**Introduction**

# Fasting is never easy, but always worth it.

 When Tom and I were dating, his Dad invited him to lead a revival at his home church, First Baptist, Dickson. I remember that Tom was very excited about this opportunity, and as part of his preparation, he determined to fast weekly on Mondays. I’d never fasted much before, but in my growing desire to become “one” with this man, I decided to join him in his fast.

 Wow…who knew that fasting was so hard? After all, you’re not trying to *do* something*,* you’re determining *NOT* to do something. And I don’t know about you, but in my flesh, I am extremely allergic to hunger. Fasting is never easy. It’s hard, I sometimes get a headache, my stomach hollers at me, and I get a bit frustrated with myself at how emotional I am about food!

 But, once I experience the victory of just saying “NO!” to that grumbling inside of me, I learn how to say “YES!” to the divine invitation from God to live (for a bit) unfettered to this world. Fasting is incredibly powerful, and God promises to reward us when we practice this spiritual discipline. (Matthew 6:18)

 This year, we are inviting you to join our leaders at Thompson Station Church as we fast and pray January 8-12. We are participating in the invitation Joel declared when he wrote, *“Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord.” Joel 1:14.*

 I hope that as you participate in this fast, you experience God in ways you’ve never experienced Him before. I’m convinced that together we are going to experience God in ways this year that we’ve never experienced Him before (as a direct result of our fasting together).

 After our 5-day fasting and praying experience, we will celebrate the end of this fast on Saturday, January 13 at 8AM with a BREAK FAST that we share together. I look forward to seeing you then.

**Leighann McCoy**

Prayer Minister at Thompson Station Church

 The following guide was adapted from *Prayer and Fasting Guide 2017, Knowing God* written by Jim Laffoon (international director of Every Nation School of Empowerment). Several days devotions are written in the first person. Those are Jim’s words. Very little editing (to personalize this material to the life of Thompson Station Church) has been done to the original material.

A Practical Guide to Prayer and Fasting

# Planning for the Fast

 *Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.” Joshua 3:5 (ESV)*

**Pray—**Spend time reading the Bible before the fast. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance in your prayers. On pages 4-5, write down your faith goals, as well as your answered prayer in 2017.

**Commit—**Pray about the kind of fast you will participate in and commit to it ahead of time. Do not decided day-by-day. Ask God for discipline (and grace).

**Act—**Start eating smaller portions a few days before the fast. Avoid food high in sugar and fat. Plan to limit physical and social activities for the week of the fast. Ask someone to be your prayer partner and support throughout the fast.

**Note:** Consult a physician, especially if you are pregnant, nursing, or taking medication. If your situation does not allow you to do a full fast, determine what will work best for you.

# Declare your fast

Decide how you will practice the fast, and commit to it now.

Fasting options:

* Water only
* Liquids only
* One meal only
* Other (consider giving up something that you enjoy such as caffeine, sugar, social media, television and other forms of online entertainment)

A fast that I have had great success with (for multiple days) is to drink a protein shake in the morning followed by vegetable juices for lunch and dinner. Include plenty of water and herbal tea throughout the day. With this fast you can continue light exercise.

**My fast will include: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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# While fasting

 *Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word, that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4*

**Focus—**Set aside time to work through the devotionals. Be ready to respond to God’s Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

**Pray—**Join at least one prayer meeting with others. If you choose to use the Prayer Room at the church, the code to get in is ¼, 2, 3 then enter.

**Replenish—**During mealtimes, read the Bible and pray instead of eating. Drink plenty of water and rest as much as you can. Be ready for temporary bouts of physical weakness and mental annoyances like impatience and irritability.

# Breaking the Fast

 *“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’” Isaiah 58:9 (ESV)*

**Eat—**Reintroduce solid food gradually. Your body will need time to adjust to a normal diet. Start with fruits, juices, yogurt, then salad, and add more vegetables. Eat small portions throughout the day.

**Pray—**Don’t give up! Trust God’s faithfulness and timing. Know that during your fast, heaven’s gates opened on your behalf. Carry your newfound passion for God throughout the year. Be confident that the God who hears you when you pray is the God who answers your prayers.

**I am thankful to God for…**

# Answered prayers in 2017

List highlights, answered prayers, and lessons learned in 2017. Thank God for His faithfulness, provision, and grace this year!

**In 2018, I am believing God for…**

# Personal Faith Goals

Spiritual revival, Physical healing, Success in work, Rich generosity

# My Family

Restoration of Relationships, Salvation of loved ones

# My School/Career

Excellence, Advancement

# My Ministry

Small Group accountability and growth, Salvation of friends and neighbors, Spiritual Growth

# My Prayer Partner

What things does your prayer partner want you to join him/her in for prayer?

**The Power of Seven Vision**

# **7 Personal Relationships**

 We are asking every member of Thompson Station Church to identify 7 people who need to know Jesus personally. As you pray for these people, invite God to give you opportunities to minister to them and share God’s love with them.

My 7 include:

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# **70 Neighborhoods**

 As a church, we are identifying 70 neighborhoods where we target intentional ministry neighbor to neighbor. We are asking that you be neighborly this year. Get to know your neighbors, contribute to the community of your neighborhood and pray for them.

