



Growing Together... Building In Faith

*...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our
Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the
glory both now and forever!*

2 Peter 3:18

40 Days of Fasting and Prayer

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Short Course On Fasting

In over fifty references to fasting in the Old and New Testaments, there is no specific command to fast, with the exception of the Day of Atonement for the Jews. In the New Testament it was assumed that fasting would be a part of the normal devotional life of the believer.

Mathew 6:16 *When you fast do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.*

Mathew 9:15 *Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."*

If these verses indicate that fasting should be a normal discipline in the church (and the numerous examples of fasting support the idea), then what does it mean to fast? What is the purpose of fasting, and how does one go about fasting?

Fasting: Voluntarily going without food and sometimes water, generally for religious purposes.

Four types of fasting referred to in the Bible are:

1. Norman fasting – going without food for up to 40 days (Ex.34:28; Ezra 8:21,23; Dan.6:18; Luke 2:37; Mark 2:18; Matt. 4:2; Acts 13:2-3; 14-23 and others).
2. Partial fasting – abstaining from certain foods (Daniel 10:3).
3. Absolute fasting – going without food or water no more than 3 days (Esther 4:16; this is very rare in the Bible)
4. Voluntary group fasting – called for a specific reason for a specific group of people (1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Jonah 3:5; and others).

Purpose of fasting:

1. Fasting as a means of worship, which must be God-centered, God-intended, and God-ordained.
2. Fasting as an expression of grief, distress, or repentance.
3. Fasting as preparation for God's guidance and renewal (Daniel 9; Ex. 24).
4. Fasting to reveal the things that control us and hinder our intimacy with God.
5. Fasting to remind us that we are sustained *“by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”*
6. Fasting to help keep our balance in life.

Practice of fasting:

1. Occasional fasting – eat a light meal (fruit, vegetables, yogurt, etc.). Skip 2-3 meals, and drink a lot of water. Break the fast with fruit juices followed by a light meal. Avoid oils, dressings, and starch for a couple of meals.
2. Regular discipline of fasting – begin slowly with a partial 24-hour (2 meal) fast once a week for several weeks. During this fasting time, drink fruit juices. After succeeding with this for several weeks, move to a 36 hour (3 meal) fast. Break these fasts with a light meal of fruit and vegetables.
3. Optional fasting – if skipping meals is not possible, try fasting certain types of food (sweets, soft drinks, etc.) or leisure activities (TV, sports, etc.).

Points to remember while fasting:

1. Monitor your inner attitudes and maintain a worshipful attitude.
2. Be careful not to call attention to what you are doing.
3. Devote this fasting time to devotional activities.
4. Seek the Lord regarding extended fasting. *
5. Remember that the major work of scriptural fasting is in the realm of the spirit.

*Get additional information on extended fasting and clear the fast with your physician (people with certain physical conditions should not fast).

Day One

Direction In Prayer

October 30, 2001

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” Matthew 6:13

Jesus taught us much about prayer in example and in word. “The Lord’s Prayer,” or as it could be known, “The Disciple’s Prayer” is part of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the model prayer, and it gives us an outline of the subjects we should pray over.

At the close of the prayer, Jesus instructs us to pray for the Father’s direction for our day. It includes a healthy understanding of our lives. Satan loves to bring the child of God into the place of temptation and ultimately, after we have surrendered to temptation, to the place of bondage.

We should pray every day for God to lead us in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Pray that He will give us daily deliverance from the enemy’s power and deceit. Yesterday’s deliverance was great, but we must depend on the Father to lead us daily. The enemy never ceases his relentless attacks. He plans and schemes to control us constantly. Therefore, prayer should be a vital part of our daily life.

Of course, we have opportunity for complete victory over all of the enemy’s attacks. As believers in Jesus Christ, we know who is the King of the Kingdom. It is His kingdom to which we belong, and prayer helps us focus on kingdom priorities. We know that it is His power which is able to accomplish all of these things and also know that it is all about His glory.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will give us a spirit of prayer. Pray that He will clearly direct us and protect us from the evil one. Take time to focus on God’s greatness and thank Him for the vision that He has given our church. Pray that during these forty days, He will reveal to you how you can use your time, talents, and treasures to further this vision for His glory.

Day Two

Don't Let The Fire Go Out!

October 31, 2001

"Why is the house of God neglected? Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts." Nehemiah 13:11

When the Olympics came to America several years ago, part of the experience was to see the Olympic flame. For every Olympics, a flame is lit from the eternal Olympic flame in Greece and then carried to wherever the Olympic games are being held. The flame made its way to Atlanta for the opening ceremonies by traveling all over America first.

Volunteers and heroes from all over America carried torches holding the flame from place to place. While the flame was passing through Jackson, Mississippi, Harley Sheffield had the honor of carrying it on his bicycle. As he was crossing the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, the expansion gate caused the tire on his bike to blow. The torch popped out of its holder, fell onto the bridge, and broke into pieces. The Olympic flame was extinguished.

Sheffield was horrified. They would have to go all the way back to Greece and start over again! He would go down in history as the man who allowed the flame to go out! His panic was unnecessary because a "mother flame," along with a replacement torch, was present in a trailing van. Thus he could resume his duty, and the Olympic flame traveled onward.

This story provides a great illustration of our walk with God. Too many times we stumble and allow our flame to go out. If your flame has been doused, there is not a "mother flame" to restore it, but there is a "Father flame" who stands ready to light your torch today; and He will keep it lit.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will light our spiritual torches with the oil of the Holy Spirit. Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church will always be on fire for the Lord. Ask God to make your spiritual flame burn brighter (increase your faith). Scripture tells how He can enable you to restore, rekindle, or resume your spiritual flame and in doing so give Him glory.

Day Three

The Birth of A Dream

November 1, 2001

“Then God remembered Rachel; He listened to her and opened her womb.” Genesis 30:22

Rachel was Jacob’s dream wife. They were very much in love. Like most married couples, they desired to have a child so their love could walk upon the earth. God listened to Rachel’s dream for a child, and He answered her prayer by giving them a son. Their dream became a reality named Joseph.

It is impossible to overestimate the power and role of dreams in human existence. Dreams have brought us lifesaving medical breakthroughs and soul stirring revival movements. Some of our greatest athletic achievements are the result of a personal dream. The United States of America is the result of a dream of real democratic government by a group of patriots. Martin Luther King changed the course of a nation because he had a dream. Your world and “the” world can be changed because of the dream inside you.

These dreams are your daytime dreams – your vision, your hopes, your aspirations, and your desires. A God-given dream won’t go away. Search your heart and mind to get in touch with the dream God has put inside you. Then pray about it and take action! Fielder’s dream to build a larger facility began in Habakkuk 2:3, “For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false: Thought is linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church’s vision will become a reality in God’s perfect timing. Pray that our dreams of saving friends and family through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will come because of our new building. Ask God to reveal or clarify your personal dream that is His will for your life and direct you in acting on it.

