



21 Day Devotional Journey



FASTING & PRAYER

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming in house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:10–11).

“God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything” (Acts 17:25).

John Piper writes in *We Have Come to Worship Him*, “The gifts of the magi are not given by way of assistance or need-meeting. It would dishonor a monarch if foreign visitors came with royal care-packages.”

Nor are these gifts meant to be bribes. Deuteronomy 10:17 declares that God takes no bribes. Well, what then do they mean? How are they worship?

The gifts are intensifiers of desire for Christ himself in much the same way that fasting is. When you give a gift to Christ like this, it’s a way of saying, “*The joy that I pursue (verse 10) is not the hope of getting rich with things from you? I have not come to you for your things, but for yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things, in the hope of enjoying you more, not things. By giving to you what you do not need, and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically, ‘You are my treasure, not these things.’*” I think that’s what it means to worship God with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Anything we give to Him should be considered in this manner.

My prayer during this 21Day journey is for God to awaken us with the truth of this text... an intense passion for Christ himself. In response, we will say from the heart ‘*Lord Jesus, You are the Messiah, the King of Israel.*’ Whatever opposition I may find in my heart, I joyfully ascribe authority to You and bring my gifts saying that You alone can satisfy my heart.

As we begin a New Year, may John Piper’s words remain in the forefront of our mind. God is our treasure and not the things we give up for Him. While He does not need anything, we give all to Him. Over the next several days, enjoy encounters with God’s Word and sharing our very lives in relationships with His people.

Day One



SCRIPTURE

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust. Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence” (Psalm 92:1-3, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Clint Brown has written a song entitled, *“There are No Secrets in the Secret Place”*. It is a wonderful song. As we begin this journey together, let’s be reminded that He knows us intimately. Therefore, our confession is not news to Him, nor is it a surprise. So, let’s begin 2016 with a time of releasing all of our issues in heartfelt confession that opens our spirit to His corrective love.

APPLICATION

Entering the secret place in our confession will not bring on His condemnation nor judgment, rather His grace and love. Remember this passage states “he that dwells...” not he who enters. It is the dwelling (our daily interaction with God) that we realize holiness and relevance, compassion and love.

PRAYER

Father, as I begin 2016 with open confession, I realize I have _____ and am desperate for You to intervene. My life and ministerial contributions must flow from a dynamic daily interaction with You. I am grateful for Your sacrifice and I submit myself to Your corrective love in every area of my personal, familial and ministerial relationships. I love You with all of my heart. May I learn to love those nearest to me, then broaden the love You are freshly pouring into my heart to those whom I encounter on a daily basis.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Two



SCRIPTURE

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:22-23, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Did Jesus really say, "I never knew you"? Yes, He did. We may say, "But Lord, I'm the pastor's wife... I visit the sick... I provide for the homeless and hungry... I am a ministry wife...I led worship...played the piano..." Yet, the answer will be the same, **"I don't know you."**

You can watch your favorite television host, read their biography and learn about their family, but if you encountered that person they would say, "I don't know you." **Knowing about someone is not - knowing someone!** Jesus is calling us to know Him, not just know about Him.

APPLICATION

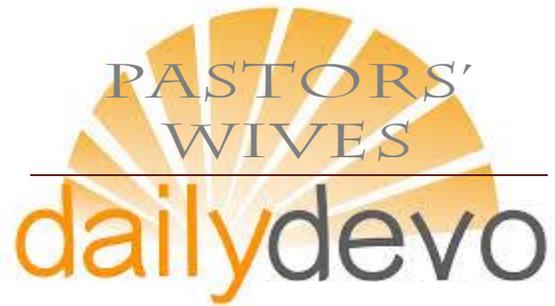
We may have a tendency to minister from a context of knowing about Jesus by what we have read in Scripture, rather than knowing Him in a personal way. As we minister, let's do so from a personal intimacy where Jesus is more than a man we have read about; He's One whom we interact with moment by moment and day by day. Let's share Jesus from a "what He is doing in the here and now" rather than "what He did, there and then". In so doing, people get a picture of Jesus who is relevant to where they are in the here and now, not just what He did as recorded in Scripture.

