



# **CBC- 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting**

## **January 2-22, 2023**

### **Devotional Guide**

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## Let it Shine

*“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14-16*

We sing and celebrate Jesus as the light of the World, yet Jesus tells us in Matthew that we, all believers, are the light of the world. That’s a lot of light!

Our former First Lady, Mrs. Michelle Obama recently wrote a book entitled *“The Light We Carry.”* Mrs. Obama talks about our responsibility to shine. I like that she places the onus on us to carry the light because shining is a choice. God gives us free will, we make the decision to carry our light or leave it behind. We shine our light through our actions and the choices we make.

When we are actively carrying our light, it indicates we are open for business, and when we are open for business we have committed to being available for others. The enemy (Satan) would prefer we leave our light under the bushel. The enemy wants us to believe we are not worthy of being the light. The enemy encourages us to only focus on ourselves.

I implore you to carry your light everywhere you go. If you've ever been afraid of the dark, you know that **light removes fear**. **Light also guides you** in your spiritual walk. Psalm 119:105 reminds us that His word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Lastly, **light offers hope**. When we visit family or friends, a sure sign of them being ready for our company are lights on in and around their homes.

Let us shine and offer hope. Let us sing with conviction, *“This Little Light of Mine, I’m gonna let it shine.”* Let us carry our light everywhere we go!

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for shining bright in our souls. We pray for the courage to provide light to our families, neighbors, co-workers, and community. You remind us in Your Word to be the light of the world, so others may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. Amen.*

Day 2/Jan 3

## GET OUT OF THE TOMB

*Why are you looking for the living among the dead? Luke 24:5*

Two men in dazzling garments asked this question to the women who came to anoint Jesus' body. To the women's amazement, Jesus was no longer in the tomb and the two men questioned why they were looking for someone who is alive in a space where only the dead reside.

Perhaps you or someone you know spends a great deal of time and energy attempting to repair something and never leave the tomb of their current situation. We seldom move from *dying- to rising up -to stepping out*; we just go through the cycle of dying, rising, dying, rising, and we keep people around us who perpetuate our self absorbing needs. We are afraid to push ourselves to get out of the tomb *and move forward*.

What is holding us back? Who is the one person that is not afraid to challenge us to step out?

Let's step out of the tomb and be the true witness that God has called us to be in Acts 1:8. Someone needs us. Encourage someone, encourage yourself to get out of that tomb and move forward to be all that God has called you to be!

Pray: *Dear God, you rose from the dead and continued to be about your Father's business. Help us to move out of the tombs of our own insecurities so we can be powerful witnesses for You.*

Day 3/ Jan 4

## **Now Go!**

*“The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.” Acts 12:6,7 NIV*

How many of us would quickly move when God says move?

Fear often causes us to miss God’s assignment for our lives. We hear the call of God and no matter how many times the call is confirmed we are still waiting on a sign or a flash of lightning before we make a move. We have been conditioned to wait even when God has given us the green light to go, act, and execute! We feel the nudge and the push, but we allow doubt to enter our spirit and we use our own logic to talk ourselves out of acting on God’s command. We spiritualize standing still and use it as a crutch when in actuality we fear what may or may not be on the other side of our decision. We all prefer when God orchestrates events and closes and opens doors which allow a series of occurrences to place us where He desires; however, there are times when God speaks a command, and puts our faith in Him to the test. We miss opportunities, we miss blessings and we miss the move of God in a particular space because we are paralyzed by fear.

In Acts 12:6-7, Peter was in prison. An Angel suddenly appeared and told Peter to get up! Peter obeyed the voice and immediately the chains fell off Peter’s wrists. Peter was FREE! Not only was he free, but God set him free in the place of bondage...in a jail cell with guards surrounding him. Many of us have been bound and prayed for a release and when God responds to our prayers, we find more comfort in staying stuck than getting up and moving in obedience.

Be assured that the voice of God will always line up with His Word. Wherever He takes you, He will keep you and give you peace. Psalm 27:1 says, The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid? I encourage you today to receive ALL of what God has for you! Now GO!

*Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to walk freely in you. I want to be obedient to Your will. Give me the courage to GO when you call. I know Your light will guide my path. Amen*

## One Dark Day.

*“The Lord is my **light** and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid. Psalm 27:1*

Have you ever been in a season of darkness? A season where it seems as if you have lost your mojo, and nothing satisfies. We don't like who we see in the mirror. Our circle of friends and social outings do not excite us anymore. We are stale, stagnant, and irritated with our lives. We feel as if there is nothing to look forward to and no reason to wake up in the morning; and if it were not for obligation, this dark place would cause us to lay in the bed all day. Fear has allowed darkness to reside.