Day Four

What A Great Dream Looks Like

November 2, 2001

“He said to them, ‘Listen to this dream I had.’” Genesis 37:6

In 1989, a movie called “Field of Dreams” was released. Kevin Costner played Ray Kincella, a 37 year-old man who had never done a crazy thing in his life until he heard a voice one day that said, ‘Build it and he will come.’ You see, Ray had had a stormy relationship with his dad. As a rebellious child of the 60’s he scorned his dad who loved baseball, refusing even to play catch with him. His father died before he could make things right. When he plowed his cornfield over and made a baseball field, everyone said he was crazy for following his dream, but through the magic of the movie he could be reunited with his father as a young man. The theology is certainly not correct, and the plot is nowhere near reality, but that is what makes the movies, the movies.

One thing is for certain; people will come to a place where their dreams can be fulfilled. God’s field of dreams is not in Iowa but rather in the hearts of His people. How do we know what a dream looks like? This list below gives us a good description of what a God-given dream looks like:

A God-given dream will stir your passion.

A God-given dream will be humanly impossible to accomplish.

A God-given dream will make an impression on you for a lifetime.

A God-given dream will cause you to exercise strong faith.

The enemy of our soul will attack a God-given dream.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church will be a true “field of dreams” where people can find and fulfill their dreams. Pray that the whole congregation will be united in our dream to build a larger facility. Pray that we can be one so that the world can be won. Pray for church leaders to have discernment for decisions that affect this dream. Ask God to protect our dream from the enemy.

Day Five

When Your Dream Is Delayed

November 3, 2001

“Here comes the dreamer!” They said to each other. ‘Come now, let’s kill him... Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.’” Genesis 37:19-20

Joseph found out what every dreamer finds out – not everyone is happy about your dream. Joseph found out that people would envy your dream, conspire against it, speak against it, and even attack your God-given dream. Joseph’s brothers put him in a pit and then sold him and he became a slave in Egypt. Don’t you imagine that at that time Joseph wondered what God was doing and if his dream would become a reality?

Remember that every God-given dream must die a human death. That is, every dream from God will come to a place where it is impossible to accomplish the dream in human ability alone. God is sovereign and his timing is perfect. Remember Habakkuk 2:3b, “It (our plan to build) will certainly come and will not delay.” Therefore, when we run out of resources and realize that the dream cannot happen unless God steps in, then God alone will get the glory when the dream is accomplished. His ways are not our ways, and He does not delay a single day.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church will continue to strive forward with our God-given dream of building a larger facility. Pray that God will give us the endurance and stamina needed to face any temporary setbacks. Pray that all involved will experience joy on this journey of faith. Ask God to strengthen you also as you continue to pursue your lifelong goals despite delays.

Day Six

Don't Stop Short Of Your Dreams

November 4, 2001

"The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered." Genesis 39:2a

In 1930, two young brothers named Dick and Maurice McDonald moved from New Hampshire to California to pursue the American dream of becoming successful. After a few failed ventures, they struck gold when they opened a small drive-in restaurant. By the mid-1950's, their annual revenue hit \$350,000, and the brothers split \$100,000 in profits.

You might think, the rest is history, but you may be surprised to know the rest of the story. In 1954, a man by the name of Ray Kroc came into the picture. Ray Kroc saw potential that the brothers did not see. In 1961, Kroc bought the exclusive rights to McDonald's for the sum of 2.7 million – now with 21,000 restaurants worldwide, the rest of the story is history indeed.

The lessons learned from this story are:

- Don't pull up short of your God-given dream.
- Don't allow someone to out-dream you.
- Don't allow someone else to finish your dream.

Christians look to Joseph as the role model for dreaming big. Genesis 39 holds important lessons for all dreamers. Some lessons in this chapter that can keep us from stopping short of our dreams are:

- Know that God is with us (verses 2, 21, & 23).
- Know that God is aware of our actions (verse 9).
- Know that God can make the bitter things in life sweet (verses 21-23).

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church will pursue our God-given dream to the fullest potential. Pray that through the achievement of this dream will come more and better Christ followers for the kingdom of God. Ask God to show you ways in which you have stopped short of His best for you.

Day Seven

Can You Trust God?

November 5, 2001

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all ways acknowledge him, and He will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

There are two ways people live their lives as they pass through this world – either remembering God or forgetting Him. They either acknowledge His presence and live their lives in dependence on Him, or they pay no attention to His claims on them and live a life on the basis of their own understanding and abilities. The worst tragedy and cruelest deception is the man who says feebly with his lips, “I trust God,” but an examination of his calendar and checkbook shows no difference between him and the man who does not even make that claim. The question we must ask ourselves today is, “Do we trust God?”

The very nature of this questions produces two possible meanings: First – “Can you ‘Trust’ God?” That is, is He trustworthy? Can He handle the decisions and the problems in your life? Secondly – “can ‘you’ trust God?” That is, do you have the ability to trust Him?

These verses reveal some important things about trusting God:

The matter of trust is an all or nothing thing. Notice how many times the word “all” is used.

The command to trust precedes the promise. Blessing comes after trust is expressed.

The promise is conditional. Unlike many of the unconditional promises in the Bible, this promise of direction is given only to those who exercise trust in God.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our congregation’s faith and trust in God will grow. Pray that we will allow God to be in control and we will utterly depend on Him and desire that His will be done. Pray that the fruits of our deepened trust in Him will result in guidance from Him. Ask God to identify an area of your life where you need to yield to Him and then look for His direction.

Day Eight

A God You Can Trust

November 6, 2001

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

God expects His people to trust Him, and He is a trustworthy God! We were created to live our lives in dependence upon Him. Our knowledge is incomplete, our wisdom is inadequate, our power is ineffective; thus, we need our Creator. Sin in its very essence is failing to trust God. These verses in Proverbs tell us how we are to trust Him.

We are to trust Him entirely (verse 5). God wants us to trust Him “with all of our heart.” That means everything from our salvation to physical, mental, and social needs. That includes trusting Him with our families, marriages, jobs, relationships, finances, abilities, weaknesses, health, accomplishments, and failures.

We are to trust Him exclusively (verse 5). God commands us not to depend on our own understanding. Why? Because it is fundamentally flawed with an infection of sin. God is truly omniscient. He knows it all from beginning to end. He even knows the number of hairs on our head. So follow His leading from His Word, prayer, and Godly counsel. He is on your side, so trust Him!

We are to trust Him uniformly (verse 6). In all we do, in every decision we make, we are to trust His wisdom, not just with big things, but also with the little things.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church will be fully convinced of His trustworthiness. Take time to praise Him today for who He is and what He does. Take time to thank Him today for His direction of your church's path. Thank Him for His direction of your path.

Day Nine

Learning To Trust Him

November 7, 2001

“Trust in the Lord...Fear the Lord...Honor the Lord.” Proverbs 3:5-9

In order to receive the blessing of God, we must trust Him. Trusting God is not some mere token confession you make from time to time. Trusting God must be complete, total, daily reliance upon the promises of God. Everyday you will face the choice of relying upon your own understanding or trusting Him.

