



Abbotsford
Pentecostal Assembly

thin places

A PRAYER AND FASTING
DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



**THIS DEVOTIONAL
BELONGS TO:**

Introduction

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!”

Matthew 6:16-18

Thank you for participating in the month of prayer and fasting. There is nothing more important, more powerful, or more transformational than prayer. It enables us to communicate with God, share our desires and needs, and hear His voice in profound ways.

We are, once again, encouraging our whole church to fast during the last week of February. Combined with prayer, fasting presents us before God with humility and desperation. It’s an acknowledgement that our need for God is greater than our need for other kinds of sustenance. We believe that our church is going to experience God’s power as we fast and pray!

As the month goes along, make sure you encourage others in their participation. Spur one another on, as sometimes it’s easy to lose steam partway through.

God will certainly bless you for your dedication to Him, and the fruit of this month of prayer and fasting will carry you on through the whole year of 2025.

In Christ,
Pastor Dave Funk

Using This Book

This book was designed to be a devotional guide for the 28 days of February. It can be used to facilitate your daily devotions in as little as 5-10 minutes.

The theme of the book corresponds with our February sermon series: *Thin Places*. The series title is inspired by a Celtic Christian term that refers to rare locales where the distance between Heaven and Earth seems to collapse. While we know that God is always present everywhere, there are some moments where He seems especially close. The sermon series, and the study guide, will look at stories of men and women who experienced these “thin places” and had their lives changed by an encounter with God. Our hope is that you’ll experience an encounter with God as you pray, read Scripture, and fast.

Each day starts with a Scripture reading, followed by a short devotional. Read the Scripture and devotional, then spend a few minutes in prayer asking for an encounter with God like the one in the story.

My Fasting Plan

From February 23 to March 1, we are inviting the whole church to fast together. You can fast for the whole week or for just a few meals.

At the end of this book, we’ve created a section that will help you design a personal fasting plan. It will guide through the the steps of setting a goal and making appropriate preparations to get the most out of your fast.

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to talk to a pastor or contact the church office.

February 1

READ: GENESIS 28:10-22

In Genesis 28, Jacob finds himself wandering a wilderness, penniless and alone. He was running from the wrath of his brother, who vowed to kill him for deceiving him out of his birthright and the family blessing. He finds a spot to spend the night in the middle of nowhere and lays his head on a rock for a pillow. It's not a stretch to say that if you've got nothing but a rock for comfort, you've hit the proverbial "rock bottom" of your life.

The good news is that God doesn't just exist on the mountaintops of life; He exists in the rock-bottom places as well. He appeared to Jacob in a powerful dream where He confirmed His covenant promises. Even though Jacob had messed up multiple times, God promised to remain faithful.

The promises of God are not dependent on the faithfulness of men and women. God is the "rock" that we can rely on even when we've lost everything else. He's always closer than we think, even in the lowest moments of life. And when we've messed up, God will always be there to reassure us and invite us to walk with Him again. Rest in God's promises today.

February 2

READ: LUKE 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel arrived and gave Mary a message that left her “confused and disturbed” (NLT). I think we would all feel the same way. Maybe add “terrified” to the list of reactions if it were me! Mary couldn’t imagine why an angel would visit a young teenage nobody from nowhere and announce such incredible news about the birth of the long-awaited king of Israel. Of course, what confused her even more was how it would happen since she was still a virgin. The answer: The power of the Holy Spirit.

This description of the creative work of the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb is reminiscent of Genesis 1:2, where the “Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The power of the Holy Spirit is the creative power of God at work in the world.

It’s easy to conclude that our lives lack the necessary ingredients for anything good to come of them. Mary concluded that her body lacked the ingredients for pregnancy since she had no husband. You may lack skills, opportunity, resources, or any number of other ingredients usually required for success. But God doesn’t require any of those ingredients to do something amazing. The one who shaped the world from nothingness can bring fullness to our lives with merely a word. When the Spirit of God hovers over our lives, anything is possible. With that in mind, we can then take Mary’s lead: to respond with humility and faith, believing that God’s word in our lives will be fulfilled in His way and in His time.

What is God saying to you right now? How will you respond?

February 3

READ: EXODUS 3:1-15

Have you ever met someone by surprise? On a recent morning, I bumped into someone from the church at the Surrey Passport Office, and then I bumped into that same person in the evening at an Abbotsford grocery store. I had never seen this person outside of church events ever before, and here we were randomly seeing each other in two different cities in one day.

Moses had an unexpected surprise encounter with God. While caring for sheep in the dry wilds of the ancient Near East, it wouldn't have been unusual to see small bushfires on occasion. What was unusual on this day was not only that the fire did not spread to surrounding plants, but the burning bush in question was not consumed by the fire. Upon closer inspection, Moses realized he was encountering the living God! The famous scene at the burning bush became a catalytic moment in Moses' calling and in the liberation of the enslaved Hebrew people. God called Moses from the bush and charged him with the task of leading his people out of Egypt and toward the land of Promise.

