 19). In the New Testament, the Scriptures explain God's glory as the expression of God's holiness, His worthiness, His deserved honor (John, Acts, Romans). The glory of God is also described as honoring God with our lives, acknowledging His greatness, beauty, power, and perfection.

DAY 5

PRIORITIZING GOD

Reading for the Day - Haggai 1-2:9

KEY VERSES:

“In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, “Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: ‘This people says, “The time has not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.’” Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: “Consider your ways! “You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes.”

Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,” says the Lord. “You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” says the Lord of hosts. “Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. ¹¹ For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the Lord. Then Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, spoke the Lord’s message to the people, saying, “I am with you, says the Lord.” So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.”

Haggai 1:1-15

DAY 5

Haggai's ministry dates to the reign of King Darius. When the book opens, it has been nearly 20 years since the Jews had returned from the Babylonian Captivity. They were busy, building their homes and going about their daily business, while God's temple remained in ruins. They put God's work on hold, striving for themselves, and facing economic hardships as a result. Haggai firmly rebukes them for neglecting the temple and God's work in chapter 1 verses 1-11.

Are we not guilty of similar actions? Putting the work of God on hold, not saying we won't ever do it, just not right now. Accepting discouragement as a sign to stop the work, rather than a way to build up our faith. In Haggai, the Jews had neglected the restoration of the temple. Why? So they could have more time and money to spend on their own homes and businesses. Doesn't that sound familiar, much like the excuses we offer up for ourselves?

There is a lesson here, as God punished them for not rebuilding the temple (Haggai 1: 6). Haggai tells them to take a look at their lives, they have spent lots of money with little to show for their efforts and investments. They eat and drink continually but are never filled. They work hard to earn wages, but the wages just slip through their fingers. Sadly, the same is true for modern-day believers who lavish much on themselves and their households but fall short in doing God's work. God expects us to join Him in His work here on earth, working at it with all our hearts.

God had promised to do a new thing in Jerusalem and reveal more of His glory, but the people had to put Him first – in both their finances and their time. The people were not seeing the prosperity they had hoped for because God was not first in their hearts. They had prioritized themselves instead of God. How often do we do the same thing? The people had time for everything – except God.

In the verses that follow (Haggai 1:12-15), God reminded them He was with them, on their side, even though they had been ignoring Him. God's grace was at work in their lives, He was ready to forgive if they confessed and trusted Him to leave their personal pursuits to rebuild the temple. He stirred their hearts and they responded immediately, giving His Word and His work priority, and when they put God first – in time and resources - everything in their lives fell into place.

How do we do make God a priority? It begins by setting our minds on Christ, confessing our sins, focusing on Christ, trusting His unfailing love. In doing so, we can make decisions which honor God and prioritize Him, whether it means changing a behavior, doing something good for others, or simply focusing on God and His work.

DAY 6

RETURNING TO GOD

Reading for the Day – 2 Chronicles 29-31

KEY VERSES:

“Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the command of the king: “Children of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see. Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord; and enter His sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him.”

2 Chronicles 30:6-9

“For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, “May the good Lord provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.” And the Lord listened to Hezekiah and healed the people.”

2 Chronicles 30:18-20

“Then the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven.”

2 Chronicles 30:27

“Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. And Azariah the chief priest, from the house of Zadok, answered him and said, “Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and have plenty left, for the Lord has blessed His people; and what is left is this great abundance.”

2 Chronicles 31:9-10

DAY 6

In our reading today, we discovered Hezekiah was crowned king at the age of 25 and was declared a good king in God's eyes. Even so, the writer of 2nd Chronicles, who many scholars believe to be Ezra, goes on to share that during Hezekiah's reign, the Northern Kingdom was defeated, and Judah's fortified cities annihilated by Assyria. Jerusalem, though threatened, survived by divine intervention. Why? The writer sets his focus on Hezekiah, who put his relationship with God first, chronicling in the next three chapters the spiritual impact of Hezekiah's reign as king.