You and I must choose to trust God. When you come to those places in life where the line is drawn and the question is, “Can I trust God?” your answer determines whether you grow beautifully or shrivel spiritually. The issue is, “Which am I going to choose?” When God told Noah to build the ark, it had never rained. Noah chose to trust God. Abraham left everything behind because he chose to trust God. Joshua was faced with a decision, and he said, “Choose today whom you will serve...but as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” Do you have this kind of trust in the Lord?

You can prove your trust in Him. Trusting Him is real when you acknowledge Him, when you depart from evil, and when you honor the Lord with your time, talent, and treasures.

Prayer Focus: Claim the following Scripture today and personalize it for Villa Rica First Baptist Church and for yourself! Hebrews 10:35-39, “Do not let this happy trust in the Lord die away, no matter what happens. Remember your reward! You need to keep on patiently doing God’s will if you want Him to do for you all that He has promised. His coming will not be delayed much longer. And those whose faith had made them good in God’s sight must live by faith, trusting Him in everything. Otherwise, if they shrink back, God will have no pleasure in them. But we have never turned our backs on God and sealed our fate. No, our faith in Him assures our soul’s salvation.”

Day Ten

A Prayer For Direction

November 8, 2001

“Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.” Psalm 119:133

There are at least two essentials to the Spirit-filled life – prayer and the Word of God. As the old song says, “They go together, you can’t have one without the other.” Prayer finds its very foundation in the Scripture. You could not pray with purpose, conviction, or direction without the revelation of God that you find in the Bible. Therefore, you must study the Bible and be a person of prayer.

In Psalm 119, almost every verse refers to the Scriptures. Verse 133 is a prayer for direction. The Psalmist here pleads for guidance from the Word of God.

Have you ever considered that God desires to guide every step you take? He desires to guide not only the big steps in your life but also even the mundane steps you take every day in the kitchen or your workplace. He will also guide you to the friend who needs encouragement, the neighbor who needs Jesus, and the co-worker who needs a witness of God’s love.

Prayer Focus: Thank God for guiding our church through Scripture to build a larger facility. Ask the Lord to continue to give the pastor and staff the wisdom to discernment needed to accomplish everything He has placed before us. Thank God for His guidance of your steps. Ask Him to continue to guide you by making the Scripture you read become alive and personal to you.

Day Eleven

Discover Your Destiny...Like Abraham

November 9, 2001

“Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.” Genesis 14:20b

Chapter fourteen of Genesis records for us a significant event in the pilgrimage of Abraham. This godly man becomes a warrior as he joins in defeating four kings who have united against five kings of the valley. War would not have interested Abraham, except for the fact that Lot, his nephew, was captured and taken into captivity. Today's text picks up with Abraham returning as a conquering hero. His high esteem, already in the eyes of others, has gone higher. He is now known throughout the land.

At this point in his prosperity, he is faced with a significant choice. In fact, his future destiny hangs in the balance of this choice. This choice is a spiritual battle, and it is a greater battle than the physical one he just fought. Will he become worldly with all these material possessions, or will he become rich in God's eyes because he is a giver?

Life is all about making the right choices. In this Bible passage, Melchizedek is a picture of Jesus Christ. With that in mind, you can see that Abraham made a wise choice by giving back to God a tenth of what God had given him. In your prosperity, which comes from God, do you give any back to Him? Spiritual growth will result from worshipping the Lord through giving.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church is a giving church. Pray that we will reach beyond our walls and our members to touch the world with God's love through our talents, time, and treasures. Ask God to reveal ways that we can grow in our giving. Pray about your personal giving and how you can become more generous.

Day Twelve

Discover Your Destiny...Like Rebekah

November 10, 2001

“Drink, my Lord, she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. After she had given him a drink, she said, ‘I’ll draw water for your camels too...’” Genesis 24:18-19

Chapter twenty-four of Genesis details the marvelous narrative of the servant of Abraham who seeks out a bride for Isaac. Most interpreters see a story behind the story in these verses. Abraham appears to be an example of Father God; Isaac is a picture of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the servant, the Holy Spirit.

This unnamed servant when looking for a bride for the Father’s son had one characteristic in mind that she must possess. It was not natural beauty, even though Rebekah was naturally beautiful. It was not strength, even though she was strong. The servant was looking for a person who had the spirit of giving, for a giving person would bless the son, Isaac. When Rebekah gave him a drink and then offered to water his camels (which might take hours), he knew that he had found the one for Isaac.

The Holy Spirit as well waits in the background until He sees the spirit of giving in you. Then He pulls out the riches and gives you revelation of the Father’s plan. The Holy Spirit is watching and waiting on your response to the opportunities to give in your life (Gen. 24:12). The Holy Spirit will graciously confront you with the opportunity to give (Gen. 24:17).

Rebekah was willing to give. She was going to the well to take care of her needs. It was her water, but she gave it away (Gen. 24:18). Rebekah was willing to go beyond the ordinary. If you are willing to go beyond the ordinary for God, He will go beyond the ordinary for you (Gen. 24:19).

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church possesses a spirit of giving above the ordinary. Ask God to bless you with a giving spirit. Pray for someone you know who struggles in this area.

Day Thirteen

Discover Your Destiny...Like Jacob

November 11, 2001

“When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it...and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.’” Genesis 28:16,22

Jacob was the black sheep of the patriarchs. His resume was filled with many questionable incidents. Today’s passage finds Jacob running from the consequences of his actions and falling asleep at a place called Bethel. While he was asleep, God revealed Himself to him in a personal way. It was then that the God became his personal God.

Before we see how this destiny movement changed his perspective about giving, let’s look at the point where God showed up in Jacob’s life.

Jacob’s scheming and trickery brought him nothing but failure and rejection. When he stopped running and fell asleep at Bethel, he had nothing. It is when you are at the end of your rope that God reveals Himself to you in a personal way.

God reveals Himself when we are alone. God came to Moses when he was alone with his flocks in Midian. God came to Isaiah while he was alone in the temple praying. God uses the time we are alone to reveal Himself, for usually, that is when He has our undivided attention.

Jacob was forever changed at Bethel. When God became personal to him, he immediately vowed to give God a tenth of everything. This personal encounter with God changed Jacob from a taker in life to a giver.

Prayer Focus: Pray that everyone touched by our church will experience a personal relationship with God. Ask God how giving of your time, talent, and treasures can reveal your personal faith in Him. If you don’t know God in a personal way, pray and ask Him to meet you at “your Bethel.”