David was writing from a cave in literal darkness, and from a dark place of fear as he was hiding from his enemies. From this dark place, David goes back and forth between fear and faith. In Ps 27:6, he celebrates that God will place him high above his enemies, then in later verses he pleads with the Lord not to abandon him. There are times when we know in our minds that God is able to deliver, but we allow our circumstance to outweigh our faith in Him.

Trouble and dark spaces can come from anything, like a bad interaction with a boss or co-worker, to sickness, financial stressors, or a strained relationship. Many experience trauma and darkness from rejection or from harboring unforgiveness. We are like David with moments of confidence believing God is going to make everything alright; with concurrent moments of uncertainty questioning if God is even there.

The reality is, we will have our share of dark days. As believers we must walk in faith in spite of the hills and valleys because at the end of the day, like David says in verse 14 we can find hope by waiting patiently on the Lord. Be assured, He will bring us out of the darkness and into the marvelous light!

Prayer: *Thank you Lord that weeping only endures for a night but joy and new mercies come every morning.*

Day 5/Jan 6  
**An Epiphany**

*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. Matthew 2:9-10*

Epiphany is defined as grasping the reality of something or having an illuminating disclosure, enlightenment or a discovery. It is that feeling you get when the light comes on; it's that aha moment. An epiphany has no sense of time or season, you can be riding in your car and something you have been trying to figure out or discern for years all of the sudden drops in your spirit. When you have an epiphany, you can't shake it nor do you ever forget it and it usually calls for a turning point or a defining moment in your life.

According to the Christian calendar, today, January 6, is the beginning of the Epiphany season. The first day of Epiphany, also called Three Kings Day, is to commemorate the Magi's visit to baby Jesus. When they see Him and worship Him, the manifestation of the divine Christ is revealed. They went from following the sign of the star- the light-the epiphany, to the revelation and manifestation of Jesus our King and Savior. A celebration of the showing of Jesus as the Son of God.

As we grow and mature in Christ, we will all experience that moment when our God given purpose is revealed. The epiphany is when we see the sign and we finally recognize it is meant for us. Next, we must act in obedience and follow the directions of the sign leading to our purpose. Lastly, the manifestation is when we begin to fulfill and walk in our purpose. This is when God brings out your full potential and others begin to notice the change in you.

The Magi ( wise men) saw the sign of the bright star and they followed it. My question to you is what signs are you noticing? Have you been ignoring or avoiding the signs? What reoccurring dream or visions are you having?

Just as these wise men were confident that this sign was the way to Jesus, we too, see Him moving, hear Him speaking, and feel His spirit; but we are hesitant to follow Him. Perhaps He is leading you down a new road, a road you never traveled before. Maybe the sign is directing you to a narrow road that cannot handle a lot of folks traveling with you. Maybe the road looks bumpy, maybe it is all uphill. Be encouraged, and ask God for strength to stay the course. What a blessing it is to know that our destiny can be reached on the same road that leads to Jesus!

*Prayer: I have decided to follow You Jesus, no turning back, no turning back. Amen*

## **Working in the Vineyard**

*“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’” “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” Matthew 20:13-16*

In The Gospel of Matthew chapter 20, Jesus tells a parable about what some may consider an unfair labor practice. Jesus teaches the disciples through this parable about workers who worked in a vineyard for one hour and received the same wages as those who had put in a full day. Those who put in a full day of work in the heat of the day, grumbled and rendered this as unfair. I think we can all agree that working all day and receiving the same amount as someone who only worked one hour doing a similar task is certainly unfair. So what is Jesus trying to teach us through this parable?

First, we must understand that Kingdom assignments are unique to the individual. It is dangerous when we assume the right to assign value to our spiritual sisters’ and brothers’ contribution to Kingdom work.

Second, there is no amount of work that can earn God’s favor nor will our works guarantee our ticket to heaven. God grants His grace freely to all who believe and receive Him as their Savior. Think about those times when we are physically, emotionally, and spiritually depleted. Aren’t you glad that God does not hold back his love and provision when we need some time off? God’s grace is free to all believers!