PRAYER

Father, may the presence of Jesus be so real in my life that when I share a Jesus story it is from my most recent encounters with Him. I know You have done great and mighty things as I have read, but I desire for those great and mighty things to be the norm in my day-to-day walk of faith. I am excited about what You are going to do as I submit myself to You.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Three



SCRIPTURE

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6-7, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

This passage is not unfamiliar to us. However, note the last sentence... *The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this*”. Jesus will certainly be a wonder of a counselor, a powerful God, everlasting, and a prince who gives peace and governs in righteousness that never ends. This word from the prophet was one foretelling what was to come, but the key is that God is excited, anxious, and He is looking forward to the day of fulfillment. God the Father is with great anticipation inspiring the prophet with these words that one day will become reality.

APPLICATION

This excitement of fulfillment, this forward looking (*They that wait on the Lord...*) is rightly understood when we think about as a parent knowing the gifts we have prepared and the timing the gift will be given. There is an excitement about the time of giving and how wonderful that will be. Use that analogy as you think of Father God hiding something “for” you and not hiding something “from” you.

PRAYER

Father, Jesus who is the fulfillment of this passage is daily interacting with His children and He too is filled with great anticipation of what great gifts He has in store for me today. Gifts given that will be used for strength in my life-- not for status with others. May the fullness of Christ gifts flow freely though me today that others are enriched by the gifts You have and are giving.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Four



SCRIPTURE

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:5-9, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Pride rises and says, I. Humility rises and says WE. We are laborers together with God and others, not separately. There may be times we work without others but never is there a time when we have done without others. Everyone is designed by God, individually unique. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. It is as we serve from our strengths (without allowing our weaknesses to overwhelm us) that we can celebrate when the strengths of others shine in areas of our weakness.

APPLICATION

We are not designed to be the “doer of all significant things”. As we look at today’s scripture let’s embrace an attitude where God has placed people around us to complete the work. In so doing, growth and bring health will result in those we serve. Look around you! There are people who can do some things you are doing and can actually do them better. Do not be intimidated by that. Celebrate their gifts as they are gifted to benefit the entire body. None of us are adequate alone.

PRAYER

Father, may my life reflect the attitude of “we” that I might value those who can do something better than me. May I consistently look around to see those You have so positioned to bring completeness to what You have called us to accomplish? I thank You for what You are going to do through us as we labor together and not alone. Father, do not allow my strengths to go to my head and my weaknesses go to my heart.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Five



SCRIPTURE

“Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Psalms 37:4, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

While this passage provides comfort, it is not one that provides some kind of magical response from God when we do things that we think might delight Him. Rightly understood, these words reveal the understanding that when we are intimately connected to God, our desires in life are in direct alignment to His desires for us. Consequently, when we pray we are asking Him for what He wants for us and not what we want. When we ask in alignment with His heart, it will be done. Now that encourages me! Delight yourself in the Lord today and see what might flow from your heart... that is really His heart.

APPLICATION

Take a moment to evaluate the work you are doing. What are you doing that is producing fruit? What are you doing that is not producing fruit? Those areas of work that are not producing fruit may not be in alignment with the heart of God. **When our heart aligns with His**, the outcomes will be according to His ability and not ours. We may not be able to count the outcomes on a report but they certainly can be measured and will be rewarded by the One who sees the heart.

PRAYER

Father, may the first fruit that I am concerned about be the fruit of Your Spirit visibly flowing from my life. If there is anything that is not in proper alignment with Your heart that I have become blind to, please reveal it to me. May I see in ME what You see, and then see in others what You see. May my response be to others what Your response would be. I will lovingly, gently, compassionately shepherd your inheritance from the integrity of my heart and the skillfulness of my hands. I ask You to empower me by Your Spirit as I delight in You.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Six



SCRIPTURE

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

As ministry partners, we have been called to work with Jesus in a manner that is restorative. As we shepherd those in our care we will see others stumble, making mistakes in behavior and belief. All the while, realizing the key to our shepherding must be found in people having a sense of belonging. In Scripture, we note that people who knew they had failed were compassionately and gently brought into Jesus’ circle. As they sensed His love, they were changed. While we see this over and over displayed in the Scripture, I am most sure that you have experienced that same sense of belonging in your own life. It is that story that we must never forget as we minister in the power of His love to those we shepherd.

