**21 Day Devotional**

**DAY 1**

**Firstfruits Offering**

*The best of all firstfruits of any kind, and every sacrifice of any kind from all your sacrifices, shall be the priest’s; also you shall give to the priest the first of your ground meal, to cause a blessing to rest on your house. – Ezekiel 44:30*

Today is the first day of your fast. You are steeping into a different experience of feeding your soul, strengthening your spirit, and renewing your body. By entering into this special period of time, you are consecrating yourself (setting yourself apart) to focus more intently on the Lord and His ways.

 We don’t hear much about firstfruit offerings anymore. But they were a customary part of life for Old Testament believers, and there are many ways to make firstfruit offerings today. In Ezekiel 44:30, we see that the firstfruit is for the priest. So on this first day of consecrated prayer and fasting, you can say to Jesus, your High Priest, “Lord, today I give You the first of me. I put You first in my life.”

 We are also asked to give a firstfruits offering of our resources, just as God instructed the Israelites to do with their produce. The promised reward was “a blessing to rest on your house.” You will recall that both Cain and Abel gave offerings to the Lord. Abel gave the firstborn of his flock and it pleased the Lord. But Cain’s heart was not right before the Lord. Scholars conclude that his offering was not the best he had to offer, but rather leftovers. God rejected this offering.

 The Lord doesn’t want our spare time or our leftover efforts. He wants to be first in our lives. He wants the best of us. Throughout Scripture we are commanded to put God first. Exodus 20:5 says, “You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.” And in Matthew 6:33, But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all those things shall be added to you.”

 When we put God first in our lives, when He is the first and last authority in all that we do, then we are pleasing to the Lord and we have access to all He has for us. Psalm 103:1-2 says it beautifully: “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”

 Does God want this position of priority because He craves our attention or needs our admiration? Maybe in part. I believe the underlying reason that God wants us to put Him first in our lives is because of the amazing, powerful, and immeasurable love He has for each one of us. He wants to pour out His mercy, grace, goodness, wisdom, and blessing over us in abundance. He wants us to be all He created us to be so we can experience a marvelous life and accomplish the good works He has already assigned to us.

 The greatness He has planned for each of us is so enormous that the only way it can be fully realized is for us to stay close to Him. Likewise, His love and care are so deep and so broad and He desires to have an intimate and loving relationship with each of us that we must be close to Him to share in that bond. Finally, we know that our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. His goal is to steal, kill, and destroy us, and we need the protection and counsel of our Father and His forces, available to defend us and realize the victory.

 Do you hear the Holy Spirit’s still, small voice beckoning you to come closer? Is God calling you to make adjustments in your life so that He is first in every area? Your period of prayer and fasting is a perfect time to hear the Lord and discover how much He desires you and every aspect of your life. Open your heart to Him and seek His wisdom and counsel. He will instruct you guide you as you draw closer to Him and His ways. His arms are open wide, so respond to His warm and gracious invitation and come.

**DAY 2**

Sanctified by Truth

*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. John 17:16-18*

Not long before Jesus started the journey toward His crucifixion, He talked to the Father about us. As our Advocate, He prayed for us even before He was sitting at the right hand of God. He was pleading our case and asking our Creator to bless us and keep us. One of those prayers was, “Sanctify them by Your truth.”

 The Greek word for “sanctify” is hagiazo, and it means “to make holy, purify, or consecrate.” Consecrate means “to make full, to fulfill a calling, and to set apart for a holy purpose.”

 So in John 17:16-18 Jesus is saying to our Father, “These people are different now, Father. They’re more like Me and not like the rest of the world. So please make them holy, pure, and able to fulfill Your calling on their lives through Your truth. Because just as You sent Me into the world to do Your business, I have sent them into the world to do Your business.”

 You and I are people set apart with a commission from Christ to do the business of God, which is to reconcile the world to Him. He has equipped us with unseen powers and tools to accomplish this task. He’s given us everything we need. We are His army, His chosen people.

 One of the important elements of fasting is consecration. We are consecrating this time and our lives unto the Lord. It is different from our normal, everyday routine. We are setting ourselves apart. In the Roman Catholic Church, priests, nuns, and monks are consecrated for religious service. Church buildings are consecrated or dedicated for spiritual purposes, similar to the Tabernacle in Jewish life. Furnishings in the Tabernacle were consecrated, set apart for spiritual practices. Belshazzar, the king of Babylon when Daniel was still a captive, unwittingly put his life in jeopardy when he drank from something that God had intended for a holy purpose.

*Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Daniel 5:3-5*

Because of the king’s brazen action, Daniel was summoned to read the writing on the wall, which warned of the doom that was to come to the king and to his nation. The king was slain that night, and the kingdom of Babylon soon began to crumble.

 Another word closely associated with consecration is sanctification, which means “to be set apart for spiritual or holy purposes.” When God led the captive Israelites out of Egypt, He said to them, “I will take you as My people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7). He called the Jews to separate themselves from others in the world and to focus their lives on Him. He gave them innumerable promises for a good life if they would put Him first and follow His promises for a good life if they would put Him first and follow His ways.

 In John 17:16-18, Jesus is praying to the Father asking that we be sanctified, set aside for holy purpose. And how will we be sanctified? By the truth that is in the Word of God.

 As you continue on your fast, think about ways the Lord is calling you to be separate from the world. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas in your life that you could realign in order to be consistent with God’s Word. Remember that you are a chosen person with a purpose to fulfill the business of God. Then set your mind to follow that call, to submit yourself to the Lord, and to walk in His ways.

**DAY 3**

**What Do You Want Jesus to Do for You?**

 *Jesus answered and said to him, “What do you want Me to do for you.” –*MARK 10:51

As I read the Scriptures I like to picture the scene in my imagination so I can glean more truth from the Word. That’s what I did when I was reading Mark 10. The story about the blind man, Bartimaeus, is told in just seven verses (46-52), yet it’s packed with powerful truths we can use today.

 *Now they came to Jericho. As [Jesus] went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

 *Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, “Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you.” And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.*

 *So Jesus answered and said to him, “What do you want Me to do for you?”*

 *The blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, that I may receive my sight.”*

 *Then Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. –Mark 10:46-52*

 *Blind Bartimaeus had a critical need. It was the hardship in his life that gave him the most* grief and kept him trapped as beggar. Bartimaeus knew about Jesus’ reputation so when he learned that He was about to pass him by, he called out to Him. Bartimaeus knew and trusted Jesus as the Healer, even though he had never seen or talked to Him before. He had faith in who Jesus was and what Jesus could accomplish.

 Here we are today in a similar situation. We, too, have hardships in our lives. Perhaps it’s an illness, financial pressures, or marital problems. We, too, can call out to Jesus for help… but we also need to know who He is, even though we have never seen Him with our own eyes.