While it can be surprising to have random encounters with people during the day, it should not be a shock when we have random encounters with God. God is always everywhere. In fact, I think we could be more aware of the presence of God in the mundane moments of life if we were looking for Him. Sometimes we bypass the proverbial "burning bushes" because we're too busy and distracted, but what are we missing out on? What great endeavours might God be wanting to call us to if we could merely pay a little more attention? Are you paying attention?

February 4

READ: LUKE 24:13-27

There are passages of the Bible that I jokingly put in the following category: *The Bible can be confusing sometimes*. This category is a junk drawer of passages and stories that are hard to make sense of. When I think about the discussion these two walking disciples had, I can relate to them. They are deeply confused about the life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus. What did it all mean, especially since he died?

The arrival of Jesus on the scene represents His grace for those of us who are confused. He cared enough for these two disciples to drop in and give them some direction. Jesus' teaching to these disciples gives instruction to us as well. We can learn that the best way to interpret the Bible is to learn how to find Jesus on every page: "He explained to them all that was said in the Scriptures concerning Himself" (v. 27).

While the Bible can be confusing sometimes, it is not unknowable. God desires to be known, so He communicates in ways that can help us know Him. Of course, being a student of the scriptures takes hard work, discipline, and time, but the end goal of knowing God better is worth every effort. Plus, we don't have to do it alone. God has given us each other, and he has given us the Holy Spirit, who teaches us like Jesus taught the disciples on the road. Don't give up on the Bible because it's hard. Keep reading, keep praying, keep seeking, keep believing, and you will find Jesus.

Spend a few more minutes reading the Bible today and intentionally look for what it's saying about Jesus.

February 5

READ: ISAIAH 6:1-13

Isaiah was probably a faithful Israelite, obedient to the Law in every way. He would have performed the right sacrifices and said the right prayers just as the Law required. By all accounts, he was a righteous man. But when Isaiah had this profound vision of God's, he realized that he was not as righteous as he thought. In the face of God's glorious presence, Isaiah expected to burn up in fiery judgment.

God's holiness is kind of like the sun. Even though the sun is millions of kilometres away, we need to protect ourselves from its power. But if we dared to approach the sun up close, there's nothing that could save us from the inferno. God is so holy that no human can bear His presence without getting burned. Yet, Isaiah survived his encounter with God. Why? Because God is not just a force or power, like the sun. God is a gracious and loving Father. He offers true righteousness to us by cleansing us of our sin. In God's grace, he enables us to stand on the sun. We can approach Him and know Him without getting burned.

Getting close to God can feel scary because the closer we get to God, the more our unholiness is revealed. However, as we approach God, we also learn how amazing His grace is. The remedy to our unholiness is the powerful grace of God, displayed to us through the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus got burned so we could approach God and be accepted. How great is the grace of our God!

Thank God for His grace, and ask Him where He wants you to go today.

February 6

READ: ACTS 9:1-19

The story of Saul's life should both humble us and encourage us. It should humble us, because Saul spent his whole life up to this point being absolutely certain he was correct about his beliefs. He was so certain that he was willing to defend his position with violence. He zealously persecuted Christians, trying to stamp out the Jesus movement in its infancy. It should cause us to pause and think...*Am I being stubborn, like Saul?* While it is commendable to have strong convictions, we should always hold them with the humility of knowing that our personal discernment is often flawed.

Saul's story also encourages us. Jesus proves that He's willing to correct those who are in error, both for their sake and the sake of the people they are hurting. Saul was creating chaos for the church, and Jesus put an end to it. I know that Jesus will protect His church from harm in the long run. He's even willing to protect His church from the harm I may potentially cause. That's encouraging. I'd rather not be corrected by Jesus the way Saul was, but I'm sure glad that Jesus loves His church enough to make sure she's cared for.

From this point on, Saul's life began a new trajectory. He was still a zealous believer, but he expressed his zeal with more humility. Ask Jesus to help identify any stubbornness within you today. Like David did in Psalm 139, ask God to examine you for any offensive ways that could cause harm to the church, and then trust that God is good enough to help you walk a better path forward.

February 7

READ: JUDGES 6:11-18

Imagine a scene where you are terrified to death, hiding where no one could find you, and then an angel arrives declaring that you are a mighty warrior. I'd think, "This angel got the wrong address." This was the scene for Gideon. He was hiding from the enemies of Israel because he was afraid. He didn't want his food stolen, and he didn't want to be killed by foraging enemy soldiers. He was certainly not a mighty warrior!