The neighbors whose properties touch mine are:

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# **7 Cities**

 Over the next 3 years we will identify 7 cities where we will plant and/or satellite our church to reach that city for Christ. Right now, we are ministering in:

1. Thompson Station and Spring Hill
2. Columbia
3. Cincinnati, OH
4. Las Vegas, NV
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# **7 Countries**

 Over the next 3 years we will identify 7 countries where we will partner with missionaries on the ground to build churches and expand the Gospel message to people who’ve never met Jesus. Right now, we are partnering with:

1. Nicaragua
2. Guatemala
3. East Asia
4. Uruguay
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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Use this list throughout 2018 as you seek to serve Christ in bold witness and generous love.

Preparation for the Fast: Day 0

# The Scriptures and the Power of God

**Read Matthew 22:23-33**

 *Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” Matthew 22:29*

 Some of the Sadducees (the priestly class of Judaism) were trying to trap Jesus with a question about the resurrection of the dead, which they themselves denied. They presented Jesus a scenario based on a Jewish laws, which required a man to marry his brother’s childless widow. The child of this new union would be regarded as the son of the deceased brother, ensuring that his family line did not die with him.

 In essence, the Sadducees asked Jesus: if a widow married seven times within the same line of brothers, whose wife would she be in heaven? The timeless answer of Jesus is still relevant today: *“You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God”* (Matthew 22:29). In other words, the hypothetical scenario they presented was a manifestation of the fact that they had been led astray and deceived, because they misunderstood both the Scripture and God’s power.

The word *error* in Matthew 22:29 is a powerful word in the original language. It means “to be deceived, to be led astray, or to wander about.” Tragically, I still see countless well-meaning Christians being led astray because they have failed to grasp God’s Word or experience His power.

 Although this deception is rarely theological (like that of the Sadducees), the ramifications can still be devastating. Some Christians may be destroyed by bitterness because they have never fully grasped the implications of the scriptural injunctions to forgive. Or perhaps they lack the understanding necessary to appropriate God’s resurrection power, so they are living in a perpetual state of darkness and despair.

 No matter where you find yourself today, I want to begin a journey with you—a 6-day journey into a deeper understanding of both the Scriptures and God’s power. As we journey together, I will introduce many exercises designed to give you the skills necessary to gain a deeper understanding of God’s Word and a fresh appropriation of His mighty power.

 I am also asking the Holy Spirit to help you apply these newly developed skills to an area of your life that has proven resistant to change. Finally, we will join in prayer with many others by focusing on specific prayer requests related to our Power of 7 vision.

# **Apply**

* What specific area or pattern in your life has proven the most resistant to change? Please write it out. Let’s bring the Scriptures and God’s power to bear on this area/pattern for the next 6 days.

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* As great as fasting is, it loses its effectiveness when we do not pray. And although it’s clear in Scripture that God loves for us to start our day with Him, any time is better than no time. What time every day do you hope to pray? How long do you hope to pray during these times?

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* Make time to pray for our pastors. Pray for Pastor Tom, his wife, Leighann, his daughters Mikel and Kaleigh, his son TJ, and his granddaughters (Mikel) Misty and River.

 Also make time to pray for the pastor who leads the ministry you serve in:

* 1. Duane Murray, executive pastor
	2. Teri Froman, interim adult minister
	3. Matt Allen, communications and creative arts pastor
	4. Chip Leake, worship pastor
	5. Leighann McCoy, family and prayer minister
	6. Tim Jurjevich and EJ Medina, student pastors
	7. Ashley Vantrease and Robbie Moore, kids ministers grades 1-5
	8. Chris Ussery and Nancy Smith, kids ministers birth – kindergarten
	9. Eric Nichols, satellite campus pastor, Columbia
	10. Wes Willet, satellite campus worship pastor, Columbia
	11. Andrea Key, satellite campus family minister, Columbia
* List the 7 people you are intentionally building relationships with to lead them to a closer walk with God.
	1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
	2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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	7. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What neighborhood has God placed on your heart to reach for Christ (perhaps your own):

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* Which city (of the 4 we have identified that are part of our 7 cities to reach for Christ) will you allow God to place on your heart this year? (choose from Thompson Station/Spring Hill, Columbia, Cincinnati, Las Vegas)

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* Which country (of the 4 we have identified that are part of our 7 countries to partner with for the advancement of the Kingdom) will you allow God to place on your heart this year? (choose from Nicaragua, Guatemala, East Asia, Uruguay)

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The Well of Salvation: Day 1

Before you read the Scripture passages below, ask the Holy Spirit to help you grasp what He is saying to you so that you can apply it to your life. I also recommend that you read the passages out loud and slowly. Open your journal and get ready to write down your impressions and thoughts.

**Read Isaiah 12:3-4 and John 4:1-42**

 *Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:13-14*

 Jesus was on historic ground; this was the very well where Jacob had watered the flocks of his family. It was also controversial ground. There had been centuries of hatred and misunderstanding between the Samaritans and the Jewish people. Jesus realized the true openness of these precious people, unlike His disciples, who were totally oblivious to His Father’s love for the Samaritans because of their ethnocentricity and hatred.