 As Bartimaeus cried out, those around him tried to get him to be quiet. This can happen in our circumstances as well. Family members, friends, and church traditions can try to keep us from relying on Jesus to meet our needs. Sometimes the things that try to quiet us are more subtle, like intellect, unbelief, or fear. But like Bartimaeus, we must ignore these “voices” and cry out all the more.

 It’s interesting that as soon as Jesus gave His attention to Bartimaeus, all those around Him changed their tune! They moved from being critics to observers and witnesses.

 When Bartimaeus got the message that Jesus was calling for him, he threw off his garment and went to Jesus. The garment has significance. It was a beggar’s cloak that the authorities provided to needy people. The cloak gave them the right tobg and showed others that their calamites made them worthy of the givers’ donations. But Bartimaeus tossed his beggar’s garment away even before he received his sight.

 Then Jesus asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you?” I find that question very interesting. It was obvious that Bartimaeus was blind. So why did Jesus not just heal him? I think this question was to test Bartimaeus’s faith. He could have asked Jesus for money or for food. That would be the typical request of a beggar. But instead, Bartimaeus demonstrated his faith in Christ’s ability to heal him and asked for the impossible: “Rabboni, that I may receive my sight.”

 Jesus responded to the request by saying, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” This is so powerful. How many times do we beg Jesus to move and perform a miracle for us? Yet here, Jesus says that it was Bartimaeus’s faith that gave him his sight. There is no indication that Jesus touched him or prayed to the Father for the miracle. Instead, Jesus said that it was Bartimaeus’s faith that made him well.

 Bartimaeus knew Jesus healed. He activated his faith by calling out to Jesus even when all the voices surrounding him told him to be quiet. He threw off the garment that marked him as a blind man, and he told Jesus exactly what he wanted and knew Jesus could give him. And then the impossible happened!

 What are the problems in your life today? What do you want Jesus to do for you? And what do you need to do to know Jesus, to activate your faith, and to expect the impossible?

 Jesus is calling to you, just like He called to Bartimaeus. Do you hear HIM? What voices are drowning out His beckoning? Step out in faith-and receive what the Lord wants you to have today.

**DAY 4**

**Five Smooth Stones**

David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them.” So David took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine.-1 Samuel 17:39-40

Here is a message I sent to the online Daniel Fast community in the spring of 2008:

As many of you know, I started another Daniel Fast the last Monday. It’s a little different this time around. First, I am fasting for seven weeks instead of twenty-one days. Second, I am eating only three simple meals. Third, I am increasing my focus on God and His Word in such a way that I really do expect this to be one of the most significant spiritual experiences of my life.

 You also may know that last year was a dark and difficult year for me, mainly because of being hit really hard financially. As a real estate investor serving the lower income population, I got caught in the middle of the real estate landslide and the subprime mortgage fall. Consequently, I had vacant houses, no buyers, a declining market, and many mortgage payments. I was all but wiped out!

 God was so faithful…and brought me through. But I am now waging war on the lingering debt and pressing into God for a financial breakthrough.

 Today in my quiet time I thought about David. The humble young shepherd had a giant to fight. One that seemed overpowering and had already proved to be a threat. I could identify with David’s position. Our giants aren’t exactly the same, but are still both very imposing!

 In the verses above, we read about David taking off the armor that the soldiers had given him. Instead, he went to the brook and chose five smooth stones. We know the end of the story; David’s weapon of choice and the five smooth stones were the death of Goliath, and David went on to be king of Israel.

 I was moved to select five smooth stones of my own…and these I selected from the Living Water of Scripture. I went through my Bible and copied five verses into my journal. They all have to do with faith, God’s provision, and my position with Christ.

 These will be my weapons over this seven-week period. I will proclaim and memorize them. When I feel worry trying to enter my thinking, I will recite a verse and I will continue to fight the war with these five smooth stones from the Word of God.

 Ephesians 6:12 tells us, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” It is in this realm where my five smooth stones are effective!

 Coupling the power of God’s Word with wise stewardship is what I believe will put me back on solid ground and into a level of faithful living that I will value forever.

 Maybe you have a giant in your life, also. I encourage you to go to the Living Word of God and select your five smooth stones. Allow God to lift you up to victory and success!

The update to this story is that our amazing God is always faithful. I received hundreds

of encouraging e-mails from my online friends, and the vast majority were reporting that they too would select their five smooth stones. For me, my Father showed me ways to create the income I would need, and He directed me to a bright future. The greatest prize is that my faith has developed and my confidence in the faithfulness and power of God is stronger than ever before. Amen! Our God is so good!

**DAY 5**

**Take Every Thought Captive**

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

-2 CORINTHIANS 10:4-5

Thoughout the Daniel Fast, I hope you will become more aware of who you are and the makeup of your being:

You are a spirit.

You have a soul.

You live in a body.

In the passage above, we are reminded that our weapons and the war we fight are not of the flesh or in the physical world. Instead, they are of the Spirit and in the spiritual realm. The Word of God points us to the Kingdom of God—a reality that surrounds us and that is in us! It’s a totally new way of thinking, different from the way our carnal, fleshly minds think.

 So as we work to move our flesh and our minds toward Kingdom living, we must align every thought with the Word of God. Over and over again every day, we should ask ourselves, What does God have to say about this?

 Every thought that is contrary to God’s way must be “taken captive.” Then we can toss that thought out and replace it with God’s truth. His truth then becomes our activation point or our weapon.

* When a fearful thought comes into our minds, we take that lie, turn to the Word, find the promise, and then declare the truth.
* When the enemy tells us we’re no good or defeated, we take that lie, turn to the Word, find the promise, and then declare the truth.
* When all the circumstances around us scream defeat and failure, we take that lie, turn to the Word, find the promise, and then declare the truth.

Taking every thought captive is a discipline. We must guard our hearts and minds. We must be alert to every notion that enters our thinking and measure it against God’s Word, which wins the contest every time!

I once heard a pastor say. “Whenever you are confronted with a circumstance, you need to ask yourself three questions: What does God say about it? What does the enemy say about it? What are you going to say about it?”

 I ask myself those questions all the time. It’s a simple way to take every thought captive and choose Christ’s way every time! Joyce Meyer, a popular television teacher and bestselling author, wrote a book called Battlefield of the Mind. It’s sold more than a million copies, and shows readers how to take thoughts captive and replace those that don’t line up with the Word of God with those that do. The title says it clearly: the battle is in the mind, and it is important to guard the thoughts we allow to roll around in there. I like the way this popular prose puts it:

 Watch your thoughts, for they become words.

 Watch your words, for they become actions.

 Watch your actions, for they become habits.