Day Fourteen

Discover Your Destiny...Like Jacob

November 12, 2001

"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, ' Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it...and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."
Genesis 28:16, 22

Today we continue our look at Jacobs encounter with God. Because of this experience, Jacob went from being characterized as a taker, to being known as a giver. It was all due to meeting the living God personally. Look at the God he met:

God is a Dream-Maker. (Gen. 28:12) God came to Jacob with a dream for a glorious future. God always puts dreams about the future in our hearts. Jacob awoke to a wonderful truth. Beforehand, he did not know that he was at the house of God and the gate of heaven. God delights in giving us dreams and then seeing them come to pass.

God is a Promise-Keeper. (Gen. 28:13) God reveals Himself not with just a generic name for God, but the covenant name of Yahweh. God is a God who makes promises and keeps them. He does what He says He will do.

God is a Work-Giver. (Gen: 28:13) He speaks. The verse says, "and He said." God reveals Himself clearly to His people through the Bible, which are His oral words in written form. Jacob had been stumbling around wondering, until he heard the voice of God.

God is a Living God. (Gen. 28:13) God does not identify Himself as, "I was the God of your grandfather Abraham" but rather He says, "I am the God of your grandfather Abraham."

Prayer Focus: Take time in prayer to praise and worship God for who He is to you. Love Him back in a real and personal way today.

Day Fifteen

Discover Your Destiny...Like Joseph

November 13, 2001

"...when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived." Genesis 45:27b

Today's story is about Andrew Singleton. He had an I.Q. of only 55. But his parents dreamed for him. They dreamed that he could somehow enjoy life as a teenager. Although he was enrolled in special need centers for most of his life, when he was 19, his parents put him in regular high school. He attended special classes there and endured a tremendous amount of pressure while adjusting to his new environment. His parents desired that and would be accepted and have friends there. Eventually, Andy did so well that he was able to participate in some mainstream classes.

On graduation day when Andrew's name was called, his parents watched in amazement as the unbelievable happened. All 192 of his classmates rose to their feet and soon the entire crowd of spectators joined them. His classmates began to cheer for him and to call out his name. It was a dream come true.

When we get to heaven we will also celebrate a dream come true. Until then, God will keep us revived. Jacob was living with a spirit of poverty until he saw the wagons. When he saw the riches from Egypt from a son he had thought was dead, he was revived.

Prayer Focus: Pray that each and every one of us at Villa Rica First Baptist Church will develop ownership of our God-given dream to build. Ask God to revive the church leaders of this dream as they continue to work toward it – our pastor, the staff, the deacons, and the campaign leadership team. Ask God to revive you in an area of your life that needs it.

Day Sixteen

How Much Is Too Much?

November 14, 2001

“She broke the jar and poured the perfume on His head.” Mark 14”3b

The story of the Bethany anointing is one of the few stories of Jesus’ life that is contained in all four of the gospels. So impressive was this event that it was indelibly written upon the disciples’ hearts so that they never, ever forgot this act of devotion. Mark uses it as a prelude to the passion events. It contrasts the hatred and rejection that Jesus was receiving at the hands of the rulers and the people. This act of worship and devotion stood out as an act of love that the Lord deserved from all, but was only given by a few.

May this deed be received as a call to worship for us today. May this deed make us ask ourselves the question, “How much is too much?” This woman’s act set a standard of sacrifice, which none can better, but all can match. That alabaster bottle was very valuable. It was worth a year’s wages. Plus, it was to be saved for the most important occasion of one’s life. What is the most extravagant thing you have done for the Lord? What can we learn from this Scripture?

Real love is always extravagant.

Extravagant love is always criticized.

Jesus always comes to the defense of those who are criticized
for being extravagant in their devotion towards Him.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the people connected to our church will love Jesus so much that they will be extravagant with the giving of their time, talent, and treasures.

Day Seventeen

Power!

November 15, 2001

"...His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the Heavenly realms..."
Ephesians 1:19-20

One of the greatest needs in the church today is power; not political power, not manipulative power, not fleshly power, but heaven-sent, Holy Spirit anointed power. The source of all power is the Work of God. The Bible tells us in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." The Bible continues to state this truth again in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

If the Bible is the source of all power, and there are lots of copies out there, then why are there not more changed lives? How is it possible to read the Bible and yet be unaffected by it? The root of the issue is what you define as truth. Do you believe that everything in the Bible is true and that it is from God? For the Christian, power and truth are inseparably linked together. Paul says in Ephesians 6:17, "Take the Helmet of Salvation and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." God gives us the power through Scripture. Consider today's devotional a challenge to memorize a new Scripture verse. Then you can claim the promise of its power.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the people of Villa Rica First Baptist Church will be a powerhouse for God because we daily put on His armor. This armor includes the belt of truth, the body armor of God's righteousness, the shoes of peace that comes from the Good News, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the work of God, and that we will be a people who pray at all times (See Ephesians 6:10-18). Pray that we will have a genuine love for God's truth and will claim its power.

Day Eighteen

Power For The Future

November 16, 2001

“Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today...the Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.’” Exodus 14:13-14

God’s power does not operate until we move beyond the realm of our possibilities. As long as we can do it in our own strength, there is no need for God to display His power. We must move beyond our abilities if a watching world will ever see the power of God. This feat is seen clearly in our text as the recently freed Hebrew slaves found themselves surrounded by impossibilities. Before them was a sea that could not be crossed. Beside them was a barren wasteland. Behind them was an enemy that desired to capture them and take them back to where they had been. In this difficult situation they had three options:

They could go back.

They could stand still.

They could go forward.

For the children of God there is only one real option; go forward! As we move forward under God’s direction and by His power, we must be careful. Around us are many roads that can only lead to defeat and death. Doctrinal deviation, isolation, cowardly compromise, and division are to be avoided.

Before us there is a future. There is a land that flows with milk and honey. This future is as bright and powerful as the promises of God that we find in Scripture.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church will not be afraid to move forward with God. Ask God to give you a promise out of His word to claim for our church. Pray about an area of your life that needs to move forward.

Day Nineteen

Powerful Jesus

November 17, 2001

“At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” Mark 5:30

In Mark, chapter five, we have three important incidents in the life of the Lord Jesus. It is within the context of these events that Jesus revealed Himself as the powerful Son of God. In the first event, Jesus revealed Himself as more powerful than demons. He went along with His disciples to the most demon-possessed man in all the country. With one word the demons left this man, never to return. When Jairus' daughter fell ill, he sought Jesus out to come and heal her. But before they could arrive, the girl had died. Jesus, nevertheless, restored her life by the power of His word. In the middle of these two great revelations, there is rather small incident where Jesus showed Himself more powerful than disease. It falls almost as parentheses to the greater event of the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead, but there are still some important truths about the touch of faith.

This healing event shows us that we should not only have spiritual life, but we should also have spiritual health individually and in our corporate church body. Many have received salvation and have spiritual life, but are not well. Jesus says in John 10:10 “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” The way to experience spiritual health is the same way to experience spiritual life – that is to come into contact with Jesus.

Prayer Focus: Ask God to give spiritual health to our corporate church body and to you as an individual.