 Even though He was tired, Jesus refused to have lunch with His disciples. His Father’s gentle leading to go through Samaria had brought Jesus’ acute spiritual senses to a place of heightened awareness. He was there to open a well in that spiritually-parched land—a land forgotten by everyone but Jesus and His Father. The well was not Jacob’s famous well; this well was buried deep within the rubble of a broken life.

Jesus’ choice was an unlikely candidate to become a well of salvation for a whole city. She was living with a man out of wedlock after being married five times. Her shame was so acute that she had come to the well in the heat of the day to avoid being rejected by the other women of the city. Yet, through this seemingly chance meeting, the infamous woman *at* the well would become a woman *with* a well.

 Jesus’ first words to her seemed a little out of character: “Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7). How could Jesus ask this poor, broken woman to serve Him? Surely, He realized the abuse she had suffered at the hands of men as well as the hatred she felt for Him as a man and a Jew. In reality, however, Jesus’ request was a promise; for before the day ended she would not just get a drink—she would become a drink.

 As Jesus’ words slowly disarmed her, He promised her a drink of living water that would quench her thirst forever. Her reply in verse 11 revealed her great thirst: “Where can I get this living water?” His answer revealed one of the most critical aspects of receiving God’s power and life: “Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 14:14). The internal *spring* or *well*-spoken of here is a metaphor for the new nature every believer receives when they trust in Christ. Essentially, the moment you were born again, your human spirit was reunited with the Spirit of God. With this reunification, your whole being came under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit. The concept of having a new nature is seen throughout Scripture:

 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)*

 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Galatians 6:15*

 This new nature is the channel through which the living waters of God flow into your life. To understand how the waters of God’s life flow into us, think about running water or indoor plumbing. If you don’t have the luxury of running water in your home (like the woman in this story), the bucket or container you use at your source provides a perfect metaphor for God’s living water. Even though you have access to this water you must open a faucet (or draw a bucket) to use it.

 It is no different in our spiritual lives; we do not have a water supply problem. We have a usage problem. We are simply not turning on our spiritual faucets. In the context of John 4, the living water Jesus is speaking of is received through drinking. Drinking here is synonymous with the whole concept of worshiping God through the spiritual disciplines:

 *“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” John 4:19-24*

 No matter which spiritual discipline we are worshiping God through (reading the Word, worship/praise, waiting on God, etc.), our spiritual faucets open and we can drink from the living waters that flow out of the Godhead. The longer we linger in God’s presence, the more we are saturated in His life, power, presence, and joy. These spiritual waters, however, don’t need to remain within us. Like the woman at the well, if we drink enough, the flow of God’s life can create an overflow of transforming power into the world around us. In fact, the ultimate purpose of drinking from the wells of salvation (as we read in Isaiah 12:3-4) is the transformation of the nations through the proclamation of His name.

 *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So, when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with him, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” John 4:39-42*

# **Apply**

It is time to take a long drink from the well of salvation. Remember, the moment you were converted, your human spirit was reunited with the Holy Spirit, forming a new nature within you. Now, every time you practice one of the spiritual disciplines, the very waters of life we see in Revelation 22:1-2 will flow spiritually into you.

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:1-2*

 Select a Scripture. You can select one based on your current need, an impression of the Holy Spirit, recent messages you’ve heard, or randomly out of your Bible reading. For today’s purpose, let’s use John 4:23-24

 *“Yet a time is coming and has not come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers, the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”*

 Read these Scripture verses out loud a few times. If you’re in public, you can whisper. Allow your reading and speaking to merge into prayer. Begin to pray these Scripture. As you are praying, lift your hands. Begin to praise and thank God melodically if you wish. As you wait quietly, allow the living waters of the Godhead to wash over and into your soul. Now verbalize the burdens you have been carrying.

# **Pray**

* Pray for your pastors and his or her family.
* Pray for our church.
* Pray for 2 of the 7 people you are intentionally building relationships with right now.
* Pray for your neighbors by name:

To the right: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

To the left: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Ask for the Holy Spirit’s transformation in the area of resistance you targeted yesterday.

Record any pertinent thoughts, Scriptures, or impressions you receive from the Holy Spirit.

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Tomorrow, we’ll explore the power of the Scriptures to transform your life.

**The Scalpel of the Spirit: Day 2**

# **Read Revelation 1:16 and Hebrews 4:12-13**

 *In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. Revelation 1:16*

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12-13*

 In Revelation 1:16, Jesus is revealed to John (on the island of Patmos) with a double-edged sword coming out of His mouth. We know from Hebrews 4:12 that this sharp sword is a picture of God’s Word. In the context of Hebrews 4:12, the sword’s two edges reveal both its *piercing power* and its *sharpness*. I have also found this perspective to be helpful: one edge of the sword is for my flesh, and the other is for my spiritual foe. In this devotional, we will concentrate on the edge of the sword that is for our flesh—using the Scriptures as a type of surgical scalpel.