APPLICATION

Consider the great love and sense of belonging you experienced when you first came to Jesus. Remember the shame you felt as you were convicted by Holy Spirit. Remember when you felt the arms of Jesus wrap around you. Remember when you felt His love when you did not deserve it. It is what you remember that should guide you now. It is when we forget, that we become driven by an attitude of correction, followed by words about our love rather than an active love that restores.

PRAYER

Father, May I never forget what You have done for me. I am reminded today of Your unfailing love, the gentleness of Your approach to me, and the sense that You wanted me to belong. When I deserved the harshness of only Your hand, You extended Yourself to me. That made all the difference! My life was forever changed by Your love. May my life reflect to others the grace that you extended to me, the love that so permeated my heart that made me want to become a better person. Your love did all that, and for that I am very thankful.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Seven



SCRIPTURE

“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:35, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Forgiveness is an action that flows from the heart of men and women who have had revealed to them the heart of the Father regarding the matter. Forgiveness is difficult when we are looking at the action taken against us. If we understand why the offender offends, then intercede for them, the focus shifts from our pain to their pain. People do what they do from some underlying unmet need. In most cases, we may not know why, yet Holy Spirit knows. When He reveals why, He is endeavoring to empower us to release the pain of our hurt and focus on the pain of the offender.

APPLICATION

Each of us has been wronged by someone, sometime in ministry. Do you remember a wrong? If you do, it may be that you have never released it. Could it be that you continue to focus on the pain you experienced from the offense? If this is so, pray for Holy Spirit to open your heart that you might see the pain of the offender. Thus, realizing why the offender offends. Release your pain and embrace theirs. Pray as an intercessor and watch what God does with and through you to meet the unmet need of the offender.

PRAYER

Father, open my eyes that I might see the pain of offenders. I ask that my response to them be from my understanding their pain, rather than focusing on my own. As You meet my needs directly and indirectly through others, may my life express an understanding that forgiveness from me flows from a heart that has been forgiven. I have been forgiven of much, therefore I will forgive much. Forgive me for not forgiving and holding on to my pain. I release it and seek to forgive ...as You have forgiven.

In Jesus Name, Amem

Day Eight



SCRIPTURE

"And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Gandhi was quoted as saying, "If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today". The disciples were called Christians because they were followers of Christ. They did in life as Christ did in life. Could it be today, that our life reflects no true difference from religions? Have we become one of many rather than the living epistle as Paul writes? *"You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;³ clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart" (II Corinthians 3:2-3, NKJV).*

Certainly, we are known and read by those we are connected to. Does what they read reflect the life of Christ? Or, does our living reflect life lived as we choose. True Christianity is loving as He loves, living as He lives, and doing the will of the Father. As we live and lead in submission to the Father, so those we lead are impacted by His life and power, rather than ours. When that occurs... this world will be turned upside down...AGAIN!

APPLICATION

Are you doing what you are doing in ministry to impress others or are we doing it because we have been impacted by God. His life being poured into our hearts moves us from actions to impress... to actions that impact. Consider those you are in relationship with. Is your connection leading them to look to Jesus or to you?

PRAYER

Father, may my life be a living book that reveals the life of Jesus. I ask that the people I am in relationship with know that what they see is YOU at work in me. I ask that my attitude always direct people to Jesus as their direct source. Forgive me for times I have sought to impress people with what I could do. Instill in me a heart that is given to impacting others with such dynamic love they are drawn to YOU.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Nine



SCRIPTURE

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (II Corinthians 5:17, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Good, Better, Best. Never let it rest, until your good is better, and your better, best. Why be satisfied with good, better or even best? We need NEW. Good is good, better is better and best is best until it is compared to NEW. He makes new creatures out of good, better and the best from our efforts. To be NEW, we are reset, back to the original state. Reboot, reset occurs when we come to Christ broken, painted over, scratched, unusable and worn out. He alone restores us to NEW life.

APPLICATION

A master craftsman can take an old piece of furniture that is broken down, cracked, painted over, without hinges and pulls and restore it to its original condition. Consider your life as a broken piece of furniture with missing pieces. In fact, look back to that time in your life and rejoice today for a life RESET, REBOOTED... NEW!