Day Twenty

Power To Transform

November 18, 2001

*“For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves.”
Colossians 1:13*

One of our problems today is that we trivialize sin, Satan, salvation, and the Savior. We have reduced sin to what we call minor complexes and simple problems. Satan is a myth, a joke, a cartoon character. In reality, he is the very real god of this world, the chief of an innumerable company of demons, the father of all unbelievers, the ruling monarch of darkness. Salvation has been reduced to a mere intellectual decision rather than a transformation of life. Our Savior has been trivialized to simply another religious leader. In the New Testament, Jesus never asks for compliments or tribute from those who reject His claims as Messiah. He Stands alone as the “only begotten of the Father.” He made the claims that “He and the Father are one.” He claims to be the only way to heaven. We may trivialize these things, but in light of eternity, it is not a trivial pursuit. The very word salvation stands for all God the Father has done to rescue us from our fallen condition. The New Testament presents our salvation, not as a mere decision but as miraculous, supernatural deliverance! Colossians stands as a book that is a wake-up call to the powerful truths about our salvation. Never trivialize what it took to save you.

Prayer Focus: Today is the halfway point in our 40 days of prayer and fasting. Pray that our prayer warriors will be encouraged in some way today. Pray that God’s people at Villa Rica First Baptist Church will continue to strive to deepen their relationship with God on a daily basis and that generous giving on Commitment Sunday will result because of their increased faith. Ask God to help you to never trivialize His love.

Day Twenty-One

Power Of Love

November 19, 2001

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4:8

A woman named Beth was driving her husband Jim's pride and joy, a little green MG. He had labored over this car for hours every Saturday for four years. He had wanted a car like this for almost all of his life. As Beth was driving, she saw a boy on a bicycle and swerved to avoid him. She heard the little car being crunched, scraped, and the glass breaking. Another driver stopped to help her out of the car. She was dazed but not hurt when the police officer approached her and asked for her insurance papers.

She did not so much fear the wrath of her husband, for he was gentle and nice, but she feared the great disappointment he would have. She dreaded the hurt and anguish she would see on his face.

As she went to the glove compartment to get the insurance papers, she found them in a plastic package. To her surprise on top of all the documents was a white envelope with her name on it. She opened it and began to read: Dear Beth, if you are reading this, you have probably been in an accident. Don't worry. I pray that you are all right, and just remember it is you I love. Jim.

The best of us have wrecked our lives at times. We have made a mess. We have loved darkness rather than light. But the cross is God's statement to us that no matter how much we have wrecked our lives and disappointed Him, He says, "Remember it is you I love."

Prayer Focus: Spend time in prayer adoring God for His love. Pray that as we move forward as a church, we will always cultivate a loving relationship with God and each other. Ask the Lord what Villa Rica First Baptist Church family member you can reach out to today, expressing His love.

“As the body without the Spirit is dead so faith without deeds is dead.” James 2:26

How do you know that your life has been changed by the power of God? Well, how do you know that a high voltage electrical line has touched you? When a person comes into a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, it is very obvious to the one who has received this new life and to the people close to Him. When God comes into your soul, you will know it! However, the question can be asked: “Does the Bible teach about the evidence of a changed life?” This Scripture in James is the heart of this epistle, and it gives a clear understanding of a biblical working faith that is evident of a union with Jesus Christ.

Paul speaks of this in Romans, using Abraham as an illustration. Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What were his experiences concerning this question of being saved by faith? Was it because of his good deeds that God accepted him? If so, he would have had something to boast about. But from God's point of view, Abraham had no basis at all for pride. For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Romans 4:1-5

There is no contradiction between these verses in James and Romans. Paul stresses the root of faith, while James stresses the fruit of faith. Paul looks at our salvation from the Divine perspective, and James looks at it from the human perspective. Paul sees the fire, and James sees the smoke coming out of the chimney. The two go hand in hand.

Prayer Focus: Lord, increase the faith of every member of our church so that it is obviously visible to the outside world. Pray Matthew 5:16, “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven.”

Day Twenty-Three

All Power

November 21, 2001

“The Jesus came to them and said, ‘ All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Matthew 28:18

The Roman Empire was at one of the greatest moments in terms of size and influence, with borders larger than ever before. Their elaborate governing system was in full operation, tax money coming in at a higher rate than ever. Truly the Roman Empire was operating in its finest hour. It was the most modern civilization the world had ever known.

If it were possible for the leader of the great empire, Tiberius Caesar, to have looked from his palace in Rome all the way to a distant remote mountain in Galilee where eleven men were gathered around their leader, and if he were able to hear what this leader was saying to the eleven men, there’s little doubt he would have laughed out loud. The leader said to His disciples, “I have been given complete authority...”

However, if Caesar could have seen 350 years into the future, he would have been aghast to see his successor naming Christianity as the official state religion. It took less than 400 years for Christianity to conquer the great Roman Empire. History would show that this act of being made an official religion would be blight rather than a blessing to Christianity. However, it’s still significant to see how a church of only seven impacted the entire known world in such a short time. How, were they able to achieve this? It was through Holy Spirit, God-given power. We can impact our world because we have the same Holy Spirit living within us, thus the same power.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the leaders of Villa Rica First Baptist Church will be mightily filled with Holy Spirit power and thus impact the world for Christ. For yourself, pray or sing the words of this song:

Breathe on me, breath of God, love and life that make me free. Breathe on me, breath of God, fan the flame within me. Teach my heart, heal my soul, and speak the mind that in Christ we know. Take me to your sanctuary. Breathe on me. Speak to me, voice of God. Comfort, heal, restore with love. Breathe on me.”

Day Twenty-Four

The Anointing Brings Harmony

November 22, 2001

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon was falling on Mount Zion. Fro there the Lord bestowed His blessing, even life forevermore.” Psalm 133

Remember the television show MASH? It was based on an American emergency medical unit in the Korean War. This group of people was composed of some very different personalities. There were Hawkeye Pierce, B.J., and Father Mulcahy. There was Colonel Potter, Radar, and Hotlips Houlihan. They were always playing jokes on one another and arguing over different political views and the war. But there was always one thing that brought these characters together. It did not matter what particular argument was going on or what particular practical joke was being pulled, when they heard the sound of the choppers bringing in wounded, they always were united in the O.R.

In our day of hurting and wounded people, we cannot afford to be one more church that spends all of its time arguing over things that will not matter in the light of eternity. We must bring our differences together and allow the Lord to merge them in unity of the Spirit.

Just as Aaron, the high priest, was anointed on his head and the oil ran down his body, so the Holy Spirit descends from our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Anointing always brings harmony.

Prayer Focus: Pray that throughout the fulfilling of the dream that the Lord has given Villa Rica First Baptist Church, we will experience genuine harmony resulting from the Holy Spirit’s presence among us. Ask God to show you specific ways that you can contribute toward the unit of believers at Villa Rica First Baptist Church.

