

EASTERN
STAR CHURCH

GROW
UP!



EPHESIANS 4:15 (NLT)

FAST DEVOTIONAL
BOOKLET

Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body and the church.

MARCH 6 – APRIL 21, 2019

Hello, Eastern Star Church Family and Friends!

At Eastern Star Church, during the Lent Season, we spend 40 days fasting and praying for God to reveal Himself to us and for us to listen to and obey His voice. As Christians, our goal is to honor God by becoming more like Christ in our actions, attitudes, and abilities. We want to attract others to the Christ they see in us. This dedicated period of fasting helps to refocus our hearts and minds to receive all the good that God has for our lives.

As a church family, we will walk thru this devotional together. Our theme this year is "Grow Up!" Once you accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, every Christian begins the process of spiritual growth that requires you to think, act, and react differently. Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. No matter how hard we work on our maturity, nothing is possible without the enabling of the Holy Spirit within us. Galatians 5 encourages us to bear fruit and be led by the Spirit. I pray this devotional will reveal new truths about God and how you should respond to Him. I hope that each day will provide insightful reflections and solutions to the challenges you will face in life.

I am always excited this time of year. I encourage you to pray, meditate, listen, and don't miss this opportunity to "Grow Up!" in your faith.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor J. Johnson Sr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jeffrey A. Johnson, Sr.
Senior Pastor
Eastern Star Church

*The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.
– Numbers 6:25-26 KJV*

INTRODUCTION

Biblical fasting is a spiritual discipline that was encouraged by Jesus when He was here on earth (Matthew 9:15). Fasting brings us closer to God. Our fasting should have an objective in mind; we should have a clear idea of the need and purpose. One of the major reasons for Christian fasting is revival, “Won’t you revive us again...” (Psalm 85:6). Fasting must be done with an attitude of humility. It is not necessary for others to know we are fasting. “But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:17-18 NLT)

FAST TYPE

From Ash Wednesday, March 6 through Palm Sunday, April 14, we will follow a modified Daniel Fast primarily only eating fruits, vegetables, nuts, and grains. We will only drink water and 100% juices and will refrain from eating meats, dairy, and sweets. Sample menus are available on the church website to provide ideas on how to structure your meals.

Select one day each week when you will participate in a liquid fast by only drinking liquids such as water and 100% fruit juices.

Alternative: For those of you who cannot fast because of medical reasons, consider giving up certain types of food (sweets, soft drinks, etc.) or leisure activities such as your favorite TV program and/or social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)

If you have any health conditions, please seek medical advice from your physician before beginning any corporate food fast at Eastern Star Church.

FAST PURPOSE

There is a pattern of fasting that is evident in the Bible. Jesus gave instructions for when you fast not if you fast (Matthew 6:16-17). The early church in Acts grew and multiplied – the leaders were worshiping the Lord and fasting to seek God’s guidance as they worked faithfully in ministry (Acts 13:2-3). Fasting is not something we do to make God love us more nor should we fast to gain other people’s approval. As we grow and mature in our faith we fast and pray:

To Connect with God – using the time preparing meals or watching TV to instead spend time praying, talking, and listening to God.

To Grow in our Faith – reading and meditating on those things that are pure, holy, caring, and loving.

To Focus on God – practicing making God first.

To Depend on God – reminding ourselves that God is a generous God and how good He is to us.

Each devotion will provide the following components: Scripture taken from The Living Bible translation (TLB), Brief Comments, Further Reflections with an activity, and My Thoughts for you to write your personal reactions. Although the fast lasts 40 days (March 6 – April 14), this devotional will allow you to focus for 47 days ending on Easter Sunday, April 21.

During the fast, we will provide the following to help you remain engaged in the experience:

1. Prayer Call: We will have a morning prayer call at 6:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time on:
 - a. **Wednesday, March 6**

Dial the number below and we will pray together.

Dial-in Phone Number: 712-775-7031

Access Code: 363-540#

2. LiveStream/Facebook LIVE: at 12:45 p.m. Eastern Standard Time during Noon Day Bible Study on the following days:
 - a. **Wednesday, March 27**
 - b. **Wednesday, April 10**
3. Visit our weekly blog to hear a reflection, inspirational messages, recipes, and information to help you on your journey.

FAST CONCLUSION

On Easter Sunday, April 21, we will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We will also wear, as a church family, any ESC logoed shirt that you may have. Additional information will be forthcoming.