 Watch your habits, for they become character.

 Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

 Our thoughts are important. So important that Paul gave us clear guidelines: “Finally, brethren, Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

 Your thoughts have power. Consider the things you are thinking about. Test them against the Word of God and then make the necessary changes. You will be amazed at the changes in your life as your thoughts become more like the thoughts of God.

**DAY 6**

**The Kingdom of God**

 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” -John 3:3

The Kingdom of God is a separate place. It’s an unseen reality that is under the jurisdiction of Jesus Christ the King. This Kingdom is open to all, but only accessible to those with the right credentials. And what are those credentials? They are free and immediate when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Savior. To cross into the Kingdom of God, you have to have identification that says, “This person belongs to Jesus Christ.”

 In John 3:3, Jesus explains that unless you are born again, you can’t even see the Kingdom of God. But where is the Kingdom of God? Is it heaven? Do we have to wait until we pass from this world before we can see it?

 Jesus answers these questions in Luke 17:20-21: “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The Kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

 Jesus makes it clear that the Kingdom of God isn’t a place to be seen with our natural eyes. It isn’t a political system or reign on this earth. Rather, the Kingdom of God is a reality within us—a belief system or a way of thinking. It is different from the way the world thinks and can only be accessed through our faith in Christ and willingness to operate our lives according to His ways.

 When we shape our lives around God and His way of doing things, we live according to Kingdom principles and Kingdom laws. All those laws are clearly recorded in the Word of God, and it is by living by the Word that we have access to the good life and the power that God wants for us.

 When Joshua was concerned about his ability to take over where Moses left off. God gave him simple instructions: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall mediate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” (Joshua 1:8).

 As a people consecrated under God, living a Spirit-led life, you and I are members of a different kingdom, the Kingdom of God. And we have different laws and standards by which we live. Those standards are available to us in God’s Word!

 The problem is that most members of the church have not changed their home addresses. Most are living by the world’s standards and abiding by worldly laws rather than living by and realizing the amazing powers and promises Christ gained for us. It is sadly apparent in the body of Christ with rampant divorce, sickness, disease, promiscuity, financial pressures, and the like. But God says that power, victory, and freedom are all available to us.

 When God told Joshua that following the law would make him prosperous and successful, it meant he would be moving forward in every area of his life. Joshua would achieve things when he put his trust in God and lived his life according to God’s ways.

 We have an even better offer because of Christ. We have Christ and His power living inside of us. But as long as those words remain just words on a page, they will have no effect. The truth of God’s Word must become a reality for us—a reality that changes the way we think and believe. And then we can charge the way we behave and the way we lead our lives.

 Our citizenship in the Kingdom of God is waiting for us, but we must take the initiative. Not only must we want to live there, but we also must actually move there. Not physically, but in our hearts.

**DAY 7**

**Please Lord, Take This Fear Away**

 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you whenever you go. –JOSHUA 1:9

Have you ever prayed and asked God to “take away this fear I feel” or perhaps “relieve me of this worry, Lord”? I prayed that prayer recently, and the Lord was quick to show me that He’s already provided a way to free me from all worry, anxiety, and fear.

 Joshua was afraid after Moses died, when he was handed the leadership over the Israelites. But God told him to be strong and of good courage. Then the Lord instructed him on how to achieve these character traits:

 *Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left , that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. –JOSHUA 1:7-8*

 The immediate response to feelings of fear, worry, or anxiety should be the Word of God. Instead of asking God to remove fear from us, we need to follow His instructions and fill our spirits and souls with the Word—the proven antidote for fear.

 Pastor Bill Johnson wrote a book titled Strengthen Yourself in the Lord in which he shares how he overcomes doubt and moves into faith. He explains that he continues to pour the truth of God’s Word into his spirit until the doubt gives way to faith. This may take time, but this is part of the good fight of faith. That’s what we need to do with our souls. We must ask the Holy Spirit to control us, go to the living Word of God, and drink from it. If fear rises, we drink more. We keep drinking and feeding on the goodness of God until fear is gone and faith is strong.

 God is not the author of fear; instead, the enemy uses it to paralyze our faith and make the Word of God of no effect. But we know the truth, and the truth sets us free from the bondages of fear. The truth is available for the taking, but we must take it.

 The next time you hear yourself praying. “God, take this fear from me,” do what the Lord told Joshua to do. Get into the Word, Meditate on it. Speak it out loud. Read it. Listen to it. Surround yourself with the purity of the Word of God, and soon the doubt and fear of the enemy will be washed away and only the truth will remain.

 The process is rarely instantaneous, so we must keep on keeping on. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4).

 When we come up against doubt, our faith is being tested, but we can overcome doubt by patiently focusing on the promises of God until our faith becomes stronger. Then we will lack nothing! We merely need to follow the path the Lord has prepared for us.

**DAY 8**

**Are You Politically Correct?**

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. –PHILIPPIANS 3:20

We hear a lot about being “politically correct” these days. Much of it is good, and some is debatable. But today I am thinking about a different way to be politically correct.

 Throughout the New Testament, followers of Jesus Christ are called to a different way of life: a higher calling that is separate from the world. First Peter 2:9 tells us, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

 You and I are members of the Kingdom of God, and our politics are those of the almighty King Jesus: King of kings, Lord of lords, the Prince of Peace. The government of this Kingdom is on His shoulders.

 When you think of the Kingdom of God with this political structure, can you say that you are politically correct? Have you answered the call your Leader has for you? Do you recognize, know, and live by the spiritual laws of this Kingdom?

 One lesson the Lord showed me in my meditations during the Daniel Fast is that while most of us proclaim Christ, we are not living as fully in Him as we can. Too much of the world distracts us from the glorious life we could have if we were sold out for the Kingdom of God. That doesn’t mean we should be living in monasteries or communes. But it does call us to a life of faith that is different from what we have known before.

 Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:21). He also proclaims, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14). He then goes on to say that our light should not be hidden, but available for all to see. In another parable Jesus teaches, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches” (Matthew 13:31-32).

 That’s you, me, and the church He’s talking about. The Kingdom is within us. We should be so bright and so attractive that flocks of unbelievers are coming to us and nesting in our branches to hear the Good News of our King and His Kingdom!

 The Bible says the Kingdom of God is a different place. And I have to ask if I truly consider myself a member of a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.” Am I a citizen of an unseen but very real realm? Or do I feel more like an American or a Washingtonian? What nation do I consider to be my land, my home?

 If I were politically correct in a Kingdom of God sense and a full-fledged member in the “holy nation,” I would have total trust in my King, believing His every word and following His every lead. My heart would be full of peace, and I would make love my aim. I would believe more, worry less, and have complete confidence in my future no matter what condition the economy is in or if my circumstances look dark or threatening.