 In Hebrews 4:12-13, the Word of God is described as *alive* (living) and *active* (effective, energetic), and *sharper* (cutting). So sharp that it can *penetrate* (pierce) into the very depths of our beings, God’s Word is both incisive and decisive: *incisive,* because it discerns the subtle differences between our soul and spirit, and *decisive,* because no sin or deception can remain undetected from its penetrating power.

 The Holy Spirit has used the Scriptures as a surgical scalpel in my life many times—to reveal and deal with sinful patterns. God’s Word has relentlessly penetrated through layers that hid patterns of sinfulness—from brazen selfishness to subtle pride. This same powerful Word has also burned through seasons of depression and condemnation that have crippled my soul, and it has rescued me from despair.

 What has been true for me can be true for you as well! Through the Holy Spirit and the people of God, the Scriptures can reveal, heal, and deal with anything you are facing. You simply need to apply them consistently to your life. Through reading (1 Timothy 4:13), speaking (Matthew 17:20), hearing (Romans 10:17), and meditating (Joshua 1:8), the power of Scripture can be released into your life.

 Although we don’t have time to discuss all the ways we can apply the Word of God to our lives, let’s take a few minutes to practice the skill of biblical meditation. The word *feeds* in John 6:57 is a powerful picture of meditating on the Word of God. We feed (gnaw, bite, chew) on the power and life of Christ’s person as we partake of His Living Word.

 *“Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.” John 6:57*

 *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.” John 6:63*

# **Apply**

The meditative exercise I have chosen for us is both biblically and neurologically sound. It is designed to engage both your spirit and the right side of your brain. Most of your embodied, emotional experience of God is guided by brain activity in this right side of your brain.

**Meditating on the Scriptures with the Brain in Mind**

**Dr. Edward B. Davis and Jim Laffoon**

The following exercise is a potentially transformative way for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. It is designed to help slow down your mind so that you can listen more clearly to what the Lord is saying to your heart. Spend at least twenty minutes on it.

* Find a quiet place where you can be free of distractions. Turn off your phone and forms of social media.
* Quiet your mind; this can be a challenge. Listen to the sounds surrounding you. Take note of what you hear. Then, breathe in and out, invite the Holy Spirit to still your thoughts.
* If you don’t already have a Scripture in mind, take several very deep breaths and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to the passage He wants to speak to you. Or, you can simply pick a Scripture that corresponds to a need you are currently facing. (For the purpose of this exercise, we will use Isaiah 61:1-7)
* Read Isaiah 61:1-7 in your copy of the Bible
* As you select a verse or verses from this passage, ask the Lord to bring His transformative power to the resistant area you are targeting.
* Read the Scripture aloud several times, slowly. Read it again, slowly and deliberately, with varying levels of feeling, intonation, rhythm, and emphasis.
* Then draw a picture under the Scripture, showing what the Holy Spirit is speaking to you.
* Discuss this experience with a Christian family member, friend or leader.

 **Rationale for this exercise**

Most of our embodied, emotional experience of God is guided by brain activity in our right brain, which is very neutrally connected to our body. Because “neurons that fire together wire together” (Hebb, 1949), to change how we experience God at an embodied, emotional level, we need to **S**timulate **N**eural **A**ctivity and **G**rowth--**SNAG** (Siegel, 2007) in the right brain and in the body. Interacting with the Scriptures in an overly intellectual way tends to only SNAG the left side of the brain (which is especially logical, linear, and linguistic), thereby just bringing changes to our head knowledge of God. In contrast, interacting with the Scriptures in the ways described above can bring about deep-level changes in our embodied, emotional experience of God. In particular, this exercise is designed to strategically SNAG the right brain, thereby disentangling us from “autopilot” and positioning us to better hear the Holy Spirit’s transformative life-giving words to our heart.

# **Pray**

It’s time for you to focus your prayers on your pastor, our church, and the needs of our world.

* Pray for Pastor Tom and his family.
* Pray for the pastor who leads the area of ministry where you serve.
* Pray for 2 more of the 7 people you are developing relationships with.
* Pray for your neighbors who live across the street from you (by name)

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* Pray for the pastor who serves in the city you have chosen to pray for. If you don’t know them already, find out the names of his family members (and maybe their birthdates as well so that you can put action to your prayers this year and send them a birthday card. Consider finding this information from their facebook pages and/or church websites, you can find a link to this information at [www.tsclife.org/mission-trips](http://www.tsclife.org/mission-trips) ). I am praying for:

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* Use the space below to record what you have heard God say to you today.

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**Tomorrow we will walk through the third day of our fast together, we will explore the power of praying in the Spirit.**

Hebb, D.O. *The Organization of Behavior; a Neuropsychological Theory.* New York: Wiley, 1949. N. pag. Print.

Siegel, Daniel J. *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2007. Print.