There is a Prayer today at 6:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time
To participate dial Phone Number: 712-775-7031
Access code: 363-540#

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Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River, being urged by the Spirit out into the barren wastelands of Judea, where Satan tempted him for forty days. He ate nothing all that time and was very hungry. – Luke 4:1-2
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Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lent Season. Lent is traditionally recognized as a 40 day fast where believers abstain from certain foods or other luxuries to commemorate the 40 days and nights that Christ fasted before His earthly ministry. At Eastern Star Church, we participate in a modified Daniel fast during this season. The guidelines for the Daniel fast are taken from Daniel 1:8-16 where Daniel and his friends only ate vegetables and drank water while training to serve in King Nebuchadnezzar's service.

FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Read the entire account of Jesus' fast and temptation, Luke 4:1-13. Jesus was tempted in every way but without sin.
2. Reflect on the areas in your life where you are tempted. List them below. Pray for God to give you strength and not to give in to those temptations during this time of fasting and forevermore.

..... **MY THOUGHTS**

MARCH 7

So don't worry at all about having enough food and clothing. Why be like the heathen? For they take pride in all these things and are deeply concerned about them. But your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well that you need them, and he will give them to you if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to.

– Matthew 6:31-33

One thing we all have in common is the same amount of time each day – 24 hours. In our fast-paced environment, we use words like urgent, ASAP, priority, and pressing. With all of our modern conveniences and technological advances, we should be retrieving time, but the opposite is true. For most of us, it's run, go, run some more, go some more, and repeat the cycle. Do you ever feel that you are so busy coping with the pressures of life that it is a struggle to make time to spend with God? The 15th-century theologian Martin Luther said, "Work, work – from early till late. In fact, I have so much to do I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." This sounds so radical, but remember that the early church found their power to "turn the world upside down" through their commitment to prayer (Acts 2:42).

FURTHER REFLECTION

J. Oswald Sanders wrote in his book *Spiritual Leadership*, "Mastering the art of prayer, like any other art, will take time, and the amount of time we allocate to it will be the true measure of our conception of its importance. We always find time for that which we deem most important." Commit to starting and ending each day of the Fast with a prayer.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 9

But when you have been made perfect and complete, then the need for these inadequate special gifts will come to an end, and they will disappear. It's like this: when I was a child I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I became a man my thoughts grew far beyond those of my childhood, and now I have put away the childish things. In the same way, we can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see him in his completeness, face-to-face. Now all that I know is hazy and blurred, but then I will see everything clearly, just as clearly as God sees into my heart right now.
- 1 Corinthians 13:10-12

Research shows that although newborn babies have the full visual capacity to see objects and colors, they can only see about 8-15 inches away. Additionally, newborn babies can only see in black and white for the first four months. As babies mature, they slowly develop color vision and images become sharper. Further research goes on to say that around the age of 40 our vision starts to diminish, at which point people obtain glasses and contacts for visual aid.

Similarly, in the infant stages of our spiritual walk with Christ, it is difficult to see ahead as to what God is calling us to do. As we mature in Christ, the vision God has for our life becomes more evident, but He does not give us full understanding because He wants us to rely on Him completely.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Take this opportunity to reflect on how far God has brought you and pray about what he wants you to see in this season of life. Although it may be difficult to understand or visualize, ask God to give you clarity to see what he wants you to do and where he wants you to go. He is our spiritual visual aid, and He loves you.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 10

For the Holy Spirit, God's gift, does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, love them, and enjoy being with them.

- 2 Timothy 1:7

God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift that guides each of us to live for God and in His image. We should not be scared or intimidated by one another, but instead, know when to share and give strength to give others when they are in need. Within us is the power to love and have mutual respect; we should bring each other joy and happiness. These things may get lost in everyday worldly activity. At Eastern Star Church we practice these things as we interact with one another. At times we have to use wisdom and be strong for each other, as well as provide love and space for enjoyment.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you follow through with treating others in a Christ-like manner. Take time to recognize moments when you have been intimidated by others. Think of ways you could have been smarter and utilized the strength God has given you and write it down. Share the love you have for the people around you, by verbally saying it to them, writing it, or sending a quick text. Lastly, let go of worldly stress and the weight of evil temptations. Enjoy and cherish the time you spend with those around you and be aware of how much they can change and uplift your mood.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 11