In his first month as king, Hezekiah purified and reopened the temple, closed by his father Ahaz (who had also turned Jerusalem into the center for idolatry), and reestablished worship within. Next, in chapter 30, Hezekiah calls for the people to celebrate the Passover together. The people are overjoyed and extend the celebration an additional week. In chapter 31, we see the people return to God wholeheartedly, as they destroy pagan shrines throughout Judah. At the same time, the people bring offerings to the temple from all over the nation of Judah. Finally, the descendants of Aaron, once more supported by the people's gifts, serve the Lord in the temple.

What brought about this great change in the nation of Judah? There is little doubt that Hezekiah's example – putting God first in all things – brought about the change. He led the spiritual renewal in Judah beginning with consecration (29:4-14) which was followed by purification and rededication of the temple sanctuary and altar (29:15-30). Next, he encouraged the people to do the same. They responded, consecrated, and purified themselves, thus renewing their dedication to God

Healing, blessing, peace, and prosperity occurred in Jerusalem as a result of the people returning to God. These are the areas we hope to see change in our lives and communities as well, and it is possible if we, too, follow the example of Hezekiah. We can experience the healing, blessing, peace, and prosperity that only God can provide if we consecrate ourselves, purify our lives, and dedicate ourselves to His service.

DAY 7

A CLEAN HEART

Reading for the Day – 2 Samuel 11, Psalm 51, and Matthew 23

KEY VERSE:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.”

Matthew 23:25

DAY 7

In 2 Samuel 11, we see David, who had been described by Samuel in 1 Samuel 13 as a “man after God’s own heart,” experiencing troubles as he struggles with temptation. He succumbs to temptation, taking Bathsheba, who becomes pregnant. In a coverup, he recalls Uriah, her husband and soldier, home from the front. When Uriah refuses to sleep with his wife, while his comrades are still fighting in the field, David gives orders which result in Uriah’s death. David then marries Bathsheba.

When God sends Nathan the Prophet to confront David regarding his sin, David is overwhelmed with emotion, which we see expressed in Psalm 51. David confesses his sin and cries out to the Lord for forgiveness and cleansing. He begs God to restore his joy, knowing that only then will he be able to lead the way God intended.

David’s private sin with Bathsheba tore his family apart, led to death of his child, and resulted in big problems with God. Nevertheless, he still remained in his public position. The real issue was David’s heart. He was an outward success while at the same time being an inward failure.

In Matthew 23, we see Jesus address this issue with the Pharisees and leaders of the day, calling them out as fools and hypocrites. Like David, they acted with great calculation, intended to hide their true intentions and impress others. Their focus was on the external, when their issues were actually internal – issues of the heart – including their love for God as well as their love for others.

So many of us live our lives this way. On the outside we look great, but on the inside we are wasting away because of secret sins. It is why Jesus had such a strong rebuke for the Pharisees, as what matters most to God is our heart – how clean we are on the inside.

We all know how easy it is to fall into sin. It is downhill, which makes it even more difficult to stop once begun. Like David, when we find ourselves with secret sins (or not so secret ones), we must be willing to see our sin for what it is and pray for God’s mercy, confessing our sins, asking for forgiveness, so that we may be cleansed and return to Him and the work He has for us to do. So that we may have a heart after God.

CONCLUSION

A CLOSER WALK

And now, our week of fasting and consecration is complete, so let us go back and review Paul's inspired words to Timothy, "*But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.*" Here, we learned the type of people God uses – cleansed people, people who run from sin, and chase after godliness – and through our week of fasting, we have learned to become these people.

We have learned and practiced fasting and consecration as we explored the Word and Will of God, pondering our own willingness to take new steps of faith. We examined God's Law and discovered how to be right in spirit. We saw the consequences of unfaithfulness and the blessings of God's favor. We acknowledged our sin, humbly confessing and repenting, so that we might experience the promise of God's favor and the new glory God wants to reveal in our lives. We discovered how to prioritize God, putting Him first in our hearts and all areas of our lives. We realized our need to return to God, so we can enjoy the healing, blessing, peace, and prosperity of God. Finally, through it all, we came to understand a clean heart is what matters most to God, further confirming we can be the type of people God uses.

