



## Transformation – A Lenten Journey

Spiritual Practices have been a large part of the Christian faith. These spiritual practices open us up for the Holy Spirit to *TRANSFORM* our lives. Anything in life calls for some sort of discipline whether in a sport, a job, a relationship, and especially our faith journey. As people of faith, we are called to run the race with endurance. Hebrews 12:1-3 says, “So then, with endurance, let’s also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let’s throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith’s pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God’s throne. Think about the one who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won’t be discouraged, and you won’t give up.”

During this Lenten season, would you consider the call of Christ to deepen your faith through these spiritual practices? Some of these practices might be new to you and some might be challenging.

**FASTING** --- March 9<sup>th</sup> – March 15<sup>th</sup>

“Ultimately we fast simply because we want God more than we want anything this world has to offer us.” John Piper – *A Hunger for God*

### March 9<sup>th</sup>

**Psalm 24:3-4** - *Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.*

**Psalm 32:5** - *Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

It is a common malady of this Christian life to face serious insecurities when considering approaching God. In my own life, I have experienced many dark seasons of feeling unworthy or uniquely disqualified from this privilege. Why the struggle? Because I know me! I know my propensity to sin. I know my inability to give God the righteousness He deserves. If I were Him, I wouldn’t be pleased to have me come near. Praise God. He knows we have these struggles. And, He has an answer.

First, my confidence in drawing near to God is not based on my performance. My confidence is in the performance of Jesus. Hebrews 4 instructs us to come to God with boldness based on our full confidence in the finished work of Jesus on our behalf.

And second, my confidence in drawing near to God is based on His love. I can trust His love for me. And strangely enough, the very things in my life that appear to disqualify me – sin, weakness, failure, flaws, etc. – provide convincing proof of God’s love. If someone says they love you but are not familiar with your past

failures or current weaknesses, you cannot be sure they really love you. But if they are fully aware of the good and the 'ugly' and love you anyway, you are truly loved. Praise God! He knows it all and loves us anyway. My sin and weakness become my opportunity to really know He loves me. I can really trust His love for me.

Today we draw near to God. We do this by uncovering the 'ugly' side. We confess our sin. We reveal the part of our life that puts His love for us to the test (at least in our minds). And praise God again... He proves His love. He forgives and loves us anyway.

Prayer Focus: Thank God for loving us despite our failures. God's loving-kindness leads us to repentance.

## March 10<sup>th</sup>

**Psalm 111:1** - *Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.*

**Psalm 27:8** - *My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.*

In You, O God, I find my identity. When I come to seek You, I find that You are already here, seeking me. What gives my worship meaning is so much more than anything that I can do or say - it is You! You are the reason I came to exist, You are the giver of my next breath, and You are the reason for my continued being. You are the reason I worship. I worship You with my whole heart. I come to worship You because of who You are! You are the one and only true God! I bring You praise because of Your holiness. You are so gracious to me, and You have already done more than enough for me to bring You thanksgiving. I worship You.

May my life bring glory to You, my Lord and my God. I want to worship You with my whole heart. I am not ashamed to declare my love and adoration for You before others. All I am is Yours, and I belong to you. I am Your possession. May You be pleased with my worship. I long to recapture a spirit of genuine worship, a personal revival of my whole being, heart, soul, and spirit. Heaven and earth declare Your glory, O God, and therefore so do I. All of creation submits to You, and so my life is surrendered to You. I am willing to do Your will. How can I be in Your presence and not be changed? I long to be the kind of worshipper that You have been looking for, fully devoted to You. I worship You with my whole heart.

Prayer Focus: Pray that every day of our lives will be worship of God in all that we do.

## March 11<sup>th</sup>

**Psalm 43:3** - *Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.*

**Ephesians 1:17-18** - *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and the incomparably great power for us who believe.*

Too often we slide slowly into the normalcy of pretending and stay there unaware. With this strange statement, I mean that as Christ Jesus has resurrected our souls by His grace, we know that light and life only come from Him. We are convinced of this emphatic truth. We've looked elsewhere for life and have been awakened to its emptiness. But sadly, we often return there slowly and sink into the gray of unintentional motion, conditioned responses, and banal routine.

Lord Jesus, Open our eyes! James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, reminds us that when we lack wisdom, we should ask it of God who gives generously. In Psalm 43, the Psalmist confesses that God's light and God's truth are the only reliable leaders, for they bring us to where He is.