**Praying in the Spirit: Day 3**

# **Read Jude 20-21 and I Corinthians 14:2-16**

 *But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirt, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Jude 20-21*

 *For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit…Anyone who speaks in a tongue edified themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.*

 A note from Leighann: For today’s devotion, I invite you to read an article I recently submitted to *Prayer Connect* magazine. [www.prayerleader.com](http://www.prayerleader.com)

# **What does it mean to “Pray in the Spirit?”**

 Prayer is perhaps the most misunderstood and least exercised privilege of the believer and the Church. I’m convinced that the devil works extra hard to keep things this way because prayer is the one thing we do that terrifies him most. When we pray, God’s power flows from heaven to earth. And when God’s power flows, God’s purposes prevail. His Kingdom advances and Satan’s schemes to stop Him are wrecked.

 Not just any kind of praying releases the power of God, some prayer doesn’t do a thing! And other prayer never happens because we simply don’t pray. But the kind of prayer that causes demons to tremble is the kind of prayer that Paul encouraged the Ephesians to pray.

“And ***pray in the Spirit*** on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Eph. 6:18 NIV

 The kind of prayer that makes demons tremble is the kind of prayer that is “in the Spirit.”

 Jude also exhorted us to “pray in the Spirit.”

“But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and ***praying in the Holy Spirit*, 21**keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.” Jude 20-21 NIV

 But what did Paul and Jude actually mean when they said this?

Several different interpretations:

 There are several different perspectives on what is meant by praying in the Spirit. To land on a solid understanding, let’s look at the various interpretations.

 Some Pentecostals use the term, “pray in the Spirit” to mean prayer that is released through the spiritual “gift of tongues.” To pray in the Spirit is to lend your physical tongue and vocal chords to complete control of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to express His heart through your voice. Those who experience “prayer in the Spirit” report that this is a powerful and delightful way to pray.

 They cite Romans 8:26-27 as their Scriptural basis prayer in the Spirit. The Spirit intercedes for us with groans that are too deep for words, thus praying from the inside of us, here on earth, to the inside of God sitting on His throne in heaven. They call this experience the exercise of their “prayer language.” And even though they don’t know what was said the experience itself is supernatural and the accompanying peace that praying in the Spirit releases assures the pray-er that whatever was said was spot on.

 What a marvelous exchange this must be!

 Conservative evangelicals believe that prayer in the Spirit is prayer that is inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit without taking over their tongues and vocal chords to voice the prayer in an unknown language. For them, prayer in the Spirit is the experience of having their thoughts directed by the power of the Holy Spirit so that they pray with supernatural discernment and perspective.

 They cite I Corinthians 14:13-14 as biblical basis of their belief that to “pray in the Spirit” is to pray knowing what is being said, and being encouraged by that understanding. Paul indicated that praying in an unknown tongue encourages the spirit, but leaves his mind “unfruitful.” Conservative evangelical pray-ers testify to experiences in prayer that are both powerful and enlightening as they come out of their prayer closets knowing exactly what the conversation held.

 Both Pentecostals who enjoy their prayer language and conservative evangelicals who enjoy their conversations have powerful prayer lives. Because of this, I pose the question, “Does it really matter which interpretation you choose?” I prefer to land with Paul when he went on to say in I Corinthians 14:15,

**15**So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.” NIV

 The important thing is to pray! And I believe that even your interest in prayer is indication that you are being led by the Spirit, and therefore your prayer itself can qualify as being “in the Spirit.” Keep reading and let me explain.

The Spirit’s role in prayer:

 In John 14 Jesus introduced us to the third Person of our Triune God. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God that has come to stay with us until this world passes away (or we pass away) and we are united with God the Father and Christ Jesus His Son in heaven. The Holy Spirit keeps us connected to God while we are living out our earthly lives. (Read John 14 to get a better understanding of the Holy Spirit and His role in our lives today.)

 Because prayer is the lifeline of our relationship with God, to “pray in the Spirit” is to experience the power of the Holy Spirit as He motivates us topray, and as He guides us when we pray.

 **The Spirit as our prayer motivator:** In the natural, we are not compelled to pray. Without a Spirit-infused connection with God, there’s no need to pray. What does the flesh have to do with God?

 Unfortunately, many of us are unaware of the difference our God-connection makes in our everyday lives. There are phrases we’ve become familiar with that indicate our current predicament of living in the natural as we strive to experience the supernatural. Consider these phrases we hear and maybe even say,

“you’re on your own,”

“make the most of it,”

“you get what you get so don’t pitch a fit.”

 The natural man “makes do.” If he’s smart, he learns from his mistakes, and fails forward, and applies life lessons learned so that he can make wiser decisions in the future.

 But those of us who are “in Christ,” have the Spirit of God living in us! (Colossians 2:9-10) And the Spirit of the living God reminds us that we are never “on our own” (Philippians 4:13), Our resources are unlimited! (Philippians 4:19) So we never have to “make the most of it,” and, if we’re smart, we can avoid mistakes because God’s given us His Word to help us navigate life. Thus, we don’t have to “get what you get so don’t pitch a fit.” We get way more than we could ever deserve and find ourselves full of hope even in life’s darkest valleys.

 The Spirit reminds you that God has promised to respond to you when you pray. The Spirit compels you to pray. Let me remind you again that the Spirit Himself is leading you to read these actual words. It is the Person of God dwelling in the person of you that stirred you to desire connection with God through prayer. The Spirit motivates you to pray.