God has a habit of calling out the truth that we cannot see. Gideon was a mighty warrior, but he just didn't know it. Similarly, before the universe was formed, the earth was already a beautiful act of God's creative order; it just didn't know it. Yet one word from God and the earth came into being. One word from God and Gideon became what God said.

One word from God can transform anyone or anything. Romans 4:7 reminds us that "God calls things into being that were not." He doesn't need preexisting mighty warriors in order for Him to create a mighty army to accomplish His purposes. He just needs a declaration of His word and people who will trust Him. While it took some convincing, Gideon eventually stepped into his identity as a mighty warrior of God. I think there are some people reading this who are having trouble believing what God has spoken over their life. What has God said to you that you refuse to believe? Of course, in your own strength, His words are not true. But with God all things are possible. If he has spoken something over you, he has the power to make it a reality. You just need to trust Him.

February 8

READ: LUKE 3:21-22

This powerful scene signals the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. After this, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness in prayer and fasting while being tempted by the Devil. It was a dramatic reenactment of the temptations faced by Israel for 40 years in the wilderness. While Israel failed over and over in the wilderness, Jesus emerged victorious. Then He went on to perform powerful miraculous signs, proclaim the kingdom of God, die for the sins of the world, and rise from the dead.

Did you notice that God proclaimed His love and pleasure for Jesus *before* Jesus did all those wonderful things? God didn't wait until Jesus accomplished His mission to proclaim His pleasure in Him; He was pleased with Jesus before He accomplished anything.

This is a powerful truth about God's love for the world. God doesn't love us because we've accomplished wonders or impressed Him with our skills. God has chosen to love us. His love is sustained by His nature and choice, not by our good behaviour or accomplishments. What an affirmation!

Of course, Jesus did go on to accomplish wonders. He did provide salvation for the world. But He did it knowing that He was loved *already*. He wasn't working to earn God's love; He was working from a knowledge that He was already loved. What about you? Are you striving because you think it will make God love you more? Or do you work out of a knowledge that you're already fully loved? Know today that you are loved by God, and there's nothing you can do to change that.

February 9

READ: GENESIS 12:1-9

One of the biggest themes in the book of Genesis is the theme of blessing and curse. Here in Genesis 12, God pronounces His promise of blessing on Abraham's life. He will make him into a great nation, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through him. Observing Abraham's family line through the story, we see that when they trust in God's plan, they experience God's blessing and spread His blessing to others. When they distrust God and take matters into their own hands, they spread curse. Of course, the great curse that humanity faces is the curse of sin and death. Our great blessing is found in the salvation provided by Jesus. When we trust Jesus, we experience His blessing and spread it to others. When we distrust Him, we bear the weight of the curse of sin and death.

Like Abraham, we are called to a life of faith. Faith is not blind belief but a deep trust in the purposes of God and the efficacy of the ways of Jesus. God has called us, blessed us, and commissioned us to be a blessing to the world around us. We have an opportunity to spread His blessing everywhere as we share Jesus with the world.

It's counterintuitive, but one of the best ways to live a blessed life is not to focus on your own blessings; it's to spend your efforts being a blessing to others. This requires faith. You don't need to spend all your energy creating your own blessings, because you can trust God to do that. Instead, you can focus on being a blessing to others. Who are you blessing today?

February 10

READ: JOHN 20:19-20

The disciples must have felt a deep sense of disillusionment after Jesus' crucifixion. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah who would overthrow their Roman oppressors and set up God's kingdom on earth. They didn't fully understand that Jesus' mission was greater than that, and His Kingdom would transcend the kingdoms of the world. All they knew was that He was dead, and they worried that they'd be next.

Fear caused the disciples to hide. They probably struggled to sleep, or eat, or even focus on regular daily tasks. Fear has a profound psychological and physiological effect on us, disrupting every part of our lives. While hiding in a secure room, suddenly Jesus was among them! The stories they had heard of people seeing Jesus risen from the grave were true. The tomb was empty, not because Jesus' body had been stolen, but because He had walked out Himself, alive and well. In light of this new reality, Jesus declared, "Peace!" No more fear. No more worry. No more confusion. Peace.

There are plenty of things in life that can cause us to experience fear and worry. The paralyzing effect of life's challenges is real. In the midst of it all, Jesus is with us, declaring, "Peace!" While the world still struggles with the chaos and disorder brought on by sin and death, we can enjoy the peace of Jesus. As he said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Ask Jesus for His peace today.

February 11

READ: ACTS 10:1-35

This story reveals a massive paradigm shift for Jewish Christians in the time shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection. One of the biggest challenges for early followers of Jesus was reconciling what to do with Gentiles who wanted to follow Jesus. Must they follow the regulations set out by the Mosaic law, specifically the dietary laws? The apostle Paul designates much of his writings dealing with this.