 I want to be politically correct in the Kingdom to which I am called. I realize even as I write this message that my flesh needs more renewing and my spirit more training. What I know for sure is that I won’t hear my King arguing on a campaign platform against His opponent, nor will I have to vote as to whether something really is or is not politically correct. In the holy nation, the King is always right, always fair, and always looking out for me. That’s the nation I want for my life, my seed, and my seed’s seed.

**DAY 9**

**Why, Lord, Why?**

 Gideon said to Him, “O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?” –JUDGES 6:13

Do you ever find yourself wondering about why you’re going through such a rough time when God’s promises are supposed to protect you? You’ve prayed, you’ve read your Bible, you attend church, you give your tithes… and yet the pressure doesn’t seem to lift.

 That’s exactly what happened with Gideon. The Midianites were walking over the Israelites like they were a carpet! They stole their catle, sheep, donkeys, and oxen. And just when the harvest was ready, the Midianites took over the land and let their camels eat the crops down to the stubble. The Bible says the camels were like locusts.

 The Israelites were left impoverished and fled to caves and dens to hide from the invaders. Even Gideon was hiding in a pit when the angel of the Lord came to him.

 The angel more or less said, “Why are you acting this way? Don’t you know who you are? You are a child of the Most High God!”

 That’s when Gideon replied, “O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?”

 As the account continues, Gideon learns that because he hadn’t recognized his position, he was allowing the enemy to steal and destroy what was rightfully his! He had the power of the Lord with him. In fact, God told him that because He would help him, defeating the Midianites would be like defeating one man.

 Does any of this sound familiar to you? Do you ever feel like camels have eaten your harvest every month when you pay your bills? Do you feel like you are surrounded by enemies with all the pressures of this world coming in against you? Do you ever wish you could just go hide out in a cave to escape what seems like impending darkness all around?

 Dear reader, too often we also forget who we are in Christ the King. We don’t access the power that He won on the cross and then gave to us. Instead we stay in the pit and allow the enemy of this world to steal, kill and destroy what is rightfully ours through the victory of Christ.

 When Gideon realized his errors, he made sure everything was right before God and then prepared for battle, trusting in the Lord as his commander in chief. He did everything the Lord told him to do, which led him to victory over the invaders and caused the Israelites to receive all that had been stolen from them.

 We can do the same thing! Read Judges 6 and 7 and see if you can find yourself in the Scriptures. Remember your identity in Christ and then access the same Lord that Gideon accessed. The victory is ours, but we need to take it.

 So go identify your enemies, grid yourself in the weapons of our warfare, and fight your battles with your Commander in Chief in His rightful place. He only knows victory, and the victory is yours for the taking!

**DAY 10**

**Set Your Mind for Good Things**

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. –Romans 8:5

Do you ever have a bad day? You know the kind. You’re giving it your all, but for some reason you just can’t shake the worry you feel or the resentment that keeps sticking around.

 The truth is, these are times when our flesh is reigning, and we need to pump up our spirit so it can take its rightful authority and position over our lives. I know that’s a lot easier said than done, but I want to give you some practical tips to help you navigate through these stretching times.

 First let me share a little personal testimony. The year 2007 was one of the most stretching of my entire life. I owned a real estate investment company, and due to the changes in the real estate market, I found myself without an income and owing thousands of dollars of monthly payments! There was no immediate solution. I had previously made a commitment to the Lord not to borrow any money and to work toward debt-free living.

 At first, worry took over. I cried, pleaded, and begged God to help me. I don’t think I have ever felt so desperate. But then I learned about living God’s way, according to Kingdom principles. I really did experience a peace that passes all understanding. According to the world’s standards I should have been climbing the walls with worry. But every time I felt worry and fear coming on, I turned my attention to the Lord. I prayed, read the Word, worshipped Him, and listened to Bible preachers or my audio Bible CD’s. I did whatever I needed to do to get the worry out of my mind.

 Instead of whining to my friends and family, I looked to the promises in God’s Word and I did my best to keep my mind and heart open to His leading. Over and over again, the Lord ministered to me. He kept telling me to hang on and trust Him.

 I had been a Christian writer for many years but through various circumstances had gotten away from it and into real estate investing. Well, it was clear that the Lord wanted me to get back into writing because the doors in real estate were slamming shut at record speed. Thankfully, I had learned that in times of trouble I need to find refuge in the secret place of the Most High. I ran to the Lord and took refuge in Him. And then He started giving me writing assignments; He started showing me things to write about.

 The journey was definitely a fight for faith. This is walking in faith-living and acting according to the Word of God. It was not always an easy walk, but it has been fulfilling, and the rewards are superior to anything I’ve ever known.

 One thing I know for sure: God only has victory in mind for us. He always has a sure way out of any trouble, just like Jesus said: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulations; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

 So what do we do to be “in Him”? We study His Word and meditate on it so it becomes our truth. Not just a good philosophy or a part of religion. The truth must come off those pages and enter our hearts where it can flourish and bring us the peace and fulfillment our Father wants us to have. When we surrender our thinking to God’s thinking, then we are truly free!

 Jesus is saying to you, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

 To abide is to live or dwell. Jesus wants us to live in Him through His Word. He wants us to choose a Spirit-led life over a flesh-led existence. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life!

**DAY 11**

**Living Water**

If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. –John 7:37-38

Water is a primary element in the Daniel Fast. It is the only beverage we consume. Even when we aren’t fasting, the human body depends on safe water for life. In fact, just before I started writing this devotion I realized I had neglected a basil plant I was growing. The poor little thing was so wilted that the leaves were starting to dry up. I thought for sure I had lost it, but I decided to water it anyway. Within the hour, the little trooper was perky, green, and full of life. It was the water!

 In this passage, Jesus teaches us about a different kind of water—living water from the Holy Spirit. He tells us to come to Him and drink when we are thirsty.

 As a seasoned woman (that’s code for saying I am definitely in the second half of my life) and a maturing Christian, I have learned a powerful lesson about turning to Jesus to drink from His living water. It actually was Dr. Phil McGraw, the well-known American television personality, talk-show host, and former psychologist, who helped me learn this valuable principle. Let me explain.

 Dr. Phil teaches married couples that when they are going through hard times, they should not turn away from each other or go outside the marriage for comfort or solutions. Rather, they should turn toward each other and work out their problems together.

 This advice resonated in my soul when I felt so burdened by life’s pressures that I could almost feel my knees buckle. Instead of turning to the world for solutions or getting stuck in fear and doubt, I turned to my High Priest. I cried out to Him and asked for His advice, His comfort, and His peace.

 Oh, our Lord is so faithful. He hears our cries and comforts us. He ministered to me in dynamic and life-giving ways through His Word, Christian teachers, prayer, Scripture meditation, and friends. He led me out of the dark place and showed me solutions I never would have thought of on my own.