Truth withstands the test of time; lies are soon exposed. Deceit fills hearts that are plotting evil; joy fills hearts that are planning for good! No real harm befalls the good, but there is constant trouble for the wicked. – Proverbs 12:19-21

God commands us not to lie in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:16) and throughout His written word. Our job is to obey God and leave the consequences to Him. We can have peace and full confidence knowing, “no harm will overtake us” because the truth will stand the test of time and lies will soon be exposed. All of God’s promises will surely come to pass for He is not a man that He should lie (Numbers 23:19). Remember, it’s far easier to repeat the truth and much harder to repeat a lie. After a while, you will forget what you said or did. Lying leads us down a path filled with trouble.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Pray now and ask God to reveal moments when you were tempted to tell a lie or to live a lie. As we grow in Christ, know that God’s truth always prevails. Telling the truth provides us with great joy and peace; the kind of peace which transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Write down any areas where you need to seek a path of truth knowing God’s mercy endures forever, and He is faithful to forgive.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 12

Instead, we will lovingly follow the truth at all times—speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly—and so become more and more in every way like Christ who is the Head of his body, the Church. Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. – Ephesians 4:15-16

The Bible says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. It’s amazing how babies are formed in the womb of a woman. One of the most fascinating things about the creation of the human body is that God created it in a way that requires so many different systems to work together. The body is composed of the muscular system, the circulatory system, the skeletal system, the respiratory system, etc. There are so many different systems, but they all must work together for the body to function as intended.

FURTHER REFLECTION

The Bible teaches us that we are the body of Christ, and for the body of Christ to work properly we have to become more like Christ and learn to love each other despite our differences. Once we realize that God purposely created each of us differently, we can learn to appreciate each other and grow to become what God designed us to be. Share today’s devotion with at least two people you know.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 13

And so we keep on praying for you, that our God will make you the kind of children he wants to have—will make you as good as you wish you could be!—rewarding your faith with his power. Then everyone will be praising the name of the Lord Jesus Christ because of the results they see in you; and your greatest glory will be that you belong to him. The tender mercy of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ has made all this possible for you. – 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

So what “kind of children” does God want to have? We need only to look at Jesus, who was the only one of God’s children who always got it right. In His relationship to God, we see love—a love reflected not in mere words, but in obedience to the Father. We also see trust and commitment—so much so that Jesus poured his heart out to the Father asking for what he wanted and yet added, “But I want your will, not mine” (Luke 22:42).

FURTHER REFLECTION

Do you want to be a child of God whose behavior will cause others to praise Jesus? In prayer, ask your Father what one thing He wants you to do today in obedience to Him. Maybe something that’s been on your heart, but you’ve been trying to ignore. And what is that one prayer something you earnestly desire to which you are now willing, with a sincere heart, to add, “But I want your will, not mine?”

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 14

Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. – 1 Corinthians 13:4-6

With music lyrics, movies, books, and people trying to tell us what love is we must seek what the Word of God says about love. As small children it's all about me, me, me. But as maturing Christians we learn that we are to display certain attributes that set us apart from the world. We are not to be selfish, seeking our own way. Love is not just a word we say, but an attitude that we have towards others. Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Making the choice to love others is not only a suggestion given in Paul's writing on love in 1 Corinthians 13, it is also a command given by our Lord to those who would call themselves Christians.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Show love for other people TODAY and every day! Choose one of the options below to do:

1. Compliment a stranger. Everyone loves compliments!
2. Give someone a smile. Smiles are contagious!
3. Start a conversation with someone who looks a little "down in the dumps."
4. Offer encouraging words to someone who's discouraged or unsure. You never know when *your* words will help motivate a person to achieve what God has called them to do or be!

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 15

The seed among the thorns represents those who listen and believe God's words but whose faith afterward is choked out by worry and riches and the responsibilities and pleasure of life. And so they are never able to help anyone else to believe the Good News. "But the good soil represents honest good hearted people. They listen to God's words and cling to them and steadily spread them to others who soon believe."
– Luke 8:14-15

Jesus explained the parable of the seeds to His disciples. The seed is the Word of God. He uses examples of seeds that were spread among four types of soil, and today we are focusing on the last two types of soil. 1) The seed among the thorns listen but never come to maturity. These may be those who are interested in Jesus' message but cannot accept it because of their material desires (life's worries, riches and pleasures, etc.). 2) The last seed fell among good soil are those who listen, retain the Word, and produce a good crop bearing spiritual fruit. These seeds follow Christ and are committed to His Word regardless of the cost.