PRAYER

Father, I am very thankful for the master craftsmanship from Your hands upon my life. You have taken a life that was broken down and made it NEW. I rejoice in the newness of life and will “serve in the “newness of the Spirit” (Romans 7:6, NKJV). I am Your workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. The good work You have done in me will produce a good work flowing from me. What a joy it is to be in personal relationship with You.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Ten



SCRIPTURE

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Troubles are part of life. In ministry, we can be certain that troubles will come. Jesus said, *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NKJV).* When the enemy of our soul attacks, all of heaven turns toward us. God knows how and when to deliver His children out of trouble. Knowing us perfectly, He also knows how to walk us through adversity. The key to us getting through difficulties is found in Him as He said, *“in Me you may have peace”.* There is a peace in knowing that we are *“hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3)* and nothing gets to us before it goes through Him! Yes!

APPLICATION

Peace that is given by Jesus is not the absence of conflict, rather a deep settled assurance that in the middle of conflict God is walking through the conflict with us. *“He prepares a table” (Psalm 23)* of refreshment before you in the very presence of your enemy. He has prepared the table, but we have to sit down. Enjoy the nourishment He provides!

PRAYER

Father, I know refreshment and nourishment comes from You. I also know that the enemy of my soul is powerful. I need refreshment and nourishment. So, I ask that You help me trust You enough to sit down, be nourished, and rest in the very presence of my enemy.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Eleven



SCRIPTURE

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Paul tells the Ephesians, *“Let no corrupt communication...”*. The word “corrupt” means rotten. Are the words you speak to your spouse, children and those you serve, words that are rotten? I’ve heard parents say: “My children are worthless”... “They will not amount to anything” ... “They can’t do anything right”. I have heard pastors’ wives declare: “My husband skinned the sheep today”... “We never get offer a good church”, etc. etc. These are examples of rotten words.

Words are powerful. In another passage we read, *“Life and death are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21, NKJV)*. Certainly, words such as this will bring death to the spirit of anyone to whom they are spoken. What we speak can build others up or tear them down.

APPLICATION

Paul writes, *“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6, NKJV)*. When you are speaking in private or in public, think before you speak. Consider when you may have spoken before you thought. How did that end? Perhaps it resulted in causing pain to others. May our words never cause such pain.

PRAYER

Father, “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to You, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:14, NKJV).

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Twelve



SCRIPTURE

“Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.” So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:17-21, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

The Pharisees asked a question and Jesus specifically answered, but did not stop there. In most instances, we stop with the obvious making the focus of this passage about taxes. Jesus is always moving from the surface to the deepest parts of life... to the heart. What's in the heart? What's in your heart? Whose image do you bear?

APPLICATION

We must ask ourselves these questions, openly surrendering to the evaluation of Holy Spirit. We are the clay; He is the potter. As we daily surrender to His evaluation, He sculpts us to bear His image. Render to God what is God's.

PRAYER

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23-24, NKJV).

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Thirteen



SCRIPTURE

“And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God...” (Mark 4:11, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Mysteries are truths that are yet to be understood. They may be observable while being unexplainable. We research and study to no avail, but one day we see as it is revealed to us. Out of nowhere comes revelation; we see clearly what previously puzzled us. A rightly divided understanding is not discovered by our study. Purposely, God reveals at the appropriate time. Revelation brings revolution, and in every revolution somebody dies. When God reveals His word and His will, the battle begins. Are we going to apply the revelation and grow into His image or continue as we are? Paul said, we are not fully dead but are dying daily. We must apply the word revealed to realize more of Him and less of us.

APPLICATION

The goal of revelation is, *“Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, NKJV)*. Ask God for a revelation that will transform you into the image of Christ. God may not reveal ‘more’ until we walk in what has already been revealed to us. Ask yourself, “Am I walking in what Holy Spirit has already revealed”?

PRAYER

Father, I thank you for the revelation that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of my life. Thank you for the revelation that I do not ‘work’ for you. You work in me and as a result, I work with You. As I seek understanding (when I am able to bear it) bring revelation. I ask for more revelation of You and Your word that I might be better equipped to serve.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Fourteen



SCRIPTURE

“Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed” (Mark 1:41, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Compassion...what a great word! Jesus did not feel pity for those who were hurting. Rather, He felt what they were feeling. He entered into their pain. He came alongside of them and was moved into an action of compassion. Compassion is a verb, not a noun.