Day Twenty-Five

The Corporate Anointing

November 23, 2001

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon was falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestowed His blessing, even life forevermore.” Psalm 133

This Psalm was written on the occasion of David’s coronation as King over all of Israel. And what a struggle it was between the times he was anointed king by Samuel until the day of his coronation when he ruled over a united twelve tribes. It was David who united these warring tribes. David understood that harmony could only be achieved when they practiced the unity of their faith. These days of unity for Israel under David and later his son Solomon were without questions the most glorious days of their history. Even in our current time, Israel is but a shadow of what she was, despite her being in a united state. In fact, Israel will know no greater glory until Jesus rules in regal splendor from His throne in Jerusalem.

There is a message in these verses for the church. For as the people of God united under one king in the Old Testament, so the people of God must unite today under the King of Kings. As they experience great glory in this unification in the Old, so we will experience a greater glory in the New. As they experienced a tremendous victory over their enemies because of unification, so we will enjoy freedom from the enemy’s control in the New.

Unity is not uniformity. You can tie two cats’ tails together and have unity but not peace! Seek ways to be harmonious.

Prayer Focus: Pray that the Villa Rica First Baptist Church of believers will experience and demonstrate true unity of purpose. Pray that we will be one so that the world will be won. Ask God how you can help our church be unified.

Day Twenty-Six

From Defeat To Victory

November 24, 2001

"I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses." Joshua 1:3

Abraham Lincoln is widely recognized as one of the greatest presidents in history. He stood tall and strong in a very critical and decisive time in our history. We certainly would regard him as a successful man, but he experienced many failures throughout his life. When Abraham Lincoln went off to the Black Hawk War he was a captain. Through no fault of his own, he returned a private, bringing an end to his military career. His little country village shop "wicked out" as he used to say. So he failed as a businessman. As a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, he was too impractical, too unpolished, and too temperamental to be successful

Turning to politics, he was defeated in his campaign for the legislature. He was defeated in his first attempt to be nominated for Congress and in his application to be Commissioner of the General Land Office. He was defeated in the Senatorial election of 1854 and in his aspirations for the Vice Presidency in 1856. Finally, he was elected President of the United States and fulfilled his destiny and the destiny of a nation. Although maybe not as dramatic, Lincoln's experience is the experience of many of God's people. The enemy of our soul comes to us after repeated defeats and whispers in our ears. "You're a failure!" He tells us we will never win, are trapped forever where we are, and will never fulfill our God-given destiny.

The first chapter of Joshua tells the story of God's people who escaped the cycle of defeat and moved into the new day of victory.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church will build all the facilities that God intends for us. Pray Galatians 6:9, "Let us not become weary doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Ask the Lord to encourage you in your walk with Him. In your prayer time claim victory over evil for our church and for yourself.

Day Twenty-Seven

Are You Dangerous?

November 25, 2001

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

When we are called by God our Savior out of sin's bondage, we begin to journey with Him. We follow Him as our Captain and Leader into the promised purpose of the future, our destiny. Along the way, God will stretch us. He will enlarge the horizons of our vision.

Jim Elliot, the great missionary who gave his life trying to reach the Auca Indians said, “Am I Dangerous?”

If we are honest with ourselves, we may find that we are utterly ordinary and commonplace. We profess to know a power the world cannot reckon with. We are all sideliners, coaching and criticizing the real wrestlers, while content to sit by and leave the enemies of God unchallenged. We are often spiritual pacifists, conscientious objectors in this battle of the death with principalities and powers in the heavenly places. The world cannot hate us; we are too much like its own. Oh, that God would make us dangerous!

How do we get there? According to Joshua there are several principles:

Choose to be strong.

Choose to be courageous.

Choose to be obedient.

Prayer Focus: Pray 2 Chronicles 15:7 for our church, “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.” Ask the Lord to embolden us with strength, courage, and submission to Him to follow the path He has placed before us. Pray these traits for yourself as well.

Day Twenty-Eight

We Have Never Done It This Way Before!

November 26, 2001

“He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘ We have never see anything like this!’ Mark 2:12

Ancient sailors recorded many times that in the midst of a coming storm the top of their ship’s mast would be circled with a mysterious circle of light. Many times their hair would begin to stand straight out as this light appeared. They called it St. Elmo’s Fire. Experienced sailors knew it was time to take cover because the air was so electrically charged that a lightning strike was imminent.

The air must have been so charged in Capernaum at the time this Scripture passage took place. There was a crowd and this crowd was curious about the ministry of Jesus and the scribes were scowling as they watched this new Rabbi hoping to catch Him in an error. The room was charged with excitement. Everyone knew something dramatic was about to take place – not St. Elmo’s Fire, the King of King’s fire. When He is present, miraculous things happen. Sure enough, excitement mounted as four men tore up the roof to let a friend down in the presence of Jesus so he could be healed. The Bible say, literally “took off the roof.” When we gather it should be a “roof-raising experience” and we should be able to say, ‘We’ve never seen anything like this before!’”

According to this passage these three things are needed to have a “roof-raising” experience with Jesus: a Savior who can save; a preacher who can preach; and a flock who has faith.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church will be filled with people of faith like these four roof removers, for they did everything possible to bring their friend to Jesus. Ask the Lord to make you like one of these four.

Day Twenty-Nine

Can Jesus Do A Mighty Work Here?

November 27, 2001

“He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.” Mark 6:5

Here we have a sad picture. Jesus came to church but could not do mighty works because of their lack of faith. It was not a good first year of ministry for Jesus as far as His reputation among the hometown people of Nazareth was concerned. He experienced a tremendous amount of rejection. Nazareth was where the Scriptures say, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2:52) It started out well enough when He took the pulpit on a Sabbath and read the 61st chapter from the prophet Isaiah. This event (recorded in Luke 4:16-30), tells how they “were amazed at the gracious words that come from his lips.” (verse 22). But when He told them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (verse 21), they became enraged. In fact, they ran Him completely out of town to a cliff where they wanted to kill Him by casting Him off the edge. “But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way.” (verse 30) Talk about rejection! Most preachers would have dusted their feet off and pronounced judgment, never to return. Jesus, however, is not like most preachers, thank God. He still had a burning desire to do a mighty work among them.

Jesus still has a burning desire to do a mighty work through His church and people today. Are you willing to live by faith and have a prayer relationship with Him? For He is ready, willing, and able to perform powerful works through us. Our faith will either turn the switch on or off. Jesus will either do a mighty work here or He will go elsewhere to do His mighty work.

Prayer Focus: Pray that He will do a mighty work through Villa Rica First Baptist Church because we are of strong faith. Ask God to show you if there is a roadblock of unbelief in your life.

Day Thirty

An End Time Church

November 28, 2001

“The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clean-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.” 1 Peter 4:7

Have you heard the story about the man who woke up early in the morning, looked at the clock, and the time was 3:33? He looked over at the calendar and noticed it was the third day of the third month. As he rose from the bed he remembered that he lived on Third Street in the third house. When he read the morning paper he became even more excited because at the horse races that day there was a horse named Trio in the third race. He rushed to the bank, withdrew his life’s savings and rushed to the racetrack. He went to gate three and sat on the third row. He bet it all on Trio to win in the third race. Guess what – Trio placed third. Sometimes things do not work out the exact way we think they will or want them to.