God of Heaven, Lead us with your light and truth! As we continue our way into this consecrated season of prayer and fasting, we are coming together as a church praying that God would lead us, open our eyes, and give us the moving power of His Spirit in a fresh and awakening way. This prayer is a heart-felt, guttural, straining desire to return to True Reality, God's light and life. We know that Christ Jesus has resurrected our souls by His grace and that light and life, along with wisdom and revelation, come only from Him.

Prayer Focus: Pray Lord, open our eyes to see God more clearly and our ears to hear anything God would desire to speak to us.

## March 12<sup>th</sup>

**Psalm 61:3 & 5-** For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. For you, God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

**Psalm 92:11-** My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.

**Romans 15:13-** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We often feel physically, spiritually, and emotionally tired, with endless tasks and little time to rest. On such draining days, I wonder how to fulfill God's purpose when feeling empty. The answer lies in God's Word, the Bible.

Jesus says in John 15:1-4, "I am the vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off branches that don't bear fruit and prunes those that do to make them more fruitful...Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

Staying devoted to God amidst life's demands requires discipline. To bear fruit, we must stay connected to the vine. God's plan for us involves pruning to maximize our fruitfulness. By putting God first, we gain the strength and power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish our tasks.

Prayer Focus: Pray God to prune off the things that are not important and get in the way of our time with God.

## March 13<sup>th</sup>

**Galatians 5:22-** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Several years ago, after helping our young daughter memorize the above verse, she proudly recited, "Love is patient, and love is kind. It does not envy; it does not burst." We chuckled, because while we knew she meant to say boast, there was certainly some truth in saying love does not burst as well!

Once we ask Jesus into our lives, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us. The apostle Paul gives some great advice for loving and living in the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5. He tells us we are called to serve one another humbly; to love others like we love ourselves. He goes on to list the fruit that comes from living in step with God, one of which is love.

Love is a loaded word. If you asked ten people to describe it, you'd most likely get ten different answers. The good news is we don't have to guess what true, Godly love is. It's spelled out for us in the Word. Love is patient and kind. It doesn't 'burst' as my daughter recited, because it's controlled and gentle. It isn't rude, self-seeking, or easily angered. It doesn't delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth because it's full of goodness,

faithfulness, and joy. Do you see the connection between these two pieces of scripture? They weave together quite beautifully and leave us with a clear picture of what love and living in the Spirit really looks like.

Prayer Focus: Pray that we show the fruits of the spirit in all aspects of our lives daily.

## March 14<sup>th</sup>

**Joshua 24:15-** As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

The Christian life is not intended to be solitary. Jesus shared His life with twelve disciples and subsequently instructed them to share it with others. Early believers gathered to break bread and share the living Word. The weekly gathering in church serves as an expression of a shared belief in Jesus – a community of faith that derives strength and courage through worship. However, a fulfilling life following Jesus extends beyond a single hour each week in church. It necessitates personal devotion and interdependency with others in prayer, study, fellowship, and praise. In essence, the most effective way to follow and serve Jesus is within a community.

Modern families are diverse, encompassing various forms and structures. Whether one is widowed, single, divorced, or part of a blended family, God provides a group for intimate belonging. This small cluster of believers represents a microcosm of the church, while the church itself can be seen as a larger extension of the family unit. Regardless of perspective, the objective is to create a space for love, acceptance, prayer, and the celebration of communion with Jesus among us.

Sharing our hearts, burdens, and triumphs is crucial, as is encouraging one another to remain strong in the Lord (Ephesians 6:18). Prayer is straightforward, involving simply talking to God together. Seeking time with a trusted brother or sister can transition us from defeat to victory. Cultivating the habit of worshipping together is essential to becoming the individuals God intends for us to be.

Prayer Focus: Pray for opportunities to have deeper communion and fellowship with God and with our community of faith.

## March 15<sup>th</sup>

**Psalms 9:10-** Those who know your name trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You.

**Jeremiah 29:13-** You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

**1 Chronicles 29:13-** Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord your God.

Jeremiah 29:13 offers us a profound promise: that God will be found by those who genuinely seek Him. This promise was given to the Israelites during a time when they were in exile—far from their homeland, feeling abandoned, and experiencing hardship. Yet, God's promise transcended their physical circumstances. It was not a promise dependent on where they were, but on the state of their hearts.

Similarly, for us today, God's invitation to seek Him is timeless. It doesn't matter what our external situations look like; God is near and waiting for us to turn to God, no matter where we are in life. God's invitation is clear: if we seek Him wholeheartedly, we will find Him.

Prayer Focus: Pray that we would seek God daily in all things.