God is calling us to move into an action of compassion. We are to step into others pain, walk with them through their anguish, and mourn when they mourn. Don't just attempt to say something spiritual, move passionately to come near others. Walk with those who hurt, for tomorrow we may need someone to walk with us.

APPLICATION

As we go through this day watch for the lonely, broken, and hurting. Find someone and express love that bends to mend. *“Blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4, NKJV).*

PRAYER

Father, fill my heart with such compassion that I am moved to come near the hurting, wounded and broken. May I not attempt to fix them or counsel them, rather walk with them through their struggles. When they cry, move me to tears. When they hurt, let me feel their pain. And, when they are victorious, I will rejoice as they rejoice. Thank you, Father, for the privilege to be Your hands and feet. Strengthen and equip me to meet the needs of others.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Fifteen



SCRIPTURE

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time...” (I Peter 5:6, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Humility is a virtue of the spiritual leader. This virtue is not one that is natural. We have a tendency to look out for ourselves. Culturally, the admonition is: "Get to the top"... "You deserve the best seat." However, this is the antithesis of Peter's admonition as referenced above.

Spiritual leaders never run to top position or seek the best seat. Rather, they endeavor to serve the one at the top or the one in the better seat. When the thought is to serve others rather than be served, you are humbled under the mighty hand of God. Consequently, He exalts in the appropriate season.

Humility is not an action that you decide to live in. Spiritual humility is produced supra naturally, that which is beyond our nature by the power of Holy Spirit. False humility comes from our feeble attempts to appear "to be humble". When this virtue is a default reaction, you know you are living under the sovereign rule of Christ and in true humility, not false humility. False humility is what we can do/produce naturally. Spiritual humility is a work of Holy Spirit. See Colossians 2:16-23.

APPLICATION

Our efforts to "be humble" is nothing more than that...efforts. True humility is a direct result of the life of Christ being poured in us by Holy Spirit. As we consider how far we have come, let's not forget just how far we have to go. How much more of Jesus needs to be evidenced in your life? What are the areas in life and ministry that still need His attention?

PRAYER

Father, I am very thankful for how far You have brought me. However, I have a long way to go! Forgive me when pride rises. Make me aware today of areas that need Your attention and help me to walk in what You are revealing to me ...about me.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Sixteen



SCRIPTURE

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

OBSERVATION

When I met Scott years ago, my entire life changed. Within five days I told my mother, “I have met the man I will marry”. Three weeks later, we were engaged. From the time, my focus (and challenge) has been to understand him.

Since the church is betrothed to Christ, do we have eyes only for Him or is our vision cluttered with others that clamor to receive our attention? Holy Spirit will let you know. All seven churches of Asia heard, *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Then, the call went to anyone. If anyone has an ear, let him hear” (Revelation 13:9, NKJV).* As Holy Spirit speaks today, and He will, may we listen intently. Focus your attention on Him and what He is speaking to you.

APPLICATION

Take a few moments to review your schedule from yesterday. What demanded most of your time? What was your focus? You may have an occupation but the primary reason for your existence is not your occupation, rather your **vocation**. When your occupation overrides your **vocation**, you are not seeking first His kingdom. If demands take away from your **vocation**, systematically reduce those things and watch God work in ways that will be amazing.

PRAYER

Thank you for calling me into ministry partnership. Forgive me for those times that I have given in to the demands of life where “important” details derailed the “essential” aspects of my relationship with You. The foundation of ministry is my relationship with You. Fill me with Your presence. Areas of emptiness in my life, I relinquish to You.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Seventeen



SCRIPTURE

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John" (Luke 1:13, NKJV).

"Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Luke 1:30, NKJV).

"Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10, NKJV)

OBSERVATION

The first verse mentions Zacharias; the second Mary, and the third the shepherds. All three were admonished, **"Do not be afraid"**. Fear will paralyze. And if we are paralyzed, we are not walking in the light (*John 12:35*). If we are paralyzed, we are not walking in the Spirit (*Galatians 5:16,25*).