The recipients of Peter’s letter were in the same situation. They had bet it all on Jesus and believed they had a winner. But they were severely persecuted for placing their faith in Him, and wondering if being taunted and persecuted by unbelievers every day was worth it. Knowing the difference Jesus made in their lives, they answered yes! This affirmative answer still begs another question – “How can we endure until the end of the world?”

God will prepare His people before the Lord returns; the church will return to its position of power. We are beginning to witness a Pentecostal power on the church again. The tides are hitting the shores, but a tidal wave is coming! God will deal with the church as a bride as He did when she was a babe. Not everyone wants to be part of an end-time church, content to be in a safe ministry and disturbs no one. Many would love, in these last days, to sit at the feet of those preachers who will tickle their ears with “sweet Jesus” sermons and tell them all is well with their sin filled lives. End-time churches want to pray relentlessly, give tremendously, witness powerfully, and worship constantly.”

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church is an end-time church. Ask the Lord to help us to do our utmost for Him as a church body and as individuals.

Day Thirty-One

God's Great Relocation Project

November 29, 2001

"Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly dot it.'" Numbers 13:30

God is in the moving business. He is always in the process of moving His people. Although we are often content where we are, God loves us enough not to leave us there. Sometimes we can get a little stubborn about changes that He has in mind for us.

A good illustration is found in the children of Israel as they were moving from Egypt to the Promised Land. God sent miracle after miracle to get them out. But they did not want to on in and possess what He intended for them. In fact, they said in Numbers 14:3, "...Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" It seems God could take His people out of Egypt, but His people couldn't leave Egypt behind.

The old song says, "I have decided to follow Jesus – No turning back, no turning back." Paul says in Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God has begun a spiritual project for His people of Villa Rica First Baptist Church. May we take heed of the lesson we learn from the children of Israel going to the Promised Land. May we be wise enough to realize that God began this great project, and He will continue this work until completion?

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will continue to lead the way and that our faith will remain strong as we continue with this vision He has given our church. Thank the Lord for loving you enough not to leave you where you are. Also thank Him for the privilege of being a part of this church body of believers during this exciting time in our history.

Day Thirty-Two

You Make The Call

November 30, 2001

“All Scripture is God – breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 11 Timothy 3:16-17

Baseball umpire Durwood Miller tells of his rookie year of umpiring in the major leagues. It was the first time he had called balls and strikes with the famous pitcher, Nolan Ryan. The second pitch of the game was so fast, Miller never saw it. He froze, unable to make the call. Finally he yelled somewhat tentatively, “Strike!” The batter backed out of the box and said, “Ump, don’t feel so bad, I didn’t see it either!”

This story is a good illustration of what is happening in the world today. Change is occurring so fast that none of us can see it clearly. Yet we have to make vital calls and daily decisions about very important things, all the time wondering if we are making the right ones.

There has never been a time when we have needed a standard more in our lives than we do today. We need a fixed point, a true north, an unchanging standard on which we can base our decisions and not have to worry about changing them. God has given us such a standard. It is the Word of God, the Holy Bible. It contains the rock-solid, never changing, and always-relevant truth.

Unbelievers might say the Bible is irrelevant and outdated. Believers know that “...the work of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing the soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) You make the call.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our fellowship of believers will read and study the Bible daily. Ask God to let its wisdom sink into our hearts and minds and then reflect in our character and actions.

Day Thirty-Three

Watch Out For The Dream Stealers

December 1, 2001

"...so I sent messengers to them with this reply: ' I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you.'" Nehemiah 6:3

Dr. Haller Nutt of Natchez, MS, had a dream. He wanted to build one of the greatest plantation houses in the entire south. Being a doctor and cotton farmer gave him the wealth needed to accomplish this dream home. He made his sketches and searched the nation for the best architect to make his dream a reality. He found Samuel Sloan in Philadelphia. It was going to be an octagon mansion with eight rooms on each of the six floors. All would be grouped around a middle piece, a six story rotunda that would be capped with a 16 sided Byzantine onion-shaped dome. Dr. Nutt went all over the world to purchase the very best furnishing for this masterpiece.

As soon as construction began, tragedy struck. The Civil War erupted. All workers left to fight. Dr. Haller Nutt lost everything during the course of the war. During that time, he moved his family into the basement of this grand mansion so they might be safe and have shelter. Dr. Nutt died in 1865 before the war was over. The family continued to live in the basement. In fact, they lived there for over a century, 111 years! Finally, some relatives donated it to the local historical society and to this day, it stands as a monument to an unfinished dream.

In chapter 6 of Nehemiah, enemies tried to stop him from completing the dream that God had laid on his heart – that of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. But Nehemiah stayed focused. He completed his God-given dream in record time to the praise of His glory. He is a role model for us today.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will enable us to complete the dream that He has given us in such a way as to bring Him glory and expand His kingdom. Pray that He will thwart any enemies who try to steal our dream and prevent it from happening. Ask the Lord how you can take ownership of this vision using the time, talents, and treasures that He has given you.

Day Thirty-Four

The Absurdity Of Going Back

December 2, 2001

“Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human efforts?”
Galatians 3:3

On Thursday, August 1, 1985, a room full of America's top intelligence officials were gathered outside the office of the director of the CIA for a farewell reception of a retiring colleague. However, the topic was not about the retiree. Whispers were flying around the room that the highest-ranking KGB agent, Vitally Sergeyeovich Yurchenko, had defected. He was most important because he was in charge of all KGB operations in the US and Canada. Now, he would be able to provide extremely important information about Soviet spies in America.

After presenting himself to the American Embassy in Rome, he was quickly flown to the US in a military plane. Once in the US, he was taken to a “safe house” in northern Virginia where he was interrogated for hours and provided very sensitive information. The most startling and amazing part of this story took place three months later on Nov. 2nd. He had been spurned by a girlfriend in Canada and was growing impatient with his situation. During the evening he persuaded his assigned CIA agent to take him to Georgetown for dinner and a movie. During dinner he asked the agent “What would you do if I got up and walked off? Shoot me?” The agent replied, “We don't shoot defectors.” Yurchenko countered, “I will be back in 15-20 minutes, if I am not, it is not your fault.” He walked out of the restaurant and presented himself to the Russian Embassy where he un-defected.

The world watched in amazement a few days later as he boarded a Russian jet and waved good-bye to freedom. He returned to the confines of Communism. Why, you ask. Yet that which amazes us in the political arena is met with welcome acceptance in the spiritual arena. Why, after tasting the freedom from the grace of God would anyone return to the confines of legalism regulating that relationship? What kind of relationship do you have with the God of grace?