FURTHER REFLECTION

When looking at yourself, do you know where your seeds fall? Do the things of the world interest you more than telling others the Good News about Christ? Are you a true follower of Christ—following Him, believing His Word, and carrying out the Great Commission? Read Matthew 28:19-20.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 19

I advise you to obey only the Holy Spirit's instructions. He will tell you where to go and what to do, and then you won't always be doing the wrong things your evil nature wants you to. For we naturally love to do evil things that are just the opposite from the things that the Holy Spirit tells us to do, and the good things we want to do when the Spirit has his way with us are just the opposite of our natural desires. These two forces within us are constantly fighting each other to win control over us, and our wishes are never free for their pressures. When you are guided by the Holy Spirit, you need no longer force yourself to obey Jewish laws. – Galatians 5:16-18

In this part of a letter to the believers in Galatia, Paul experientially explains the internal tug-of-war between the God in us and the evil yet within our flesh. This description brings to mind the mental duality some people describe as having “an angel on one shoulder and the devil on the other.” However, because of our sinful nature, we can ponder evil or go in the opposite direction of God without the enemy’s input. Thank God that salvation provides us with the unceasing residence of the Holy Spirit, who constantly works to bring us to spiritual production as we learn to submit to Him rather than rebel. A bit of good news; in the world to come, we’ll finally be free of our corrupted flesh!

FURTHER REFLECTION

The charge of conforming to the food restrictions of this fast gives immediate illumination to the warfare between flesh and spirit. Also, we are admonished by Pastor Johnson to change our diet in other areas as well. Whether it is consuming foul music or addiction to social media, we can have many fleshy attachments that can be severed as we push towards God in this season. If you haven’t already, ask God about these additional habits/behaviors that are hard to let go, write them down, and let the Holy Spirit influence you to submit these very things for sacrifice as well.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 20

The Ten Commandments were given so that all could see the extent of their failure to obey God's laws. But the more we see our sinfulness, the more we see God's abounding grace forgiving us. Before, sin ruled over all men and brought them to death, but now God's kindness rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. – Romans 5:20-21

We all fall short in life. Sometimes we choose to ignore the fact that we are sinning because sin is like a weed in a garden. It will keep reappearing unless it's pulled out by the roots. We need to remember second chances are possible through Jesus Christ. God's grace allows us to overcome sin through the power of Jesus Christ. Thank God that His love is not dependent upon our conduct. It is only because of Jesus' obedience in going to the cross, that we are given yet another opportunity to be in the right relationship with God.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Pray and ask God to help you see your sinfulness to change your sinful behavior. Remember failure is not final. Continue to embrace the grace of God. Do this:

1. Make a list of people you need to extend grace and kindness to. Pray for God to help you see those individuals in the way He sees them.
2. In what situations do you find it most difficult to practice kindness? Why do you think these situations are triggers for you?

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 21

But grow in spiritual strength and become better acquainted with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be all glory and splendid honor, both now and forevermore. Good-bye. – 2 Peter 3:18

What better way can we grow in God by than getting to know Him personally? God is warning us when it comes to salvation not to get caught up in social media discussions or what the talk is in the streets; search for the truth in His Word. Our understanding will become much stronger in the Word when we take time out of our schedules and spend time in God's Word. This will strengthen our relationship with the Lord, and our lives will reflect the growth from just knowing Him in a better way, which will bring glory and honor to God.

FURTHER REFLECTION

The apostle is writing to remind us of sin, which has caused us to be separated from God, and that Jesus died for our sins. Jesus has told us that He will come again to get us, so while we are waiting; we need to prepare ourselves for His return. Just because Jesus has not returned yet does not mean the Scriptures are not true. We need to read the Word of God so that we can get an understanding of His Word and get better acquainted with Him so that we may bring honor to Him. Pick one of your favorite passages of Scripture and list three things you like about this passage.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 22

My work was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos' work was to water it, but it was God, not we, who made the garden grow in your hearts. The person who does the planting or watering isn't very important, but God is s important because he is the one who makes things grow. – 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