 I drank from the living water Jesus serves so generously. And then as I was restored, I was able to offer living water to others, just as He said, “Out of his [her] heart will flow rivers of living water.”

 Since that experience, I have set my mind on drinking a lot of living water from the Word of God, and bit by bit, I find myself changed into a strong and able women of God. I liken this process to a tall glass filled with dark, murky water with a pitcher of water on either side. One pitcher is filled with more murky water from the world. The other pitcher is filled with clear living water from the Word of God.

 If I empty the glass and refill it with the water of the world, it will be as murky as before. But if I empty the glass and fill it with the living water from the Word of God, the water in the glass will be good enough to drink and to offer to others.

 As you proceed through the Daniel Fast, consider the source of the water you pour into your heart. Is it the living water of Jesus or the contaminated water from the world? Choose life! Choose the living water. It is safe, sweet, and it truly quenches your thirst. And once you are full, the living water will overflow from your life so that you can help quench the thirst of others. Amen!

**DAY 12**

**Set Your Mind on Things Above**

 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

 --Colossians 3:1-2

Not long ago, I received a question from a woman on the Daniel Fast. She asked me how much is okay to eat for a snack while fasting I encouraged her to make a decision about how much is okay for a snack before snack time comes. For example, if you decide that twelve almonds is a nice snack for the afternoon, stick with that amount.

 This reminded me of Colossians 3:2 that says to “set your mind on things above,” and the tremendous tool this discipline gives us. Setting our mind is making a decision, and once the decision is made, sticking with it—just like when we’re fasting. We make a decision about what foods are okay to eat and which are not, and then during the fast we stick to our decision.

 There are so many things that we can make conscious decisions about that would save us so much pain and anguish. For example, many years ago I made a decision not to gossip. I set my mind to never talk negatively about a person or to pass on private information. While I admit I have not been 100 percent perfect in that area, I am pretty close. And in the few times that I’ve blundered, I was conscious of it right away and could repent (change), ask for forgiveness, and move on with a greater resolve.

 In fact, I had lunch a couple of weeks ago with a business associate and valued friend named Steve. He is what I like to call a “pre-Christian.” I had not seen Steve for a few years, so we had a lot of catching up to do. He asked me about a situation in which someone had really done me wrong. I had the opportunity to blast on the person, but I chose not to. Instead I made a couple of neutral comments about him and his situation. Then Steve paid me a treasured compliment, “You know, I’ve known you a long time, and in all those years I have never heard you say a bad thing about anyone.”

 Wow! I have to admit Steve’s words blessed me. He picked up on a part of my behavior in which my neutral self was conformed to Christ living in me: my decision to not gossip. I had set my mind on things above, and it served as a positive witness to Steve.

 There are other areas in our lives where we need to “set our minds on things above” or on the commands of the Lord. For example, throughout Scripture we read that we should never come before the Lord empty-handed. I was struck by that command just last week, realizing there are many times when I come to church with nothing to give. I am a cheerful tither and generally give my monthly tithe at the beginning of each month. But many times during the rest of the month, I don’t give anything.

 But the Lord impressed on me that I should never come before Him empty-handed. I made a decision to follow that command. Now I will always leave my house with something to give to the Lord. Sometimes it’s a batch of homemade cookies for the church coffee hour. Occasionally I bring some gifts for the children’s ministry or donate some books for the prison ministry. And then there are the financial gifts for outreaches our body is doing.

 Another area where I set my mind was to “owe no one anything except to love” him or her. In the fall of 2007 I made a decision to not borrow any more money for anything and to get out of debt as soon as possible. Deuteronomy 28:12 says, “You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.” So I plan to live a debt-free life. I made a contract with myself to never borrow again. This was a quality decision that I will continue to follow so I can proclaim, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Roman 13:8).

 These examples just scratch the surface of how we can “set our minds on things above.” The point is this: if we want to be conformed to the ways of God and the image of Christ, then we need to make these kinds of conscious decisions and stick to them. We need to make them before the need for the decision comes about.

 We can decide to not overspend, overeat, or overplay. As flowers of Christ we can decide not to look at pornography, not to develop unhealthy relationships with coworkers, and not to flirt with things that can bring us or others harm. We can decide to attend church every Sunday, share with the poor, and meet with the Lord every day for an intimate time of prayer.

 We are called to set our minds on things above. What does that mean for you and your life? Is the Holy Spirit nudging you to take a stand in an area and make a quality decision to change… and then stick with it?

 Take a few minutes even right now and listen to the Lord. Ask Him if there are areas of your life where you need to set your mind on things above, and then lift the commitment to the Lord, ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you, and stick to it. You will be blessed!

**DAY 13**

**I Know the Plan I Have for You**

**“**For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” –Jeremiah 29:11

This is one of my favorite verses. It’s so encouraging and full of promise. Wow! The Lord has plans for me to prosper and have a good future. That’s good news.

 So how do we discover the plans our Father and Creator has just for us? Do we wait for the writing to appear on the wall or for a messenger to arrive at our door? As inviting as that sounds, I don’t think that’s the answer. We tap into God’s best for us when we start dreaming and planning while staying sensitive to His voice.

 Getting quiet before the Lord, submitting yourself to Him, and seeking the Holy Spirit’s help is a powerful experience. Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and reveal the Father’s plans for you.

 Establishing short- and long-term goals will boost your success and lead you toward those dreams and accomplishments that the Lord plants in your heart. For every good work He calls you to do, your Father will provide the tools to succeed. But you need to search your heart and discover what may be forgotten hopes and dreams … and then develop goals to reach them.

 Most people have never learned to tap into their dreams or how to set goals for their lives. Instead, they go aimlessly on life’s journey and figure things out along the way. Sadly, this approach can lead to a life of mediocrity and disappointment. But we can choose a different approach.

 Planning and writing goals is a proven system for success. And just think how successful we could be if our goals and plans were undergirded, protected, and fortified by the Lord! So why don’t we plan and write goals? Why don’t we invest the time, energy, and meditation necessary to discover the plans the Lord has for us?

 I think the answer is no different for Christians than it is for non-Christians. Many people don’t think goals are important. And if people don’t value planning and goal setting, they don’t do it. Many people don’t know how to set goals or how to create plans to fulfill them; still other fear rejection and failure.

 Throughout the Bible, God shows by example that He is one for planning, details, and success. He planned the creation of the universe to take six days. He planned in minute detail how the Tabernacle would be constructed. He counts the hairs on our heads and the number of our days.

 He also likes things to be in writing: the Ten Commandments, the Word of God, and the plans He told Habakkuk to write, just to name a few. And Jeremiah 29:11 says that He has plans for you! But before those plans can move into action, we must do our part.