Peter's vision and Cornelius' angelic visitation set the stage for a monumental revelation that God would not require Gentiles (or Jewish Christians) to continue to avoid unclean food. Not only was it not required, but the voice Peter hears instructs (or perhaps rebukes) him to no longer refer to these animals as unclean, for God has made them clean (v15). This divine encounter was reported to the church in Jerusalem and resulted in their conclusion that "God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

God seems to have a unique way of keeping us on our toes. Jesus taught that the Spirit "blows where it wills" and cannot be predicted or controlled. (John 3:8) Too often, perhaps with good intentions, our human nature attempts to do just this. We often treat the Bible as a book of formulas for how to get God to answer our prayers or bless us instead of a record of how God has dealt with people in the past. Just because God did it once, doesn't mean God will do it again. God is a person, not a robot.

God's character is unchanging, but we should not be fooled into believing He is incapable of surprising us. We're invited into a dynamic relationship with a living God—He never changes, but He can't be held down. The wind blows where it will.

February 12

READ: GENESIS 3:6-10

There is a cute age of childhood where kids cover their eyes and say, “You can’t see me!” Of course they are not hidden, but their inability to see gives them the illusion that no one else can see either. This is the effect of sin’s power in our lives; our ability to see things clearly is impaired while we remain fully visible to the pure eyes of God.

Adam and Eve played a sad game of “You can’t see me!” when they attempted to hide from God in the garden, and we all do when shame convinces us to go into hiding. It’s impossible to hide from God, but it’s also unnecessary. Our shame lies to us and tells us that God (and others) will not want us around if they knew who we really are. But nothing could be further from the truth.

The God Jesus reveals to us is a God who longingly awaits us to take our hands from our eyes and receive His gracious gaze. He searched out Adam and Eve in the garden. He sent prophets, judges, and priests who would embody His searching love to the people of Israel. And in the climax of God’s loving pursuit, He came in person, incarnate, in-the-flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ. And Jesus gave the Spirit, who continues to make God’s presence close to you and I today. Not to condemn, but to save.

Today He awaits us, we who are always in full view of the one who loves perfectly. Why hide when we can never be hidden from God’s perfect light (Psalm 139, 1 John 1)?

February 13

READ: LUKE 5:1-11

We all find ourselves with some kind of work to do. This morning you may have washed your breakfast dishes, made your bed, showed up at the job site, or drove kids to school—or all of the above! While work can often be viewed as a curse, in actual fact, work is a blessing. God created us to steward planet Earth from its raw form and to fill it with ordered beauty and function. It is the frustration of our work that is a part of sin's curse, not the work itself (Genesis 3).

Peter and his fishing partners James and John encountered Jesus in the midst of a frustrating work experience. They had fished all night and caught nothing. In true miraculous form, Jesus instructs them to cast their nets again, and they catch a massive haul of fish! If only every frustrating work experience ended this way!

What we *can* count on is that when we encounter Jesus, our work is redefined in light of His call on us to follow Him. Peter, James, and John were now called to become fishers of men. In Christ, each of our vocations become much more than simply offering goods or services in return for payment. Because we have been and are being redeemed, our work, paid and unpaid, now is included in God's redeeming work in the world. Our parenting, volunteerism, passion projects, and creativity become something beyond the sum of their parts because we are joining God's creative work of making all things new.

Today be encouraged that your labour is an expression of God's call on your life to extend His blessing and goodness through all your work.

February 14

READ: MARK 5:21-43

When Jesus is present, and perhaps more importantly when we are present to Him, vast worlds of possibility are opened. In Mark's narrative, we read two stories occurring, one sandwiched within the other. In both cases, there is a demonstration of faith that Jesus is capable of drastically changing reality, and Jesus responds by healing an afflicted woman's body and raising a young girl back to life.

In what ways will Jesus bring life into your current situation? In what ways are you needing His life to bring healing? Have you asked Him?

Jesus is not predictable in how He responds to prayer, but He is always welcoming to those who come with faith. The outcomes of prayer vary. Yet despite the answers or silence we experience, we are always brought further into His eternal life whenever we open our lives in expectant trust to God.

Do you doubt that prayer will make a difference? Are you skeptical that anything will change? Don't give up hoping in God's ability to change your circumstances. You may be surprised by what He does.

February 15

READ: EZEKIEL 1:25-2:3

The call of a prophet in the Bible usually is marked by a divine vision. In Ezekiel's calling (Ezekiel 1, 2, 3), there is a marvellous vision of God's glory, the majesty of which the prophet has a hard time describing. He relies on descriptors like "looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire," "he looked like fire," "like the appearance of a rainbow," etc. The experience of God's glory went beyond words, and this experience is intended to fuel Ezekiel through the ups and downs of his ministry.

We don't often have intense experiences like this that leave us in awe and wonder; some never do. However, most of us have some kind of revelation that compels us into the calling of God. It may be an emotional experience; it may not. But if we have perceived God speaking our name, revealing something of His heart, character, or will to us, we need to hold onto that revelation.