Finally, Jesus teaches us to celebrate those whom He blesses. The landowner represents God, and He decides the wage, the blessing, and the elevation. Can we, the mature saints, on this Christian journey get excited for that new convert who has a call on his or her life? Are we willing to pour in to those who are new in the faith? There is a blessing in celebrating and encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I thank you for your generosity and favor. Your love is unconditional. Amen*

## His Love Has No Limits

*“For His Mercy Endures Forever” Ps 136:1b*

When I reflect on singing our favorite hymns during worship service, I can recall bellowing the chorus of the song over and over again and not getting tired. In fact, the more we sang it, the deeper it touched our souls. By the fifth or sixth time, the entire congregation was caught up in the spirit!

Psalm 136 is a wonderful hymn of praise with twenty-six verses and a repetitive chorus. The leader speaks or sings the call, and those gathered respond with this mighty refrain, “for his mercy endures forever.” Other translations state the chorus this way: “for His steadfast love endures forever”(NRSV), “His faithful love endures forever”(NLT) or “His love never quits” (MSG).

This powerful and popular hymn was sung in 2 Chronicles 7:3, 20:21 and again in Ezra 3:11. This song of praise is still number one on the music charts! The first nine stanzas of this Psalm express thanks to God for who He is, for creation and the wonders of the earth. In the last seventeen verses the writer reflects on what God provided for the nation of Israel. From the beginning of time, through the wilderness, and until the end of the earth, we can sing, “His mercy endures forever.”

What a blessed assurance to know that God’s love, God’s mercy, God’s kindness has no limits, He will never stop loving us! ! When we begin to reflect on our current circumstance or our past - when we think of how God blessed us bountifully with what we did not deserve and how He held back the punishment we did deserve, we can give God the highest praise and shout HALLELUJAH, His Mercy Endures Forever!

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for your constant, consistent, and everlasting love. Amen*

## Perfect Peace

*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.” Isaiah 26:3*

Our minds are constantly at work. We can be physically still and resting and not have peace. There are moments when we experience spiritual agitation due to ignoring the voice of God or perhaps from participating in behaviors that are not pleasing to God. Our spirit does not allow us to rest until we begin to walk in obedience. Thank God for grace and the opportunity to make it right!

In Isaiah 26, the prophet tells of how God plans to restore and redeem Israel from their disobedience and sins. Their responsibility is to keep their focus on God, and the reward from God is *perfect peace*.

Peace can be temporary, but perfect peace is everlasting. You can turn off the TV, silence your phone, and go for a long drive to have moments of peace; but eventually you answer a call, return to your home or workplace, and the noise resumes. Perfect peace is inner peace; it is unexplainable peace that comes from having an intimate relationship with God.

When your spirit feels chaotic, check your focus. This is not just a daily adjustment, it is a moment by moment reminder to turn our eyes toward the only one who can bring perfect peace. May His peace that surpasses all understanding guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6b)

*Prayer: Dear God, there is perfect peace in Your presence. Help us to keep our heart and mind fixed on You. Amen.*

## Power

*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:4*

Pentecost is the celebration of the descent of the Holy Spirit. This celebration is not just reserved for those who are a part of the Pentacostal or Apostolic denomination. The Holy Spirit resides in all of us. As humans, we have wants, needs, and desires in which we lack the knowledge, strength, or resources to accomplish on our own. We need the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit! We alone can not bear all the stressors and complications that life brings us. We can only bear it with God's power resting upon us.

Those in the upper room in Acts chapter 2 were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages. As they spoke, those who heard understood their words in their own language- words about all the wonderful things God had done! Later in the chapter, Peter preached to a large crowd and the Word from God pierced their hearts and three thousand new believers were baptized! The miracle of "other tongues" and baptism of the first new converts was the result of the wondrous working power of the Holy Spirit.

A sure sign that the Holy Spirit is working in your life, is when you decide to go against the grain and start speaking other languages. Not speaking French, German, or Spanish, but speaking a different language than the norm. You will begin to speak positive instead of negative, encouragement instead of gossip, love instead of hate, giving instead of hoarding, self control instead of recklessness, freedom instead of oppression, and speaking unity instead of division.