 I love the line, “You will never rise above the vision you have for yourself.” There is great truth in that adage. What is the vision you have for yourself? What do you know of the plans your Father have for you? What do you see in your future? These are all questions we can answer as we set goals and develop plans for our lives, realizing that the Lord wants us to have goodness and success.

 So what will it take for us to dream dreams, make plans, and write goals? It seems that it comes down to wanting the future that God has in His mind for us and then deciding to take action.

 You’ve heard the line, “Today is the first day of the rest of your life.” You have the rest of your life before you, and you can begin today to start thinking about and making plans for your future. What do you want for your family? your career? your faith? your health?

 Let’s not allow the obstacles that keep the masses down to also keep us from realizing all God wants for us. Let’s make a quality decision to be quiet before the Lord, to listen to Him, to imagine our desires, to make plans, and to write them down.

**DAY 14**

Lose the Shackles

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” --Numbers 13:30

Do you remember the story about the twelve spies that God instructed Moses to send into the Promised Land? God Brought the Israelites out of Egypt and freed them from slavery in a miraculous way by parting the Red Sea. While in their transitional place, He fed them with bread from heaven. He gave them quail to eat. He set up structures and systems for their existence. Still the Israelites complained and grumbled. Finally, after traveling for two years, they drew near to the Promised Land.

 The Lord had already given them the land, but they needed to apprehend it before they could posses it. So the spies went into Canaan for forty days so they could see what they were in for. Ten of the spies came back with a bad report: while the land was fertile, abundant, and rich with milk and honey, the obstacles were too big. The men in the land were large and fierce and too much for the bedraggled Israelites to overcome.

 Only Caleb and Joshua saw things differently. They, too, saw the land of milk and honey, and they also saw the Imposing forces that would come against them. But they believed God and trusted Him to help them take the land that He had promised. They took God at His word.

 Whom did the masses believe? What picture did they accept as their vision for the future? The slave-minded Israelites were accustomed to hardship. That was their comfort zone. Even when God blessed them with good things, they still grumbled. Even though they were out of Egypt, the Egyptian mind-set was not out of them.

 So they accepted the bad report as the truth, and they wandered in the desert for the rest of their lives.

 We know the end of the story-the real truth: God gave the new generation of thinkers and leaders all the help they needed to take what He had already given them through His promise. What did they need for their weapons? Faith-faith in God and trust that He would do what He said He would do.

 We look at the poor wandering Israelites and imagine that we would be different. Surely if I were alive then I would be like Caleb and Joshua and trust in the Lord, we think to ourselves. But is that really true? Are we not shackled by beliefs that are just as paralyzing and just as damaging?

 How many of us are chained to beliefs of inadequacy, guilt, or shame that result in a poverty mentality that keeps us wandering in the same old land we’ve been in forever? How many of us are following the actions of our ancestors that keep us bound in traditions disguised as truth? How many of us are weighed down with fear and anxiety so we don’t take risks to trust in an unseen God who decrees lofty promises?

 Right now, no matter where you are in life, you have an opportunity to be like the ten pessimists and the millions of men and women who believed them. Or you can be like the few people who stepped out in faith and realized all God wanted to give them. The choice is ours: we can leave God’s promises unrealized or we can gain the victory!

 Remember God’s call to us in Deuteronomy 30:19: “I call heaven and earth as witness today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”

 Let’s step out in faith and chose life!

**DAY 15**

**Be Rooted and Built Up in Christ**

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

-Colossians 2:6-7

I think we all can agree, these are turbulent times we’re living in. Whether we look at the economy, the crime rate, societal issues, politics, world affairs, or the pressures we face day to day, by the world’s standards these are very shaky, unstable days.

 That’s why, even though it was written two thousand years ago, this word from the apostle Paul is so right-on for us today. To find out stability, we must be rooted and established in Christ and His ways. And when we come up against pressures, concerns, or trials He is there to build us up and keep us strong.

 How do we get rooted and built up in Christ? It’s by bringing Him into the number one position in every part of our lives. That includes our marriages, parenting, friendships, careers, work, finances, entertainment, volunteerism, study, and plans for our future.

 Jesus told us that He is always with us, which is extremely comforting. The writer of Hebrews also says, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Let your conduct be without covetousness, be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:4-5).

 The presence of Jesus inside of us and with us is promised. So “Lord, what do you have to say about this?” can be considered on our tongues. Seeking God’s wisdom in His Word can be a normal practice for us. And when we still don’t know what to do, we can get godly counsel from a pastor or friends who are mature in Christ.

 Being rooted means going deep! It means investing the time and energy into getting to know God and His ways and devoting time to be with Him so we can have an intimate relationship with Him. And the deeper those roots dig down, the more stable we will be. We won’t be knocked off center when storms enter our lives. We will know what to do and where to go.

 We can see this type of living unfold in James 1:2-8:

 Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith

produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

 We can become stable in all our ways, firm in faith, and confident in the ways of God. Take a few minutes and ask yourself these questions:

* How can I become more rooted in Christ?
* What are three things I can do to increase my knowledge of Him and His ways?
* What time am I willing to set aside for the sole (or soul) purpose of studying the Word of God so that I can become firmly established in His truth?

Make plans to grow in Christ so that when times of trouble come, you will be ready! Our Lord beckons us to “come.” He calls, but we must respond. Can you hear Him calling you now?

**DAY 16**

**Not by Bread Alone**

Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Matthew 4:3-4

Wow! You are now more than two weeks into your Daniel Fast. You are likely past the big hunger pangs and cravings. But leavened bread is still out of your diet, so perhaps this passage of Scripture is even more meaningful to you than when you were able to bite into crusty French bread or a morning bagel.

 One of the benefits of the Daniel Fast is that we become more aware of what we are eating. Hopefully this awareness will create habits that will improve your health for months and years to come.

 We can also become more aware of what we feed our spirits and our souls. Are they well nourished? Are we feeling them whole some food and not contaminated goods?

 Jesus teaches us that we don’t live only by physical bread, but instead—and even more important—the spiritual food found in God’s Word. Just as our physical bodies need to be nourished each and every day, so do our spirits.

 The mainstay of that nutrition is the Bible, then we can have what I call “side dishes” from Christian books, sermons, Bible studies, and Christian television. But we need to make sure we have time every day in God’s holy Word so He can speak to us and minister to us.

 Likewise, we need to make sure we are feeding our souls a healthy diet that brings life and not death. Our Father tells us that we have a choice between life and death, and He tells us to choose life. That includes the kind of information that enters our minds through people, the media, the Internet, television, books, conversations, and other influences we encounter.