Ezekiel was called "to a stubborn and rebellious" people—a very challenging mission lay ahead. You may feel the same way about the children God has given you. ☺ We often face frustration and hardship in pursuing God's direction for our lives. We need to remember and hold onto the revelation God has given us to sustain and equip us into our unique area of life and ministry. What has God shown you in the past? What has moved you to follow Jesus? What revelation and conviction has God shared with you to carry into the world?

Don't forget, but forge ahead with this vision close to your chest.

February 16

READ: MARK 14:32-42

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus invited the disciples into His deepest personal struggle—to wrestle in prayer on the eve of His crucifixion. Jesus was fully human and, like you or I, didn't want to experience suffering and death. "If you are willing, remove this cup from me." (Mark 14:36) And He requested that His friends participate with Him in prayerfully struggling through this difficult night.

The disciples were very sleepy, however, and did not keep watch with Him. (No doubt they looked back on this night and wished they had done differently.) How often do we miss this as well?

The word "participation" is a significant theological word. Jesus participates in our human nature, and by virtue of redemption, we participate in His divine nature. Jesus continues to invite us to participate with Him in His work. Just as in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus continues to intercede for us today and for all of His human brothers and sisters. We are invited into His prayerful struggle. (Read John 17 for a fuller account of this Gethsemane prayer.)

We stand with Jesus at the intersection of heaven and earth. In prayer, we experience a "thin place" where Heaven's reality and Earth's reality seem closer together. We are invited to participate in Jesus' prayerful struggle.

Will you keep watch with Jesus today?

February 17

READ: ACTS 3:1-10

Jesus heals out of our poverty, not out of our abundance. The Apostles had no wealth or status with which to impress anyone—they had given up such things when they set out to follow Jesus. Throughout Scripture it seems as though God favours those who are without while issuing warnings to those who have material riches. “Blessed are the unblest” is basically how Matthew 5 goes.

Why is this? Is it because of the pride that comes when we are able to orchestrate our lives apart from dependence on God’s provision? When we have material security and a sense of control over our lives, is it harder for us to tune into the power of God? To receive humbly?

Throughout church history, many have taken vows of poverty and self-deprivation in order to find those “thin places” of divine union and connection. Fasting is a way for us to go without in order to experience a provision of God’s presence and power. “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you...rise up and walk!” Perhaps riches and wealth in the power of the Spirit are only available to those who have the capacity for them.

What can you divest from yourself and create capacity within yourself for more spiritual power? Perhaps a fast is a good way to start.

February 18

READ: JOB 40:1-9

Have you ever asked God, “Why?” Why do we have to suffer? Why do the innocent die while the wicked thrive? Did you come to any conclusions? The story of Job is Israel’s wrestling with the question of pain and suffering. Job is a righteous man, and everyone and everything around him is taken away seemingly for no good reason at all. So understandably, Job wants to know, “Why?”

His wife counsels him to just curse God and be done with life. Obviously God is no good and not worth contending with.

Job’s friends go to great lengths to convince Job that he must have done this to himself in some way—that there must have been some hidden sin causing these things to happen. After all, God is just, and our pain and suffering are the consequences of God’s judgment.

Thankfully, Job isn’t content to settle for these inadequate responses. He goes straight to the Source and asks God. And in the version you or I would write, God carefully explains all the intricate reasons why bad things happen to good people. And having sorted that out, we’d all sleep well and live happily ever after. But God doesn’t do that in this story.

God’s answer to Job? Some things are too mysterious for a human to comprehend. Mystery. Paradox. Tension. These are all wrapped up in God’s divinity and why the world works the way it does.

Where do we go from there? We go deeper into trust. Deeper into mystery. We repent of a need for certainty over everything. Trust the faithfulness of God, whose ways are higher and more loving than we could ever know.

February 19

READ: MATTHEW 9:1-8

If someone asked you to define “salvation,” how would you do that? Did your definition only refer to a spiritual salvation? If it did, that is normal for those of us operating with a Western perspective on salvation. In this story, Jesus demonstrates a concern not only for the spiritual forgiveness of this man’s sin but also that his body would be liberated physically. In Luke 4, Jesus defines His ministry to be about “good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, release for the oppressed.” These are very physical responses to people suffering from very physical problems!

Of course, the gospel of Christ’s salvation brings release from sin and death, which oppress and enslave humanity in every category: spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally, etc.

The salvation Jesus brings is comprehensive—it comes to our whole beings as individuals, as communities, as families, as nations, and to the entirety of the created order! He is “making all things new”.

Praise God for His attention to our every wound and scar, individual and corporate. He indeed is making all things new!