Can we practice using the power the Lord has given us through the Holy Spirit? Yes, His power enables us to do the impossible but it also equips us to do good in our everyday lives.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your Holy Spirit dwelling within me. With your spirit resting upon me I can use my gifts to accomplish the unimaginable. I pray that by your spirit, I can be a blessing to those around me. All the glory belongs to you. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

## Faith in the Detours

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.  
Hebrews 11:1*

In Hebrews chapter 11, this unknown author writes to this second generation of Jewish Christians on the subject of faith. In fact verse 1 has become the Christian's universal definition or mantra of faith. If you ask any bible reading believer to define faith, they can eloquently recite, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not yet seen." The Amplified bible says "faith comprehends as fact, what cannot be experienced by the physical senses." Faith says I don't see it, I don't feel it, I can't even imagine it, but I believe there are brighter days ahead.

The beginning of a new year gives us a chance to reflect on our past, and gear up for brand new days ahead. We learned valuable lessons from our mistakes and we approach the new year and season with a fresh start in mind. In previous years we resolved to eat healthy, exercise, read our bible, and get out of debt. Some made more aggressive plans to write a book or start a business. We wrote our vision. We created our vision board. We prayed over it. We fasted for 21 days. But before the first quarter of the year ended, an unexpected interruption knocked on our door. Job loss, relationship loss, illnesses, passing of loved ones, or a major life transition entered; and now we find ourselves traveling a different path with the glaring, gigantic, orange sign ahead that says "detour."

How we handle the detours in our lives is directly related to our faith in God. We believe some situations call for extreme or radical faith, yet Jesus reminds us that mustard seed faith moves mountains. We must acknowledge and embrace that God is in the detours. Detours may cause delay, but detours certainly do not mean defeat! Keep moving forward in faith and believe in your heart that God did not bring you this far to leave you.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, I thank you for the reminder that no experience is wasted. No matter what we must face, you are right there guiding us through. Our faith is not in our goals, but our faith is in You, the creator of all things.*

## A Healthy Lament

*“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How Long will my enemies triumph over me?” Psalm 13:1-2*

We have been asking the same questions? God what are you up to?

How long will we deal with so much loss, suffering and grief? How long will African American and Hispanic young men continue to take each other's lives? How long will racism, injustice and oppressive behaviors exist in this country? How long will we have to hear bad news? How long will I be single? How long will my money be short? How long will I be stuck? This is our lament.

Lamenting, however, is a healthy practice. Oftentimes we are paralyzed in our current state because we have not released our thoughts. When we hold things in, our minds take control and more times than not negativity sets in. Get it out! Tell Jesus all of your troubles!

The Bible instructs us to cast all of our cares on Jesus, because He cares for us. Do not ever think for one moment that you are less holy because you need to pour out to God with a complaint. The wonderful book of Psalms is full of complaints. The good news is God hears our cry and attends to our prayer. “Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God.” Philippians 4:6

Remember, God can handle our complaints, questions and concerns. Just as he heard David's cry and delivered him from the arrows of his enemies, He will deliver you!

*Prayer: Lord, I have been guilty of complaining to the wrong people. I know I just need to have a little talk with you and you will make it alright. Hear my prayer oh Lord, incline your ear to me and grant me your peace. Amen*

## He Knows My Name

*“And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.” Luke 19:5-6*

A tax collector, by the name of Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree as Jesus was passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. This tax collector was short in stature and wanted to get a good look at Jesus. Jesus notices Zacchaeus in the tree, calls his name and asks him to come down. The people in the town grumbled as Jesus interacted with Zacchaeus, a sinner who had cheated many of them on their taxes.

The bible never tells us if Jesus had previously met Zacchaeus. How does he know his name? The scripture tells us Zacchaeus was trying to see Jesus and he was a sinner. He did not know Jesus, but Jesus knew him! Jesus called him by name!

Aren't you glad when we act like we don't know Jesus, He still knows our name? When we get beside ourselves, He knows our name. When we are hurt or depressed and make a decision to check-out and hide in our own sycamore tree, God calls us by our name to come down. Not only does He call Zacchaeus down from the tree, but Jesus in radical Jesus fashion intrudes and tells him, I'm staying at your house today. Zacchaeus was happy to welcome Him.

There are times when we do not or will not extend an invitation to Jesus, but He loves us so much, He comes to us. He will dwell among us and take residence in our lives because He knows what we need. He knows our name and loves us better than we know and love ourselves.