Planting and watering are essential for soul care. It will take effort, but to grow in Christ, we need to recognize the importance and its significance to God. To do so is worth every seed of the mind, will, and emotion to substantiate growing towards becoming fellow workers with God. It's our role to become a caregiver (plant), to disciple care-receivers (water), and to remind them that God is the cure giver (growth). He is the reason that growth becomes relevant. Without God, nothing is possible.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Read all of 1 Corinthians 3. Reflect on the path of growth from carnality (Christian, but leaning on the world) to what it takes to become a fellow worker (dependence) with Christ. Spend some time today to ask yourself these three questions for growing active for Christ:

1. How can I make God a priority?
2. How can I make obedience a priority?
3. How can I make others a priority?

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 23

So ever since we first heard about you we have kept on praying and asking God to help you understand what he wants you to do; asking him to make you wise about spiritual things; and asking that the way you live will always please the Lord and honor him, so that you will always be doing good, kind things for others, while all the time you are learning to know God better and better. – Colossians 1:9-10

Just as earthly parents' desire for their children to move from the infancy stage to mature, healthy, and productive adults, our heavenly Father wants the same for us. If we are to grow, we must change our diets from milk and baby food to incorporate solid spiritual food. We can grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God if we ask. James 1:5 states, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." It pleases God for us to seek His Word, way, and will for our lives (Matthew 7:7).

FURTHER REFLECTION

Ask yourself if you're growing in the knowledge of God and bearing the fruit of good works or do you look and act the same way you did last year? The wisdom that comes from God should show itself in the fruit we bear (James 3:17 and Galatians 5:22). Write down three-four growth opportunities. As we continue to fast and pray, let's seek to please God and live a life worthy of our calling.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 24

For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

– John 3:16

God loved mankind enough to have his son Jesus die for us so that anyone who trusts in Him will be saved from sin (1 John 4:9-10). Therefore, we are saved from God's judgment of sin (Romans 5:9). Remember our sin has separated us from God, and the consequence of sin is death (Romans 6:23). But, God has rescued us through Christ by the death on the cross and subsequent resurrection that achieved our salvation. It is clear that salvation is the gracious, undeserved gift of God and is only available through faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can do to make us "good enough" for heaven.

FURTHER REFLECTION

What implications does God's love for the world have for your commitment to reaching all peoples with the good news of His Son? Motivate yourself to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus. It is only by God's grace—His undeserved mercy—that you can have eternal life with Him in heaven. All you have to do is have faith, to believe Christ died for you, and ask Him to forgive your sins. Pray for family and friends who have not have accepted Christ (list names below).

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 25

O Lord, you alone are my hope; I've trusted you from childhood. Yes, you have been with me from birth and have helped me constantly – no wonder I am always praising you! My success – at which so many stand amazed – is because you are my mighty protector. All day long I'll praise and honor you, O God, for all that you have done for me.
– Psalm 71:5-8

Recognition is powerful. Its purpose is to acknowledge someone who has made a significant impact on our lives. David understood the power of recognition. His reflection shows us that during each season of his life, God has been the source of his direction, growth, power, and grace. We know as the body of Christ that a grateful heart produces recognition, which is honor and praise to our God.

FURTHER REFLECTION

To further understand the power of recognition, read Psalm 71:1-8. David realized the importance of a close, intimate relationship with God. This world comes with many creative ways to distract us from spending quality time with Him. From the never-ending “to-do lists” to the response of “yes” to everyone’s needs but our own, we run the risk of becoming self-reliant, running on fumes; making it difficult to connect with God. Take time to reflect and recognize God for who and what He’s been in your life. List them below. Pray and ask God to help you draw closer to Him.

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 26

So everywhere we go we talk about Christ to all who will listen, warning them as well as we know how. We want to be able to present each one to God, perfect because of what Christ has done for each of them. – Colossians 1:28

The only way for us to be saved is by professing with our mouths and believing in our hearts that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior and that He died to save us from the wrath of His and our, the Father of all, God! Which is why everywhere we go, we must tell all about the good news of Jesus, warning those who don't believe, and teaching those who do, because the day of the Lord is near and time is running out! The only way for us to be acceptable in the presence of God is if we truly believe in our hearts that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, and that we will only depend on Him for our help! Thinking, speaking, and living in a way that imitates the way Jesus Christ did when He walked the earth!