If we are not walking in the light, darkness overtakes us. If we are not walking in the spirit, we will fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Likewise, if we are not walking, we are not moving forward. As we **exercise truth that God deposits in us, we grow in the measure and the stature to the fullness of Christ.**

Do not fear. When you do not fully understand, walk in the revelation you do have. Exercise the truth He is giving you and more will be revealed.

APPLICATION

Is there an area in your life that is dominated by fear? Take a moment to consider what you have not done that you should have done but allowed fear to keep you from. Determine if fear is affecting your actions and then pray the word, **"Perfect love casts out all fear"**. Watch the power of God work in your life as fear is replaced with faith.

PRAYER

Father, may faith rise in the face of fear. May my life be hidden with Christ in God!

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Eighteen



SCRIPTURE

“So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

We have a tendency to tell people what their needs are and then try to meet their needs. We do this before understanding their true felt needs. “Seek to understand before trying to be understood.” As the wise man of Proverbs said, “A good understanding brings favor” (Proverbs 13:15).

You’ve heard people say, “The church must be relevant”. Some may equate that to belief. But, when I say we must be relevant, I’m saying that we must listen to and answer their questions. Meet their needs. We have a tendency to offer solutions or counsel that might “fix” them.

Certainly, we share Jesus who offers forgiveness of sins. Yet, if we offer a Jesus who cannot be seen when their felt need is a real life person (you) in relationship with them, we become irrelevant. The Jesus we offer must not only be one of history, but one of present day relevance. When we seek to understand how people feel, then impart our life in a manner that meets their felt need, impact becomes significant.

APPLICATION

People have to see our love for them before they embrace the love of a Savior they cannot see. More importantly, they come to understand the love they see is actually coming from Jesus whom they cannot see.

PRAYER

*Father, give me strength to **impart my life** to others. Help me to step into their pain, aloneness, and brokenness. May I invest into them.....my time, my life, and the gospel. Help my focus to be on others, not myself.*

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Nineteen



SCRIPTURE

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7, NKJV).

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...” (Ephesians 3:20, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Prayer opens what is in the heart, to the mind, and reveals it to others through our life. God speaks to us as we pray. What He speaks must be understood in the context of the Scripture.

When that word has the foundation of a more sure word of prophecy (Holy Scripture), the results are multiplied. Our words accomplish little; His word accomplish exceedingly abundantly more (*Ephesians 3:20*). Be sure your words have the more sure word as their foundation.

APPLICATION

Paul wrote, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...” (Colossians 3:16, NKJV)*. Evaluate ‘how much’ at home the word of God is in your heart. *“Dwell”* means to feel at home. Does the Word find home in your heart? If we are to minister effectively, the Word of God must be experienced daily as nourishment *“sweeter than honey and the honeycomb”*. Read Matthew 6:9-15 regarding (1) Affirmation of God, (2) A declaration of what He does, and (3) His invitation to join Him in His work.

PRAYER

I recognize my need to communicate with You. Prayer is more for me than it is for You. You already know my needs. I declare my dependency upon You and openly acknowledge that I need You. I believe You will act in my best interests. What You do will be in my best interest in accordance with Your purpose for my life.

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Twenty



SCRIPTURE

“At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly loved” Daniel 9:23, NKJV).

“O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand up, for now I have been sent to you” (Daniel 10:11, NKJV).

“And he said, ‘O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong, yes be strong” (Daniel 10:19, NKJV).

OBSERVATION

Did you see it? I have missed it over and over again as I read this passage. Read the passages again. See it?

Daniel was **greatly loved**. Daniel was in a season where it seemed as though God had abandoned him. Daniel is distressed over the circumstances of life, yet God says to him, **“You are loved”**. Today, be reminded that **God loves you!** I pray that you are overwhelmed by God's GREAT LOVE today.

APPLICATION

Reflect upon times when you were alone and felt unlovable. How did God express to you **His love for you?**

PRAYER

*Father, your Word reminds me that **there is nothing that can separate me from Your love**. Yet, sometimes my head tells me (because of my actions), that You do not love me. Reaffirm Your love to me. May I never feel unloved again. May Your love penetrate not only my heart, but my head. Every day, may I be filled with Your love. As a result, may that love flow out to others.*

In Jesus Name, Amen

Day Twenty-one



The dictionary defines hope as “*desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment*”.