*Prayer: Jesus, I welcome you into this broken vessel. Thank you for being intrusive and knowing exactly what I need when I need it most. Amen*

## Faith Forward

*So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah.” Ruth 1:7*

There was a famine in the land of Judah and a man from Bethlehem (in Judah) named Elimelech, goes to Moab with his wife, Naomi. Their two sons marry two foreign Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Elimelech dies and some years later the two sons die. Now Naomi is left with her two daughters in law, Ruth and Orpah. As widows, their future is grave. Then Naomi hears the famine is over in her hometown, Bethlehem-Judah and decides to take what's left of her family, Ruth and Orpah and return home.

Three widows who lost everything are forced to figure it out. Women *will* figure something out. Each of these women respond to this crisis differently. Orpah decides to go back to Moab, but Ruth clings to Naomi and embraces all that Naomi believes. Ruth risks it all for the unknown. Ruth clings to Naomi even after Naomi painted such a dismal picture of what the future may hold.

Can we boldly declare our desire to follow the Lord even though we have no clue what it entails? Ruth has no idea what lies ahead but she risks it all to go to an unknown land as a foreigner and a widow. Not only was she loyal to Naomi, but she learned to know and trust the true God of Naomi. She took a huge leap of faith.

There are times when we are in a dead situation or backed into a corner. The only solution is to trust God and press our way through. Ruth knew that God + nothing = EVERYTHING! Leaving the past behind to start something new in our own strength is risky, but with God all things are possible. Embrace your new season, declare the past is over and journey forward. HE makes all things New!

*Prayer: Lord, I do not always know what tomorrow holds, but I know who holds my tomorrow. I put my trust in you. Amen.*

## Put Your Clothes On

*“To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Isaiah 61:3a*

In this passage, God provides consolation for devastated Jerusalem. These exiled people return to their home in hopes of a new and improved life but that never materializes. Even though God restored everything they lost, they were still a fragmented community. God restores them and sends encouragement. He promises them beauty for ashes, joy for mourning and a garment of praise for their spirit of heaviness.

We can all identify with arriving at our destiny, having everything in place but still feeling unfulfilled. We have checked all the boxes yet we have that instinct, “something is missing.” Sometimes the journey is so taxing when we finally arrive at our destination we are too tired and stressed to enjoy it. Some are so driven they begin planning the next phase without taking the time to rest or appreciate their current circumstance.

What do you do when you are in your new season and you don't feel settled? How do you celebrate when it's just not coming together like you envisioned or dreamed? What do you do when you are physically free but your mind is still being held captive? According to Isaiah, you can give Him praise.

Isaiah lets us know we can break out in a shout because God bestows upon us a garment of praise for our spirit of heaviness. Only God can put a garment on you to make you feel lighter! When we step on the scale physically with garments on versus no garments, we are heavier with garments on. But when you put on your spiritual clothing, the heaviness of your heart disappears. With your new garments, you are declaring the praises of God which has the power to turn any situation around. I dare you to put on the garment of righteousness, the garment of His Word, the garment of His peace, the garment of worship, and the garment of gratitude. The more you put on the *lighter* you feel, and the more you praise Him the *better* you feel.

*Prayer: Lord as I praise you through my anxiety, sickness, stress, and hardship I will experience renewed peace, love, hope and joy. I claim victory in Jesus' name. Amen*

*"If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God."*  
Deuteronomy 28:1-2

We all love to brag about the blessings of God! We have prayed the Deuteronomy 28 blessings over our lives and our children. We are blessed in the city, blessed in the field, blessed when we come and when we go. Gospel artist, Fred Hammond added, "late in the midnight hour God's going to turn it around, and around and around and around." We enjoy singing songs about the blessings of God: *"God's got a Blessing with my Name on it"*, *"Blessings on Blessings"*, *"This is my Season for Grace and Favor"*, and *"My Hands are Lifted up and my Heart is Ready to Receive a Blessing from You."*

We want God to open up the windows of heaven and pour out blessings that we don't even have enough room to receive, and God is gracious enough to do just that. He has orchestrated so much in our lives we often mistake it for happenstance. We just so happened to get connected to the right people. A door closed so the right door could open, or maybe we just happened to be in the right place at the right time and God used that experience to push us into our next level.

Moses reminds the Israelites, if they fully obey the Lord and carefully follow his commands, the blessings will follow. The lesson for us is no different. Read His instruction manual (the Word of God), and do what it says.

Remember, God is always up to something and our only job is to be in His will. Our prayer should be like Henry Blackaby, the author of *Experiencing God*, he says, "Lord, show me where you are working and allow me to join you there."