 **The Spirit as our prayer guide:** I love how Paul explained the part the Holy Spirit plays when we pray. I’ve mentioned Romans 8:26-27 as verses that support the experience of “praying in tongues,” I want to use these verses again to support the biblical truth that the Holy Spirit guides us as we pray.

 “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. **27**And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” Romans 8:26-27 NIV

 Notice a few incredible things the Spirit does when we pray.

1. The Spirit helps us in our weakness.
2. The Spirit intercedes for us when we don’t know what we ought to pray.
3. The Spirit feels for us so deeply that words cannot contain the depth of His love.
4. The Spirit searches our hearts, and knows the mind of God, and makes a divine connection with our human hearts and God’s perfect will.

 The longer I walk with the LORD the more aware I am of the vast difference between His perspective and mine. The Holy Spirit guides your thoughts as you pray if you let him. You let him take the reins in prayer by surrendering your mind and heart to Him. When you pray, confess what you do know; that God is Lord, that He has supreme power in the universe, and that He who knows all things does all things well. And then confess what you don’t know. Don’t waste your emotional energy and time in prayer telling God how to do things!

 When you allow the Spirit to guide your prayers, new thoughts will come to you, new insights will be revealed to you as you read the Bible, and new prayers will begin to form in your heart.

 This is praying in the Spirit.

# **Apply**

Praying in the Spirit is as easy as breathing:

 Because I’ve had cancer, I’m familiar with the CT scan. When you have a CT scan, you lay on a shelf, and ride in and out of a circle of cameras that scan your innards. As you ride through the circle, the machine speaks aloud (in words that you can understand),

 “Breathe in”

 “Hold your breath”

 And just when you begin wondering if you might pass out, the machine then says, “Breathe.”

 Prayer in the Spirit, is like spiritual breathing. Paul and Jude encouraged believers to pray in the Spirit. They were inviting them to heighten their awareness of the Spirit’s nudge to take the time to pray. And they were exhorting them to pay heed to the Spirit’s direction in their prayers. In other words, quiet yourself when you enter your prayer closet and let the Spirit of God tell you when to breathe.

 “Breathe in” thoughts focused on the majesty, power, love and wonder of God.

 “Hold your breath.” As you ponder those thoughts let them adjust your perspective on whatever concerns you have.

 Then, “breathe.” Exhale your praise and worship for your Mighty God.

 “Breathe in” His heart and mind. Remember that the best way to know the heart and mind of God is by reading His Word.

 “Breathe.” Exhale your requests as you allow the Word of God to adjust your petitions to line up with His best.

 “Breathe in” the assurance that God hears you when you pray.

 “Hold your breath.” Let the Spirit immerse you in peace.

 “Breathe” knowing that whatever you’ve prayed is now secure in His hands.

 Whether you breathe in a language with words that you understand, or in a language indiscernible to your human ears isn’t nearly as important as whether you have yielded your limited understanding to God’s magnificent knowledge; and have submitted your lesser agenda to His much better ideas.

 Pray in the Spirit and watch those demons scatter.

# **Pray**

It’s time for you to focus your pastors, our church, and the needs of our world.

* Ask God to pray through you the things that His heart desires as you consider your needs and the needs of these people you are praying for.
* Pray for pastor Tom and his family.
* Pray for the pastor who leads the ministry you serve.
* Pray for 1 of the 7 people you are building relationships with.
* Pray for any neighbors you know who are in circumstances that are difficult.
* Pray for the country you sense God leading you to pray for this year. If you don’t know the names of the TSC members who are serving that partnership, find them on [www.tsclife.org/missions](http://www.tsclife.org/missions)

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**Tomorrow, we will examine one of our most important weapons in spiritual warfare—the sword of the Spirit.**

**The Sword of the Spirit: Day 4**

# **Read Ephesians 6:17 and Matthew 4:3-10**

 *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:17*

 On Day 2 of our fast, we learned how the Holy Spirit can use the Scriptures as a scalpel in our lives. Today, I want to describe the power of God’s Word to pierce like a sword through the deceit and temptation of our demonic foes. In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul gives us the Scriptures’ most comprehensive treatment of spiritual warfare.

 During his first visit to Rome, as Paul awaited his trail before Nero, he was imprisoned between two Praetorian guards for two years. He must have been guarded by hundreds of these elite Roman soldiers during his long imprisonment. While writing a letter to the church at Ephesus, he began to look at his armored jailers in a whole different light. In a flash of Holy Spirit inspiration, Paul realized that the tactics, weapons, and armor of his captors provided a powerful metaphor for spiritual warfare.

 While gazing at the gladius one of his guards was carrying, Paul wrote the following: *Take the…sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6:17b). The Roman short sword, or gladius, was twenty-four to thirty-one inches in length. It was created as a thrusting or stabbing weapon. “Word” in this passage is *rhema,* not *logos*. The word *rhema* emphasizes the Word of God being spoken or proclaimed. In other words, God wants to give you Spirit-anointed Scriptures that can cut through the multi-layered maneuvers and deception of the enemy. Jesus used the sword of the Spirit repeatedly in His wilderness dual with Satan.