February 20

READ: NUMBERS 9:15-23

A cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This is how God led the people of Israel through the wilderness. “At the Lord’s command they encamped, and at the Lord’s command they set out.” The imagery of the presence of God among them, in cloud and fire, points us forward to the presence of the Holy Spirit among God’s people in the early church. Tongues of fire came to rest on each believer as a symbol of the Spirit’s empowering presence in Acts 2.

Paul picks up on this theme in Romans 8 as he instructs the church to live according to the Spirit. “You are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” Where the Spirit goes is where we go—and the Spirit is always leading us into Christlikeness: truth, goodness, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and all the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The desert wanderings were a place of temptation and testing. Would they trust in the leading of God? Often the people resisted and rebelled against God’s direction and leading. When we live according to our sinful nature, we exercise hostility toward God, and the outcome is death in all its manifestations. But the mind set on what the Spirit desires is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Trust and obey the leading of the Spirit in your life. It is life and it is peace!

February 21

READ: JOHN 20:10-18

I remember being a little kid in a store with my mom and suddenly realizing that she wasn't right beside me. The hair on the back of my neck shot up as I frantically looked around to find her. Panic started to build as I contemplated what would happen if I couldn't find her. And then in a moment, all of my anxiety dissipated. I heard my mom's voice from the next aisle over. So I rushed to her side and held her tight. I was no longer alone.

Think of a time when you felt alone. What was it like? Did you feel dismayed? Did you feel panicked? Did you feel like crying?

We aren't alone in these feelings. It's how Mary felt at her lowest too. After Jesus died a terrible death on the cross. When the disciples had all turned away and gone back home. When even Jesus' body had disappeared from the tomb. Mary felt alone and abandoned.

But in her loneliest moment, Mary was confronted with a deep truth: that she was never alone. Jesus had been there the whole time, disguised as the gardener. At the call of her name, awareness comes, and her loneliness dissipates. Jesus is with her. She is not alone.

This same truth holds for us as well. We don't need to change our surroundings to not be alone. We only need to shift our awareness and see how Jesus is walking beside us every step of every day. Jesus is always with us, even when we don't realize that His presence is there.

Let's take a moment to ask Jesus how He is present with us right here and now.

February 22

READ: 2 CHRONICLES 5:1-14

2 Chronicles 5 paints an elaborate picture of Israel coming together to put the finishing touches on the temple of the Lord. People gather from all across the nation. Every elder is present. Every priest has consecrated themselves. And there are hundreds of trumpeters and singers all praising God in unison.

The response to all of these preparations and worship is that the temple of the Lord is filled with God's glory. A great cloud descends that interrupts all of this fanfare. And God makes His home in this new dwelling place.

It's a spectacular story of Israel going above and beyond for this momentous occasion. No expense is spared. Everyone is present. And God responds by once again making His home among His people.

And yet, this same occasion happens daily and has happened daily for millennia. For God has once again decided to make His home among His people. But this time, the temple that He dwells in is the body of each and every believer in Christ. And the great fanfare that takes place is happening in heaven, rather than on earth.

This is cause for great thanksgiving and celebration. Yet it often feels like we take it for granted. I believe that we need to be continually reminded of this incredible blessing. And that we need to actively choose a posture of thanksgiving and celebration.

So let us thank the Lord that He has chosen to fill us with His Holy Spirit. And let us join in Heaven's celebrations as He continues to make His home in new believers.

Let's start today by thanking Jesus for making His home inside us.

February 23

READ: REVELATION 1:9-20

Have you ever encountered something that was both beautiful and terrifying at the same time? I remember being alone in the woods of northern British Columbia and coming across a bear. We were both minding our own business when suddenly our paths crossed. I remember freezing in panic as the bear stood up on its hind legs. Its size overwhelmed and frightened me as I contemplated how easily it could hurt me. But at the same time I was mesmerized by its beauty as I took in its details: the colour of its fur, the shape of its head and the power of its paws. After a short moment that felt like hours, I started backing away. The bear turned the other way as well. Adrenaline pumped through my veins after this encounter with danger and beauty.

In some ways, I feel that John's experience in Revelation 1:9-20 parallels my experience with the bear. John is swept up in this awe-inspiring vision. And he encounters the risen Jesus. John describes every little detail of what Jesus looked and sounded like: His clothing, His hair, His eyes, His feet, His voice and His face. John encounters this figure of incredible beauty, that is also terrifying in its power and brilliance. So John falls to Jesus' feet in fear.

But then Jesus speaks: do not be afraid. This fear-inspiring figure who conquered death is on our side. He fights for us. And as I reflect on this, I can't help but think back to my encounter with a bear, and dream about meeting Jesus one day in Heaven. It will be an awe-inspiring moment, but it won't be defined by fear. And in that place without fear, you better believe that I'll be going in for a bear hug.

Ask Jesus to if you have any fears or anxieties keeping you from fully embracing Him.