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for your many blessings; even when I mess up, You look beyond my faults and bless me according to my need. For this I give You praise! Amen.

*“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2:5*

“WWJD?” is a serious thought provoking and challenging question. However, this question became more of a fashion statement than a model phrase of how we should carry out our Christian journey. “WWJD?” was intended to remind us to think before we act or speak. It was intended to reflect on how Jesus would handle a particular situation. It gave that gentle nudge to be kind, loving, compassionate and forgiving, as Jesus is all of those things.

We see much of this branding today with signs and billboards and banners screaming “black lives matter”, and other anti-hate sentiments. If there’s a movement, there’s a t-shirt for it. Yes, we need to shed light on worthy causes but what *would* Jesus do? Would Jesus run out to Target or log on to Amazon to purchase the WWJD t-shirt and hat to wear around town? What would Jesus do in the midst of inequality, division, chaos, hunger and poverty? After all, what does it say to have a WWJD coffee mug, if we can’t spare \$5 to buy someone a cup of coffee.

Paul writes to the Philippians during a time when they are having disagreements with each other. He wanted to ensure they were walking in harmony so he asked them to rid themselves of their own opinions for the sake of unification.

We live in a time where everyone has an opinion or theory; but God desires for us to put our individualism to the side for the sake of a greater good.

What did Jesus do? He showed love to *others*, He served *others*, He sacrificed His life for *others*.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to have the mind of Christ in our day to day lives. Teach us to show love, teach us to serve and teach us to sacrifice our time, talent and treasure so your name can be glorified.*

*“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23*

Great is Thy Faithfulness was written as a poem in 1923 by Thomas Obediah Chisolm. He was not formally educated but began teaching school at the age of 16. Chisolm had health issues as a young adult which disrupted his ability to have consistent gainful employment. His careers included teaching, journalism, selling insurance, and evangelistic work. He was introduced to Jesus Christ at the age of 27. As he matured in his faith and experienced life, he realized through his illness and financial struggles he still received many blessings from God.

Chisolm explained toward the end of his life, “My income has not been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness.” (Gaither’s Homecoming Bible)

We can all testify of the faithfulness of God. The hymn does not promise health, riches, or a glamorous future, it simply reflects on the mercy of God. It reminds us that God’s blessings are not always in the form of material things. The last line in the refrain, “All I have needed, thy hand has provided”, addresses our needs and not our wants. God’s Hand provides everything we need. God does not change and His compassion is constant and sure. We do not have to dig too deep to identify the mercies of God. The sun set last night, the stars and moon were in place, and we saw the sun rise this morning. We can be assured with every sunrise, His compassion, His love and His faithfulness is brand new.

*Prayer: God I thank you for your daily gift of new mercies. As I look back over my life, I can shout and sing, You have been so faithful. Amen*

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrews 12:1*

God in his infinite wisdom designed us in such a way we receive the proper nutrients through the food we eat, and our bodies relieve the waste we do not need. What remains becomes our fuel to survive. Our spiritual and emotional well being has a similar reaction. When we take on too much without having a healthy outlet to rid ourselves of it, it drains us, slows us down and we become powerless.

When we are so busy that we can not make the time to do our necessary chores and tasks to manage our personal lives and households, that is a weight that we subconsciously carry. When we are not eating right, getting proper rest, or having some form of exercise, we tend to carry extra weight. When we have years or months of a strained relationship, that results in extra weight.

What are some practical ways we can regularly purge the unnecessary weight? We may not have all the answers individually but collectively we can share what may help someone else.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Good things and good deeds can add weight. Being over involved can be a detriment to our health. Take inventory and ask God where you can scale back.
2. There is no quick fix, it takes consistent effort. Trimming fat (physical or spiritual) takes time. Be patient and stay the course.
3. It is a challenge, but you will LOVE the results. Your vision and goals will be more bearable once the weight is gone.

Lay aside what is holding you back and run with patience the race that is set before you. Trim the fat! Your life depends on it.

*Prayer: Lord, You carried me when I was weighed down by life. I thank you for your sufficient grace. Amen*

## **Crying, Lord Have Mercy**

*“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words.” Romans 8:26*

In Romans chapter 8, Paul teaches about the sinful nature verses being led by the spirit. He talks in detail about life and peace for those who walk in the spirit, and death for those who are led by their flesh. He tells the people of Rome that the suffering experienced on this earth is nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in the afterlife.