 Read Matthew 4:3-10.

 Before doing a practical exercise on using the sword of the Spirit, you must learn some of the distinguishing marks of spiritual warfare. How do you know when the resistance you are facing is not just natural, but demonic? Demonic attack is marked by its intensity, density, and/or immensity.

**Intensity—**When something you are facing is far stronger or much longer than usual, it could be a sign of spiritual warfare. Sometimes, spiritual warfare can come in the form of a powerful wave. For example, you might suddenly be pulled into despair by a wave of depression, and it is out of proportion to anything you are currently facing in your life.

**Density—**An unusual density can also mark spiritual warfare; perhaps a thick fog that clings to your soul, a wall between you and God, or a wall between you and others than cannot be penetrated.

**Immensity—**Spiritual warfare also tends to maximize our pain and problems and minimize God’s promises and power.

# **Apply**

Whenever you are faced with indicators of this nature, ask the Holy Spirit for discernment. If you sense that what you are facing is spiritual in nature, it’s time to pull out the sword of the Sprit. This can be done in many ways.

First, you can ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind the Scripture He wants you to use. Second, you can look up a Scripture that corresponds to the problem you are facing. Both *YouVersion (*[www.youversion.com](http://www.youversion.com) *)* and *Bible Gateway (*[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) *)* have great concordances and are available on the Internet. *Bible Gateway* also has a great topical search engine in multiple versions of the Bible. Once you have a Scripture (or Scriptures), begin to thrust them into what you are facing by boldly proclaiming them. Remember, the more you proclaim the Scripture, the more your own faith will grow as well.

* What form of spiritual warfare have you been facing?

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* Which Scripture or Scriptures are you going to use?

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* Begin to worship and pray.
* As your faith grows, begin to pray the Scripture the Holy Spirit helped you select. Pray it for two minutes.
* Begin to thrust that Scripture into the resistance you are facing by proclaiming it for two additional minutes.
* If the warfare persists, you can use this strategic cycle (or a variation of it) multiple times, for as long as needed.

# **Pray**

Once you have completed the cycle, begin to focus your prayers on your pastors, our church and the needs of our world.

* Pray for your pastors.
* Pray for 1 more of the 7 people you are building a relationship with.
* Pray for the neighbors you’ve spoken to in the past week.
* Ask God to give you a verse to pray over the city you’ve selected. Jot the verse here:

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**Tomorrow, we will focus on learning to hear God’s voice.**

**Hearing God’s Voice: Day 5**

# **Read John 10:4-5 and 27**

 *“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” John 10:4-5*

 *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27*

 All of today’s devotional is an exercise designed to help you grow in your ability to hear God’s voice. Although God’s written Word is the primary way He communicates truth to us, today I want to concentrate on hearing God through impressions, visions, dreams, and the internal voice of the Holy Spirit.

 I have chosen to picture the process of learning to hear God’s voice through the metaphor of a mobile phone. Unlike earthly cellular companies that promise us limitless coverage and perfect reception but rarely deliver it, God can transmit the heavenly signal of His voice to us no matter where we are on the planet. If this is the case, why do we have to so much trouble hearing God’s voice? After all, He says, “My sheep (Christians) hear my voice.”

 Before I answer this question, take your mobile phone out and turn it off. Whether you have an iPhone, a Samsung or another brand, it will work find for this exercise. Here is something important to remember: other than an exercise like this, I have found mobile phones to be one of the greatest distractions Christians face in their attempts to hear God’s voice.

 **Press the power button—**No matter how great your phone is, you cannot receive or make calls until the power is on. It is no different with humans. Unless your power is “on,” regular communication with God is almost impossible. Spiritually speaking, our power is turned on through our conversion and baptism in the Holy Spirit. At conversion, our human spirit is reunited with the Holy Spirit, and we receive a new nature. This re-establishes our communication with God.

**Turn your ringer on vibrate—**Have you ever wondered what God’s “ringtone” feels like? I have discovered that many times when He is trying to “call” us, He uses feelings, burdens, and impressions. They are the most elementary way that God communicates with us. All of us have either heard or used expressions like, “I felt God’s presence,” or, “God was really here today.” These expressions are examples of this type of communication.

 Sadly, many of us never leave this elementary form of experiencing God. We are satisfied with simply feeling His presence when we could actually be talking to Him. After all, if God has gone to the trouble of coming to visit us, He probably has something to say. In fact, He has probably been saying a lot of things, but we simply don’t recognize them. As a spirit being, God rarely communicates audibly. The fact that all of us can fail to recognize God’s voice is described in Job 33:

 *For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it. In a dream in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds. Job 33:14-15*

**Take your phone off vibrate—**In light of this verse, it is critical that we learn how to both *see* and *hear* what God is saying to us. Now, take your phone off vibrate. Sometimes, God will just call your name when He wants to talk to you. Other times, He might simply give you a set of instructions. Therefore, learning to recognize God’s voice is critical, whether you are just answering His calls or having an intimate conversation with Him. Although God can speak audibly, He usually speaks to us through the internal voice of our conscious mind.