February 24

READ: MATTHEW 28:16-20

In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus gives His disciples an incredible task: to go and make disciples of all nations, baptize them, and teach them everything they've learned over the last few years. We call this passage *The Great Commission*. It's a task that continues to be done. Jesus extends this same invitation to you and me today.

However, this invitation can sometimes feel overwhelming. And there are two questions that often come up when I consider the task at hand.

The first question is, "Am I really qualified to participate in the Great Commission?" Because when I'm honest with myself, I don't always reflect Christ's character and teaching well. There are days that I struggle with unbelief or when sin seems to creep into my life. So I question whether this command is really for me. But verse 17 dispels this anxiety. Even moments before Jesus gives His disciples this task, some of them are doubting Him; some are struggling to believe. And yet Jesus still chooses them. So I believe that He chooses you and me as well.

The second question is, "Can I really do this?" Making disciples of all nations is a daunting task, and I'm not sure that I have what it takes to accomplish it! But Jesus doesn't ask us to accomplish this task on our own. He not only promises to be with us through it all, but He delegates His own authority to us. So it is not by our own strength, power, or might that we fulfill the Great Commission. We fulfill the Great Commission with Jesus' authority, with Jesus standing by our side.

We are qualified and equipped to fulfill the Great Commission.

Ask Jesus how you can take an active role in fulfilling the Great Commission today.

February 25

READ: JOHN 21:15-19

Repetition is a powerful tool. It is one of the ways that we learn. Through repeating facts, we allow knowledge to enter our memory. By repeating movements with our bodies, we can learn to ride a bike or play an instrument. And by repeating truth to ourselves, we invite it to sink deep into our heart and mind. Repetition has the power to grow and shape us in new and exciting ways.

We see Jesus use repetition all throughout the New Testament. He uses repetition in Matthew 5 as He lists those who are blessed. He tells story after story about the Kingdom of God to expand the understanding of those who are listening. And He repeatedly teaches and counsels His disciples in the ways of God so that this new worldview becomes second nature to them.

Jesus doesn't use repetition for His own sake. He uses repetition to allow truth to hold true in our hearts and our minds. Repetition is used for our benefit.

That's exactly what we see in John 21:15-19. Jesus uses repetition when asking Peter if he loves Him. Not only does this repetition perfectly mirror the times that Peter denied Jesus, but it also forces Peter to slow down and let this truth settle inside of him. Peter loves Jesus. Not in a fleeting or passing way. But in an intentional way.

Jesus isn't pestering Peter or teasing him by asking repeatedly. He uses repetition for Peter's sake to allow truth to sink in deep.

Let's take a moment and ask Jesus what truth needs to sink deep in our hearts and minds right now.

February 26

READ: 1 KINGS 9:1-9

Following Jesus is meant to be a lifelong endeavour. I love how Eugene Peterson puts it: following Jesus is “a long obedience in the same direction.” Following Jesus isn’t a decision that you make one time and then don’t have to worry about ever again. Instead, it is a decision that is made every day, every hour, and every minute.

King Solomon fulfilled an incredible promise to the Lord: he built the Lord’s temple. He did this with excellence and in 1 Kings 9:3, we see that the Lord is pleased with all that Solomon has done. The Lord decides to have His eyes and His heart rest on the temple forever.

If I put myself in King Solomon’s shoes, I would be exuberant! This task that was set before me has been completed. The years of planning, spending, organizing, and building are complete. And as a result, the Lord is pleased.

And yet, the Lord speaks of more than just His pleasure at the project. He goes on to warn Solomon of the need for continued faithfulness. The Lord wants to continue to bless King Solomon and his children, but in order for that to happen, they cannot turn away from the Lord. They must continue to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees. They must be faithful to the one true God and not worship idols. Following the Lord is a lifelong endeavour that can’t be achieved with a one-time decision.

Let’s ask the Lord where we need to continue to choose Him. Let’s ask the Lord how we can show continued faithfulness to Him and His ways.

February 27

READ: LUKE 1:67-79

How long do you think you could go without talking? Silence is a tricky task to accomplish. But in the story of Luke chapter 1, we see a man named Zechariah who is forced to be silent for months.

After expressing disbelief at God's promise to give Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, a child, God shuts Zechariah's mouth. He isn't able to speak again until his son, John, is born. Can you imagine what it would be like to be unable to express yourself for months at a time? It's an incredible burden that I never wish to bear. But what strikes me when reading Zechariah's story isn't the silence, but what he decides to say when he can finally talk again.

If I was unable to talk for months, my first instinct would be to share some detail about my experience over the last months. My communication would most likely be about me. And yet, Zechariah takes a different approach.

In Luke 1:67, Zechariah is filled with the spirit and begins to prophesy. He goes on to worship the Lord and sing of the fulfillment of God's promises to all people. He is outward focused and serves as a blessing to those around him. His words that once questioned now serve to bolster the faith of others.