FURTHER REFLECTION

In your private time alone with God, thank Him and ask Him to strengthen the conviction in you to live the right way, the way that is pleasing unto Him, not to people or the world, but to Him and Him alone! Pray and ask Him to strengthen your faith, your courage, and your integrity to live life in the light, pleasing to Him and others around you! Pray and ask Him to make in you a heart that hates evil, but loves righteousness! Pray and ask Him to make you more like Him and less of yourself!

MY THOUGHTS

MARCH 27

There is a Prayer today at 12:45 p.m. Eastern Standard Time via LiveStream/ Facebook LIVE. To participate, tune in to Facebook LIVE or watch Noon Day Bible Study by visiting our website and clicking on the WATCH LIVE tab – Main Campus.

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Now that you realize how kind the Lord has been to you, put away all evil, deception, envy, and fraud. Long to grow up into the fullness of your salvation; cry for this as a baby cries for his milk. – 1 Peter 2:2-3

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A Christian develops a desire for the truth of God’s Word by doing five things:

1. Remembering his/her life’s sources.
2. Eliminating sin from his/her life.
3. Admitting his/her need for God’s truth.
4. Pursuing spiritual growth.
5. Surveying his/her blessings.

At salvation, all believers experience how gracious the Lord is to those who trust Him. That should compel believers to seek more of the grace in pursuing His Word.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Growing strong in our love for the Lord and our faith; we can look at things differently. We remember how much He loves us and we should try to live better: being more forgiving, loving one another more, and letting our light shine in the world for the Lord. Remember, the world is looking at us, Christians, - are we looking like Christ or are we looking like the world? God is our Father; Jesus is our brother; let’s show the world how proud we are to be called a child of the King.

..... **MY THOUGHTS**

APRIL 1

Jesus asked, “How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story shall I use to illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed! Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, yet it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with long branches where birds can build their nests and be sheltered.” – Mark 4:30-32

Some people spend a lot of time trying to figure out details related to the plant Jesus was referencing. Let’s look at this parable in its simplest form. Even as a tiny, seemingly insignificant mustard seed, Jesus, the King of the Kingdom, came to earth to share with us that we can be part of His Kingdom. The mustard seed—the Kingdom of God—was “planted” when Jesus died and was sealed in the tomb. When Jesus arose, the Kingdom began to grow rapidly—from a handful of disciples to the 120 who gathered in the upper room, to the church at Jerusalem, and then throughout the entire world.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Ask God what He wants you to do during this time of fasting and praying to help grow His Kingdom. Share those thoughts with your spouse or a close friend, and then let the person know when you have completed what God asked you to do. From even the smallest action, something great can grow.

MY THOUGHTS

APRIL 3

But to obtain these gifts, you need more than faith; you must also work hard to be good, and even that is not enough. For then you must learn to know God better and discover what he wants you to do. Next, learn to put aside your own desires so that you will become patient and godly, gladly letting God have his way with you. This will make possible the next step, which is for you to enjoy other people and to like them, and finally you will grow to love them deeply. The more you go on in this way, the more you will grow strong spiritually and become fruitful and useful to our Lord Jesus Christ. – 2 Peter 1:5-8

Loving people can be difficult. In Michelle Obama's speech at the 2016 Democratic National Convention she was speaking about bullies and hateful people when she famously said: "When they go low, we go high." She went on to say that our words and actions matter because people are watching. As a Christian, it can also feel like people are always watching to see how you will act in certain situations as if you are in the spotlight. Being good is not always easy. Peter said that we must work hard to be good and even that is not enough.

One author edited the infamous quote "practice makes perfect" to say, "practice makes permanent." The more you seek God, putting your own desires aside, Peter says that you will grow strong spiritually, and become more fruitful and useful to the Kingdom of God.

FURTHER REFLECTION:
How well do you know God? The key to learning more about someone is communication. The more you talk to God, the more intimately you will get to know Him. Write down a few ways you can put aside your own desires to be more useful in the Kingdom of God.

..... **MY THOUGHTS**

APRIL 6

Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second most important is similar: 'Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.' All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets stem from these two laws and are fulfilled if you obey them. Keep only these and you will find that you are obeying all the others."
- Matthew 22:37-40

Jesus gave us two great commandments: love God and love your neighbor. Loving God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind essentially means loving God with every part of our being. We are to live and show this type of love at work, school, home, community, and every other area of our life. It also means loving our neighbor as ourselves. This love is unconditional love. We have the tendency of loving when we feel like it, when our neighbor has been "neighbor-like" to us, or when God is answering prayers and handing out the blessings we want. Can you love despite how you feel? God is love, and being created in His image means we can give and receive this type of love; however, we need help through Jesus to intentionally show unconditional love.