Luke 2:1

God used a government census to bring **Mary** and Joseph to Bethlehem therefore fulfilling the prophecy that Jesus would be born there. As our economy and political world continues to change, do not become overly alarmed. Once again, God may be using circumstances to fulfill prophecies of old. Look up for your redemption draws near!

Luke 2:15

The shepherds went to see what had been revealed by the angels. Upon arriving in Bethlehem, what they saw was just as the angels had revealed. (Abraham saw Him who was invisible. In the transfiguration Abraham, Elijah, and Moses were with Jesus. He saw, what he had seen.) Likewise, In the Spirit we can see what cannot be seen with the optical sense. “*Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart*” (Galatians 6:9, NKJV).

Luke 2:17

After they had seen Him, they made Him known and the people “*marveled*”. As I read this passage, I asked myself “Do people marvel when I tell them about Jesus? Jesus must be told about in the context of what He is doing today, in the here and now. As we experience Him daily and share fresh encounters with Him, with others, the marvel returns!

Luke 2:25

Simeon’s name means, “God has heard”. If Simeon was 80 years old when he saw Jesus, 80 years earlier his parents were trying to think of a name that would be directly connected to the child’s life. Based on what we read in these verses, God did hear. That’s significant. He too, will hear your prayers. As Simeon, we often times must “*wait for the consolation...*” knowing it will come. The word “*consolation*” means “to comfort, to come near, refresh”. God will come near, comfort and refresh. He will come at the right time, in fact, just in the nick of time (Hebrews 4:16). Lastly, Simeon came to the Temple that day “*by the Spirit*”. We must serve, “*by the Spirit*”.

These words produce hope in me. Hope is produced by faith, and faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Hebrews 11:1, “*Now faith means we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see.*” Hope is connected with faith. Faith is the foundation of hope and Hope is the object of our faith. Read I Corinthians 13. Have you ever wondered why faith, hope, and love are in that order? “*And now abides faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity*” (1 Cor. 13:13).

Maybe hope isn't actually something we do, but something we receive, like grace. Could it be based on the revelation of Jesus in our heart? As we encounter Jesus, faith germinates in our spirit, and hope is produced. Consequently, love is produced by hope, which is produced by faith as we encounter God's Word.

For Hope to exist, it would stand to reason that one would first realize a sense of hopelessness, otherwise, a perfect world wouldn't have any need of hope. In that context this word comes from Isaiah. *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this"* (Isaiah 9:6-7, NKJV).

The last sentence states *"The zeal of the Lord"* will accomplish this. God is excited, zealous, enthusiastic, and passionate to bring us this hope! His Word brings us... Hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7). Hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8; Rom. 8:24-25). Hope laid up in heaven (Col. 1:5). A Hope of the resurrection from the dead (Acts 23:6). The Hope of the gospel (Col. 1:23). Hope that is... Good (2 Thess. 2:16). Blessed (Titus 2:13). Living (1 Pet. 1:3). Glorious (Col. 1:27). Sure (Heb. 6:19). Steadfast (Heb. 6:19). The anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:19).

The impact of what's in our heart, impacts our life. Be willing to go through the test in life to realize the best in life.

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12, NKJV). According to Strong's Bible Dictionary deferred means to "delay or draw out". This implies that the thing hoped for is probable and will eventually come to pass. God's promises are true, yet His timetable is rarely ours. When you get knocked down... get back up! Don't put a period where God has put a comma for the comma is nothing more than a reminder that this too shall pass. It's simply a reminder that this is not how things will end. Your best is yet to come!



FOOTNOTE

At Christmas, this passage stood out to me unlike before:

*"...she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because **there was no room** for them in the inn"* (Luke 2:7).

*In 2016 there will be a lot of things vying for your attention. When the demands of life crowd your schedule, it will be easy to make time for everything and anything... but Jesus. **Though we often times don't make room for Him, He has created room for us in His kingdom. Prioritize making room for Jesus and experience a life-changing transformation. As ministry wives, may it not be said of us... there was no room (place/time) for personal devotion, prayer and fasting.***

*And they continued steadfastly in.... doctrine... fellowship...in breaking of bread.... in prayer.
(Ref. Acts 2:42)*