 In I Kings 19:12, this form of divine communication is referred to as a *gentle whisper.* This internal voice of the Holy Spirit is probably the very thing the Apostle Paul is referring to in Romans 8:16 when he says, *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.* Other than the written Word of God, this is the primary way God communicates with His children.

 To help you understand how these forms of communication work, let me use an example from how I taught my own children to hear the Lord. As a parent, it did not take me long to realize that if I did not teach my children how to hear the Lord’s voice, sooner or later they would stop talking to Him. After all, talking to a person or a being who never talks back doesn’t feel any different than talking to a wall.

 When teaching my children to hear the Lord’s voice and see visions, I would ask my children to say their names out loud. Then I would ask them to imagine their names being spoken. I would explain that the internal voice they heard when they imagined their names was very similar to how God’s voice sounded. Once they had grasped the concept, I taught them every night before they fell asleep to ask God what was on His mind.

 While they were in that place of reflective calm that normally preceded falling asleep, they would simply focus on the Lord and wait for Him to speak. Through this process, all four of my biological children learned how to hear the voice of their beloved Savior and friend. It’s no different for you. No matter how old you are, if you will come to God in faith like a trusting child, He will speak to you *as a man speaks to his friend.* (Exodus 33:11 NKJV)

 Another way God communicates with us is through images and pictures. Although some visions can seem almost real they are typically images and pictures on the screen of a person’s imagination. Unlike imagining something, however, the person does not conjure them up; instead, God initiates them. As for dreams, they are simply divine visions. Some examples of these are when Paul saw the vision of Ananias coming to minister to him (Acts 9:12) and Joseph was warned by God in a dream (Matthew 2:13).

**Signal problems—**Within the cellular world, signal strength can be affected by proximity to a cell tower, obstructions such as buildings or trees, destructive interference from other communication towers, or the condition of the cell phone. First of all, just as cellular reception is affected by proximity to cell towers, so your ability to hear God clearly is directly related to your proximity to His person and His people (the church). Remember, hearing God is not just a skill; it is a relationship. Therefore, the more quality time you spend with God, the better you will hear him.

The word quality here is important; without discipline and focus, your time with God might be wasted. When I say discipline, I am not just describing the classical spiritual disciplines. I am talking about the discipline it takes to deal with all the attractions and distractions of our media-driven world. Once we have discipline, we will be free to focus on God through His Word, worship, and waiting on Him.

 Our proximity to God’s people is also vital. Without discipleship mentoring, fellowship, equipping, and accountability provided through a healthy church, we would not have the foundations necessary to develop an authentic, sustainable relationship with God. In addition, the heavenly signal of God’s voice is greatly increased through corporate worship, making it easier to hear His voice as you wait on Him with music playing softly and others focusing on Him as well.

 Even as the internal condition and quality of a cell phone can determine all quality, so the condition of our souls is vital to the whole process of hearing God. These are some of the factors that influence our ability to hear God: stress, fatigue, physical sickness, exhaustion, distraction, or busyness. You cannot forget that your spiritual life is deeply impacted by how you are doing physically, emotionally, and intellectually. It can also be damaged if you have injured your conscience through unconfessed sin.

 If none of these factors are involved, it could just be destructive interference. Just as cellular communications can be affected by other electronic signals, so the enemy—*the prince of the power of the air*—does everything in his power to impair our ability to hear God’s voice.

 *…in which you once walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. Ephesians 2:2 (NKJV)*

 Unlike the sense of defilement created by sin, demonic resistance normally comes in the form of a wave or a wall. As a wave, it is typically an overwhelming sense of accusation, defilement, fear, despair or weakness. As a wall, it feels like an impenetrable barrier. We discussed how to deal with demonic resistance on Day 4, “The Sword of the Spirit.”

# **Apply**

**It’s time to talk—**Since our “power” is on now, let’s ask Him to call us.

* Simply quiet your soul and take a deep breath. Tell Him you love Him and you would like to talk with Him. Can you hear His whisper?
* Take your time. Spend two or three minutes simply waiting. You may feel Him before you hear Him.
* If you are feeling His “ring,” simply say, “What do you want to say to me, Lord?
* Write down what you are hearing. If you are having trouble, you may be having a signal problem.

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# **Pray**

**Let’s practice one more time.**

* Quiet your soul, and begin to worship.
* After a moment, ask God to speak to you: be more specific this time. Ask the Lord how you should pray for your pastor and his family.
* Maybe He has something new to say to you about the area of resistance you have been targeting.
* Ask God to guide your prayer for one of your 7 people.
* Ask God which neighbor to pray over, pray for the first one who comes to mind.
* Ask God to give you insight into something specific you can pray over the missionary serving in the country you will be praying for this year.

Now we have come to the end of our prayer and fasting. The spiritual skills you have been developing have the potential to release life-changing power into your life. You may want to wait a week or two and then go through all five days again (devotions, not necessarily fasting). In the end, these devotionals (and the exercises that accompany them) are about more than refining your spiritual skills. They are about responding to your Savior’s invitation to know Him and to make Him known. I am praying for you to have your greatest year in Christ yet!