 Do you have some inputs in your life that may not be giving you the best food for your soul? Are the programs you watch on television healthy and pure? Or are they contaminated and laced with toxic information? How about the Internet? The radio? The books you read? Or the conversations you have with friends?

 Just as we need to guard our bodies and make wise choices about what we eat, we must also guard our eyes and our ears as to what is allowed to enter our souls. And we must guard our mouths as to what words we say.

 The more you feed your spirit with the Word of God, the better you will find that you care for your soul and your body. Make sure your spirit is well fed, and then carefully choose the food you present to your soul and your body. That’s the way to health in all areas of your life.

**DAY 17**

**It Wasn’t about the Money!**

 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Matthew 19:24

This is a verse that seems to trip up a lot of Christians, and it certainly fuels the argument that to be a good follower of Christ one should be poor or at best middle class.

 Jesus’ reference to the “eye of a needle” was likely a gate in the wall surrounding the city of Jerusalem called “Needle’s Eye.” It was so low that a camel would have to be unloaded of all that it carried and then get down on its knees to get through to the other side. The passage was very small, and it took a great deal of coaxing for the owner to get his camel to come through.

 Basically, Jesus is saying that it’s nearly impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. But it isn’t the money that keeps a rich man from entering; it is where the rich man places his dependence. Jesus is saying that people with money often rely on their wealth to solve all their problems. They don’t sense a need for God or His way of living. Thus the reaching in 1 Timothy 6:10: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” It’s not the money. It’s the love, trust, and dependence on money that is evil and makes it so difficult for people to enter into the Kingdom of God.

 We see the same thing today. People are so focused on making and spending money that they don’t even consider God. Their self-worth isn’t measured by their character or their relationship with the Father, but rather their position, their possessions, and the people they know.

 The priorities of the world are easily observed by just flipping through a magazine, clicking on Yahoo pages, or switching the television channel. The absence of God is very apparent, and the love of money is manifested in an explosive way.

 Sadly, these values seem to be alive and thriving in the church as well. Too often we look to the world’s system for directions in living. Consequently, God’s plan for our lives goes untapped and unmet. I have to admit that I was like that for many years in my Christian life. It wasn’t until I had the invisible crutches of my middle-class life knocked out from under me that I turned to God as my Provider and began learning what Kingdom living really is all about.

 I am so thankful for what I know now. For me it took becoming financially desperate to realize that I was depending on money and the world’s system for my livelihood. Thank God I now live in the Kingdom of God. I finally got it! And the great news is that my Father has opened the heavens of His resources and is pouring them down on me.

 Am I specially chosen by God to receive His blessings? Yes! We all are chosen, but we also have to choose right back. God gives us the choice whether we will enter His Kingdom. It’s our choice whether we will align ourselves with His ways. And the way is not difficult. We can examine our hearts and present them to the Holy Spirit, who will show us where we need to change. We can make Christ the Lord over every part of our lives, including our finances.

 Open your heart to the Lord today in the area of your finances. Is the Lord the Overseer and Source of your funds? Is He your Provider? Examine yourself and ask the Holy Spirit to help you draw even closer to the Lord by submitting this area of your life to Him so that you can fully partake of the Kingdom of God. It truly is the good life.

**DAY 18**

**Who Do You Say That I Am?**

 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

 So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Matthew 16:13-15

The passage above is a familiar one. Simon Bar-Jonah’s response to the question garnered him his new name from Jesus: Peter, which means rock.

 As I read that passage today, the Holy Spirit prompted me to ask this same question of you and of me: “Who do you say that I am?”

 This isn’t a question for our minds or our intellects or even our traditional beliefs. Today this question is directed to our hearts: “Who do you say that I am?”

 Is Jesus a far-off figure that is part of our religious tradition? The one we celebrate on Christmas and Easter? Is He the painting on Sunday school classroom wall? Or is He the Savior we read about in the Bible and look forward to meeting one day?

 Today He is asking us, “Who do you say that I am?”

 For many years, Jesus was a far-off figure for me. I knew a lot about Him. I ever taught many others about Him. I wrote inspirational pieces about Him. And I said many prayers to Him. But it wasn’t until I got desperate for Jesus to be more in my life that I actually started knowing Him.

 This knowing didn’t come overnight. Instead, there was a period of deep and steadfast seeking that put my spirit in closer communication with His. Jesus wasn’t hiding from me. Instead, I didn’t know how to find Him in the intimate way that He wanted to befriend me. Even now, I am not as “tight” with Him as I know I can be, but every day I draw closer and closer.

 What I know to be true is what the Scripture teaches us in James 4:8: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” Until we make the decision to get to know our Lord by setting aside the time and quieting ourselves on a consistent basis, the relationship we want won’t happen.

 That’s why the question, “Who do you say that I am?” is so poignant. Is Jesus a priority in our lives, or do we wait until we have time? Is He a person with whom we can have an intimate and caring relationship? Or is He someone who lived a long time ago and we will wait to see Him in heaven?

 Over the past several years, my relationship with Christ has grown from an ethereal concept to a deep and abiding relationship. He is who I go to for all my needs. He’s the first one I greet in the morning and the one I talk to throughout the day. Many times He talks to me, and I can hear His voice and know what He’s saying, since I’ve developed the “ears to hear.”

 I am so grateful that I have moved from knowing about Jesus to really knowing Him. I hope you will take the opportunity over the next several days to answer the question Jesus asks you: “Who do you say that I am?”

**DAY 19**

**Going Deeper with the Word of God**

 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. –Proverbs 3:5-6

During one of my morning times with God, I was thinking about trust, which led me to one of my favorite places in the Old Testament: Proverbs 3:5-6. I looked at the verses, let them roll around in my head for a while, and then started mining the truths in this short yet powerful passage.

 First I looked up “trust.” The Hebrew word is chasah, which means “to hope in; to make our refuge.” The definition reminded me of Psalm 91:1-2, which says, “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.”

 Then I looked up “heart.” The Hebrew word is leb, which means a person’s intellect, personality, emotions, spirit, and innermost self. Our “heart” is who we are; it is what is tested and searched out by God. The heart and spirit are often used interchangeably. It is that innermost part of us that is born-again when we accept Christ as the Lord of our lives. Jesus also told us, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

 The next word I searched out was “ways.” The Hebrew word is Derek. It means a road, a course, or a mode of action.

 And finally I looked up “acknowledge,” which is yada’ in Hebrew. This means intimate exchanges; for marriage it means intercourse where new life is conceived and birthed. With the Lord it is intimate time in prayer and meditation that reveals His truth and births blessings and victories in our lives.