Prayer Focus: Pray that we will continue to live our Christian lives in the Spirit and not by our own human effort. Ask the God of grace to help you deepen your relations with Him, filling you daily with His Holy Spirit.

Day Thirty-Five

A Contribution Or A Sacrifice?

December 3, 2001

“Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:1-2

Did you hear the story of the chicken and the pig that were walking together down the road? They came upon a beggar who was nearly starved to death. He had not eaten in days. The chicken and the pig decided to help him. The chicken said, “I have an idea. Let’s fix him some breakfast – some ham and eggs!” The pig thought about that for a moment and then said, “I don’t like the idea very much because it only requires you to make a contribution, but for me it is a complete sacrifice!”

As the Apostle Paul writes our Scripture passage, he is making a turning point in his letter to the believers in Rome; He is finally giving an application to the truths that he has been telling about in previous chapters. He is stating how we should respond to the knowledge that God has procured our salvation and saved us from the wages of sin through Jesus Christ. He’s telling us to lay it all on the alter for God; surrender completely. Don’t simply make a contribution like the chicken, but sacrifice all like the pig.

Prayer Focus: Pray the Villa Rica First Baptist Church is a body of believers willing to totally surrender to God.

Day Thirty-Six

Don't Drop Out Of the Battle

December 4, 2001

"In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me, 'Flee like a bird to your mountain.'" Psalm 11:1

In the 1984 Olympic games hosted by Los Angeles, there was a memorable event in the women's 3000-meter race. Two premier long distance runners were entered: Zola Budd, a South African running for Great Britain, and Mary Decker from the US. During the race, the two bumped. Budd landed awkwardly and was cut deeply by Decker's spikes, but was able to continue. She finished a disappointing seventh. Mary Decker suffered a pulled left hip stabilizer muscle. Her injury put her out of the race.

In a spiritual sense, there are many Mary Deckers today. Wounded, they have quit running the race. Among the many images of life found in Scripture, there is the image of the runner and the image of battle. As believers in Jesus Christ we begin with a birth, but we discover quickly that this journey we are on is more like a battle. It is very difficult to persevere in a battle. In 1 Kings, chapter 22, the Bible records the time when King Ahab of Israel joined with Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to battle against Syria. Ahab is struck by an arrow and tells his driver, "Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded." (verse 34).

Many are like Ahab who have been wounded in the battle for souls and have forsaken their place. The Scriptures are full of these warnings and admonitions. Galatians 5:7, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" A disturbing part of our culture today is an aversion to any kind of commitment. Our society is short on longevity and long on short-term, quick, instant "what have you done for me lately" attitudes. God teaches us differently through His Word to persevere.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will persevere with what the Lord has entrusted to us. Ask the Lord whom you can encourage to persevere today. Proverbs 11:25 says, "...he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." Claim this promise as you act upon it.

Day Thirty-Seven

Conversion = Changed Life

December 5, 2001

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service." 1 Timothy 1:12

After Watergate, there was an abundance of books that were published by the various personalities involved. One of the most famous was Chuck Colson who wrote the very famous "Born Again." This book detailed his conversion to Christ. All of these years later, we think of Chuck Colson as a great man who has had such an impact on the world through his prison ministries. We forget that before his conversion he was known as "the hatchet man." It was a common saying in Washington that Colson would walk over his own mother for Nixon! Another player in the Watergate scandal was the very boisterous G. Gordon Liddy. One of the great quotes from his book tells of a time when a certain court date came around. Everyone had been discussing Colson's conversion to Christianity. As Colson walked into the courtroom, Liddy was overheard to say, "Oh, no, if Colson would walk over his own mother for Nixon, just think what he will do for Jesus!"

Time has proven Colson's conversion genuine. He certainly is one more example of how God can change a life. In 1 Timothy, the Apostle Paul is encouraging Timothy in the faith to cherish, protect, and preach the Gospel. The reason is that the Gospel's message changes lives. Indeed at Villa Rica First Baptist Church, the Gospel is preached so that our goal of making more and better followers for Christ can be met.

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church will always be a place that impacts the world for Jesus. Pray that each one of us will join together to help expand God's kingdom and achieve Christ likeness.

“than you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

In a day before politicians decided truth according to polls and partnership, Abraham Lincoln made decisions based on principle. His most notable act was the Emancipation Proclamation. It was New Year's Day, 1863, when this decree was first publicly stated. It would be almost two years later, after his death, that his convictions were made official on the Constitution. Lincoln took a stand without compromise that would nearly rip our nation apart and cause much bloodshed. He knew there were some things that were worth standing for, even if it meant a fight.

An unusual thing happened after the war. Even after an amendment to the Constitution, slaves continued to live as slaves. Shelby Foote records for us what once Alabama slave said in 1864, “I don't know nothing 'bout Abraham Lincoln 'cep they say he set us free. And I don't know nothing 'bout that neither.” How tragic. Strange as it may seem, man preferred the security of slavery to the uncertainty of freedom.

It is tragic when someone does not exercise his personal freedom. Even more so are God's people who have been set free spiritually but who are content to remain in their slavery. Jesus Christ is the Great emancipator who has paid the ultimate price for His people to be free from the bondage of sin.

Consider these verses:

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let ourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1

“ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” Romans 6:6-7

Prayer Focus: Pray that Villa Rica First Baptist Church believers are a discerning people who will claim our Christ-earned freedom.

Day Thirty-Nine

Why Pray?

December 7, 2001

"...the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:16

Can prayer really make a difference? Can my prayers actually change things? Is it possible for the will of God to be thwarted because I don't pray? These are legitimate questions. The answers you give them reflect the very foundation of your relationship with the Lord. On one hand, if God is Sovereign, He's going to do everything the way He wants, so why pray? On the other hand, if He is waiting on my prayers to execute His will, then I had better get serious about praying really quickly. How does His Sovereignty and my prayers go together?

God uses prayer to make the impossible, possible and the ordinary, extraordinary. Prayers make our efforts effective and help us to define God's will more clearly. C.H. Spurgeon said, "Whenever God determines to do a great work, He first sets His people to pray." Faithful praying releases the Holy Spirit to act and allows us to see God in His full glory.

Someone once said, "God does things when we pray that He does not do when we do not pray." May today's devotional be an inspiration for you to seek the Lord in prayer. Look up prayer in your Bible's concordance. Then read and study those verses it gives you. It will help you become endeared to prayer and to realize just how vital prayer is.

Prayer Focus: Thank God for hearing all the prayers that have been lifted up on our church's behalf. Thank Him for answering them. Pray that God's people at Villa Rica First Baptist Church will pray more than ever before and that everything we do as a church will be labored over in prayer.

Day Forty

He Is Faithful

December 9, 2001

“They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:23

God has given Villa Rica First Baptist Church a vision for the future. Today’s devotional is dedicated to praising the Lord for this aspect of His character.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

(Text by Thomas O. Chisholm. Music by William M. Runyan)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou has been Thou forever wilt be.

Chorus

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Chorus

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

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