What if we took the same approach? Let's ask these important questions: what we can do to encourage and strengthen the faith of those around us. How can we seek the filling of the Holy Spirit in order to bless others? How would God like to use me?

February 28

READ: LUKE 6:12-17

How do you make decisions? Do you make a list of pros and cons? Do you seek the advice of trusted friends and mentors? Or do you act on gut decisions?

Whether we are conscious of it or not, we all have a decision-making process. As followers of Jesus, an important question that we need to ask ourselves is, "How would Jesus make these decisions?"

Luke 6:12-17 provides the perfect insight for us. At this point, Jesus has a large number of disciples following Him and is faced with an important decision: "Which of His disciples should he designate as apostles?" Rather than picking names from a hat, Jesus isolates Himself in order to spend the night praying to God.

We don't know what happens during Jesus' night of prayer. We don't know if God speaks to Him in an audible voice or if Jesus struggles to sense God's direction. But when morning comes, Jesus gathers His disciples and makes His decision.

Jesus sets a precedent for us: when it's time to make a big decision, find time to be with God. Slow down. Pray. Allow God to influence and shape your decision-making process. This is how we are meant to make big decisions. If we don't carve out time to seek God and ask Him for directions, how can we call ourselves His followers?

Let's imitate Jesus together. Let's spend time with God and allow Him to shape us as we make big decisions.

Today we can start by asking God: "What decisions would you like to guide me in?"

My Fasting Plan

FEBRUARY 23 - MARCH 1

We are inviting the whole church to fast together between Sunday, February 23 and Saturday, March 1. This section of the booklet is designed to help you prepare a fasting plan. We don't expect everyone to fast for the full 7 days. Perhaps you will fast for 1 day, or parts of multiple days. It's up to you and the Lord to decide what's best. Use the outline below to set up your fasting plan.

1. What type of fast will I do?

- Complete fast:** no food, only water
- Partial fast:** no food, but still drink fruit juices or broth
- Selective fast:** fast certain foods (i.e. The Daniel Fast—eat vegetables only)

2. How long will I fast?

- 24 hour fast:** Start fasting after dinner, skip breakfast and lunch the next day, then break your fast at dinner
- Multi-day fast:** Select a number of days to fast between February 23–March 1
- Intermittent meals:** Perhaps you'll skip lunch multiple days in a row, or only eat dinner every day

Number of days I will fast: _____

3. What will I do during my fast?

The key to fasting is to redirect our focus. We don't want to just stop eating. Instead, we want to redirect that time and energy toward God. Typically, people take the time they normally use in food preparation and eating to pray instead. Additionally, some people calculate the money they saved on food and redirect that as a donation to the poor.

Time I will spend praying instead of food preparation and eating:

- Breakfast: _____ minutes
- Lunch: _____ minutes
- Dinner: _____ minutes

I will give \$_____ to the poor

- Consider Archway Foodbank, another reputable local charity, or APA's Vision Builders fund

4. What will I pray about during my fast?

Usually, people have a specific prayer request during their fast. Nehemiah prayed for favour. Daniel prayed for God's help. The people of Nineveh prayed for mercy. What specific need, or needs, will you pray for during your fast? Perhaps you want to pray for a loved one to come to faith in Jesus. Perhaps you need wisdom for a big decision or provision for a growing financial need. Maybe you want to ask God for a greater sense of His presence and power in your life, or you need help overcoming a certain sin. Whatever it is, it's good to decide what your highest priority prayer is so that you can remain focussed during your fast.

While I fast, I will be praying for...

- _____
- _____
- _____

5. Who will I tell about my fast?

Jesus encourages us to keep our fasting a secret, so we're not tempted to try to impress anyone with our righteousness (Matthew 6:16-18). However, that doesn't mean you can't keep people in the loop for other reasons. Perhaps you want to ask a friend to help keep you accountable, or to join you in prayer during your fast. You may also want to let your spouse (if applicable), or parents (if you live with them) know so that they aren't offended when you refuse to eat their cooking!

Additionally, we recommend talking to your doctor, especially if you're planning an extended fast.

I will tell _____ about my fasting plan.

6. How will I break my fast?

At the end of a fast it can be tempting to overeat. This is problematic in two ways: 1) It encourages sinful behaviour (indulgence and gluttony). 2) It can be harmful or make you sick. During an extended fast the stomach may shrink, and the digestive system shuts down.

Break your fast with fruit or vegetable juice. Then slowly introduce foods that are easy to digest.

For fasts that are 24 hours or less, you may not need a strategy for breaking your fast, but you still need to be careful about overindulgence.

Helping each other follow
Jesus at home, in our city
and around the world.

Abbotsford Pentecostal Assembly



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