 So when I put it all together, this is what I heard this Scripture saying to me: make the Lord my refuge and my secret place for every part of me. That means the way I think, the way I feel, the way I behave, the way I approach life. I am to set aside my own thinking, which has been trained by the world and is so deficient when compared with the almighty God. In everything I do, big or small, I need to seek the Lord by coming to Him in prayer and meditating on His Word. Then He will direct every step I take. He will move heaven and earth to make my way successful.

 What an opportunity the Lord gives us if we follow His way of doing things. Not our way, but His way. That is walking in the Spirit. That is living by faith.

 So what must we do to tap into the powerhouse God offers? Basically we must lose ourselves and seek God. Simple? Yes! But it takes a firm decision and quality commitment to do it. Choosing God is not a shallow option. And it doesn’t happen overnight. If you were to interview the men and women who have dynamic relationships with God, you would quickly learn that they bury themselves in the Word of God on a consistent basis. They have developed habits of prayer, meditation, Bible study, and learning about our Lord. They have made knowing God and renewing their minds with truth of His Word their primary goal. And from the knowledge they gain from the intimate relationship they have with their Father, they live their lives.

 Every person has the same opportunity to trust in the Lord with all of his or her heart. We can be renewed. We can be led by God. We can have a blessed and powerful life. But it takes an unceasing commitment.

 Is it worth it? Well, let’s see. Do I want my way or God’s way? Hmmm … no contest! That’s why I do whatever I need to do to trust in the Lord with all my heart, lean not on my own understanding, and in all my ways acknowledge Him so He can direct my paths.

 That’s a powerful way to live. I am my own testimony! Like the blind man in John 9:25 (NIV) who said, “I was blind but now I see,” my life has been forever changed because of the wondrous works of God. I know the before, and I am living in the after. He didn’t bless me because I was so good or so special or so smart. No, God has made amazing differences in my life because He loves me. He wants to bless me. I am His precious child. For me, this is the best way to live, by far. The peace, joy, and love are so valuable that I would have it no other way!

 The amazing truth is that anyone can have the same blessings. The opportunity is right there for anyone willing to follow the ways of the Lord.

**DAY 20**

**If Jesus Is the Firstborn, What Does That Say about You?**

 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation

 –Colossians 1:15

Have you ever heard a biblical truth and found yourself almost awestruck? That’s what happened to me when I meditated on this Scripture and the thought that Jesus is the firstborn. In Romans 8:29, He is called “the firstborn among many brethren.”

 Firstborn means exactly what the word says: the first or eldest child of a family. The Greek word is prototokos, which means the first to be born or the eldest child. The position is not that of stature, but rather of chronological order: first.

 So if Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren, what does that say about you and me? What happens when we couple this truth with that of Romans 2:11, “For there is no partiality with God.” Or Romans 8:15, which says, “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.”

 I asked myself the question that brought shivers to my soul: if Jesus is the firstborn, then what does that say about me?

 I encourage you to ask yourself the same question. The answer is amazing. But we won’t get the full impact of this truth unless we take it in and let it roll around in our minds and hearts until it transforms our thoughts and our identities. Do you really see yourself as a younger sibling to Jesus? He is the Son of God. You are a child of God also. You are a joint heir with Christ. Not because I said it or because of a denominational perspective. You are a child of God and a joint heir with Christ because God says so!

 We are not lowly urchins. Romans 8:16-17 tells us who we are: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

 You and I are joint heirs with Christ!

 Another very interesting element in this mix is something few Christians consider. When God sent Jesus, He was His only begotten Son. But when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, He was the firstborn. The only Son becomes the firstborn because of the Cross. No longer is Jesus the only Son. Jesus made it possible for you and me to join the family. Do you realize the truth and reality in all of this? The Son of God became the Son of Man so the sons of men could become the sons of God.

 As born-again women and men, we are bona fide members of the family of God. Jesus was first and made it possible for us to have all the same rights, privileges, and benefits. I hope you will take a few minutes and ponder what this truth means to you—let it sink in—ask yourself the question. “If Jesus is the firstborn, then what does that say about me?” Then the next time you feel lowly and hopeless, remember who you are: you are a loved, cherished, esteemed joint heir with Jesus, the firstborn of all creation!

 Be blessed in your identity!

**DAY 21**

**Do You Still Feel Like You’re in the Fire?**

 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?

 They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

 “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” –Daniel 3:23-25

Of course, the amazing fact of this story is that three men went into the fiery furnace, but four men were seen walking around amidst the flames. Long before being thrown into the furnace, the Hebrew men had faith in their God and His promises. “Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6). And here in the midst of this death chamber was the presence of God watching over and protecting His children. Scholars call the fourth man in the furnace a Christophany, which is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus, the Messiah. God’s faithfulness showed up.

 But let’s at some of the other details. One is that the men were bound. They could do nothing on their own. There are times in our lives when we are so bound by the troubles in this world that we can do nothing in our own strength. Sometimes the restraints are brought on by others and not our own doing – as in the case of the Hebrew men. But whether those things that bind us are self-inflicted because of bad choices we’ve made or are caused by the sins of others, the answer is always the same:

trust in the Lord. That’s what these men did. Nebuchadnezzar saw and exclaimed, “I see four men loose!” The restraints were gone! Even before they were out of the fire, they were free, and the Lord was there standing by them.

 The same should be true for us. Even if you’ve faithfully fasted for three weeks, you still may be in the midst of fiery circumstances. But even though you haven’t realized the victory with your eyes, you are free.

 If we have faith in the victory, it is already ours. Jesus said in Mark 11:24: “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”

 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had already received what was theirs. They weren’t out of the fire yet. But they were free to walk around in a furnace that was seven times hotter than it usually was—a heat so high that it killed the executioners.

 There may be times when the challenges of this world seem almost unbearable for those who don’t know Christ. But God promise that He will always care for His children: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (Corinthians 10:13).

 In the book of Daniel, the men who depended on pagan gods were killed, yet the men who depended on Almighty God were able to escape as their Lord provided a way in the midst of evil circumstance. Nebuchadnezzar was astonished by this powerful God; he simply couldn’t believe what he was seeing:

 Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here.” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this.”

 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon. –Daniel 3:26-30

 Nebuchadnezzar was impressed, but not converted. He saw the power of God through his natural eyes, and he recognized God as being better than all other gods. This kind of mental assent is rampant in the world today. Many people believe there is a god. Of these, some believe the God of the Bible is the only true God, and of these, many even believe in Christ. But mental assent is not conversion, and this is where a lot of people miss it.

 My prayer for you is that this Daniel Fast has ushered you into a more real and meaningful relationship with your Father so that you will never “miss out” again. I hope you have received answers to your prayers and insight about how you can partner with Christ as you feed your soul, strengthen your spirit, and renew your body. And I pray that when you look back over these past weeks you are encouraged to see how your loving Father has worked in your life. Amen!