After the lessons about sin and flesh and spirit, Paul states in verse 26 that the Holy Spirit will help us with our weaknesses even when we cannot utter a word to pray. The Holy Spirit hears our heart and prays for us with groaning that cannot be expressed in words! That ought to make you say Thank You Jesus! There are times we are so overwhelmed with the cares of life we don't know how to pray. Sometimes we just get so weak in our spirit, we can't even utter words that make sense.

After a long day full of issues and drama, the most we can do is cry out “Lord have mercy!” God can interpret that groan and although all we said is Lord have mercy, he hears, Lord, thank you for getting me through this day. He hears, Lord, thank you for keeping me focused at my job and thank you for helping me deal with that rude individual. He hears, Lord you know I ran out of time and didn't get to call and check on my loved ones but God I thank you for covering and protecting them. He hears, Lord, your love is amazing, your kindness is undeserving, and although I am physically tired and my heart is overwhelmed, I just want to say thank You!

Yes, when all we can do is groan and cry, he interprets our tears and hears every word from our hearts.

*Prayer: I love you Lord because you heard my cry and you pitied every groan. As long as I live, as troubles rise, I will hasten to your throne. Amen*

*“Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.” Revelations 3:4*

Jesus speaks through John, the author of Revelations in letters to each of the seven churches in the Asia Minor-which is now modern day Turkey. The churches are experiencing difficulties: persecution, false teaching, and apathy. The fifth out of the seven churches, the church in Sardis has a reputation for being alive but the church is now dead. This church that used to be vibrant and active is now stagnant, and the Lord tells them to WAKE-UP!

What can we do to ignite the flame and be the excited and alive ministry that God called us to be? We must recognize that “we” are the church. The church is not just the building, or the pastor, and the leaders. The church is “us” and the actions “we” take. It is easy to talk about the church in third person and point the finger at others but the Lord is telling all of us to WAKE UP because “we” are the church.

In all the difficulties the Lord points out in the church of Sardis, He identifies a few faithful servants. The Lord says in verse 4, there are still some in the church He considers worthy.

Thank God for the remnant who is holding up the blood stained banner. Those few who call in to the prayer line, the few who tell you every Sunday that he or she is praying for you! If you are reading this, you are one of them. The faithful few could be those seasoned saints who are stuck in old tradition, yet when somebody needs to get a prayer through, they are the first one you call. So don’t stop doing what you do, don’t stop showing up on time, don’t stop praying for your pastor and the leaders, don’t stop visiting the sick and sending cards, don’t stop preparing those meals and serving your community. The bible tells us the strong bear the infirmities of the weak. We need your example!

What an honor it is to walk with the Lord and be called worthy!

*Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the remnant. We thank you for the faithful few who consistently seek you on our behalf. Amen*

*"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." 1  
Thessalonians 5:18*

We made it to our last day of our 21 days of prayer and fasting. We claim victory and celebrate what God has done, is doing, and will do!

There is an old hymn written by a Methodist Episcopal preacher, Johnson Oatman, Jr, entitled *"Count Your Blessings."* The end of the refrain says, *"Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings and see what God has done."*

Take some time before the end of this week and list some things you are grateful for. Keep this list in a familiar location. When we practice the simple act of gratitude, our cares and concerns seem small compared to ALL the blessings God has bestowed upon us.

The Word of God tells us to give thanks in all circumstances. The Word even tells us to let our request be made with thanksgiving in our hearts. We are all unique and God has assigned each of us gifts which will lead us on various paths. We will encounter our own unique experiences, and we will manage similar experiences differently. God designed us fearfully and wonderfully in His image, but the one thing we can collectively embark upon as the body of Christ is the expression of our grateful hearts.

Just think if those around you truly lived like their good days outweigh their bad days. What if we turned our complaints into songs of praise? Instead of complaining that it is cold outside, thank God for providing a warm home, your own bed, and a car to drive. Hallelujah!

Let this year be a year of counting our blessings. Let this year be a year of thanksgiving and praise.

*Prayer: Lord, if I had ten thousand tongues it would not be enough to praise you for your many blessings. Thank you for every mountain and every valley. Through it all I learned to trust you more. Amen.*

Sources:

## Great is Thy Faithfulness

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*I pray the lessons from this devotional were encouraging, challenging and inspiring. May God bless and keep you through the many seasons of your journey.*

*Rev. Cynthia L. Layton*