FURTHER REFLECTION

While God never changes and neither does His love; humans do. This is why we need the supernatural power of Jesus to help us to love the way God loves. Spend time in prayer this week asking God to show you how to love the way He loves and to reveal the people and things that tend to take priority over what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Also, find ways to demonstrate this love at work, home, school, or community.

MY THOUGHTS

APRIL 8

Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becoming strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts. A wise man is mightier than a strong man. Wisdom is mightier than strength. Don't go to war without wise guidance; there is safety in many counselors. – Proverbs 24:4-6

Some worldviews date back before the time of King Solomon that being rich, physically strong, and doing things our own way defines success. We hear it in slogans in the 21st century, “Only the strong survive,” “Do you, and live your best life.” King Solomon, who asked for and received wisdom from God, warns us to see things from a different perspective than societal norms. According to the wisest man ever to live, wisdom is to be sought after and cherished over anything.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Create a to-do list. Write out three decisions you need to make concerning work, volunteering, relationships, family, or purchases (big or small). Read 1 Kings 3:1-15. Ask God for wisdom regarding the decisions you listed, just as King Solomon did. Listen for God to speak to you about each thing, how to proceed, and who can offer wise counsel. Thank Him for giving you wisdom.

..... **MY THOUGHTS**

APRIL 9

Since you became alive again, so to speak when Christ arose from the dead, now set your sights on the rich treasures and joys of heaven where he sits beside God in the place of honor and power. Let heaven fill your thoughts; don't spend your time worrying about things down here. You should have as little desire for this world as a dead person does. Your real life is in heaven with Christ and God. – Colossians 3:1-3

Do God's blessings weigh us down? Many Christians throughout the world long for heaven. Their lives are full of pain, suffering, and perhaps famine, disease, persecution, war, or tyranny. There is nothing in this fallen world that pleases them or promises them a brighter tomorrow. They love God, and they think longingly of heaven and what God has in store for them there. But, we are lavished with God's blessings. Most of us have food on our table, a roof over our heads, movies to watch, video games to play, sporting events, favorite restaurants, clothes, transportation, and one or more TVs to keep us from having to think at all. Are our sights set on the realities of heaven, or are our blessings getting in the way?

FURTHER REFLECTION

Think about what it is that ties you to this world. Do you find yourself often thinking about heaven? If not, what do you think about? What outshines the "realities of heaven" in your heart? What do you need to let go of on earth so that you might embrace your "real" life that is with Christ in heaven?

..... **MY THOUGHTS**

APRIL 10

There is a Prayer today at 12:45 p.m. Eastern Standard Time via LiveStream/ Facebook LIVE. To participate, tune in to Facebook LIVE or watch Noon Day Bible Study by visiting our website and clicking on the WATCH LIVE tab – Main Campus.

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But the godly shall flourish like palm trees and grow tall as the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted into the Lord's own garden and are under his care. Even in old age they will still produce fruit and be vital and green. – Psalm 92:12-14

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The Cedars of Lebanon are known for their longevity, strength, and are associated with plentiful water like palm trees. Godly people are like these mighty trees; they are productive well into their later years. Unlike the wicked who flourish only for a short time, God's people continue to thrive and be fruitful, for God himself tends to their needs.

FURTHER REFLECTION

In our world today people are often focused on getting things quickly and can be lured into taking questionable shortcuts or using methods that hurt others. Living in a Godly manner throughout your life is a true and lasting gain. Pray and ask God to show you if you are seeking to flourish in ways that are ungodly and to help you turn from those ways.

..... **MY THOUGHTS**

Let us stop going over the same old ground again and again, always teaching those first lessons about Christ. Let us go on instead to other things and become mature in our understanding, as strong Christians ought to be. Surely we don't need to speak further about the foolishness of trying to be saved by being good, or about the necessity of faith in God. – Hebrews 6:1

The apostle is encouraging us to grow up and become mature in God's Word so that we can be that spiritual man or woman God wants us to be. The apostle did not just point out their issues of the uncertainty of the teachings of baptism, the resurrection of the dead, but he took ownership of being a solution to their spiritual growth by saying let us go on instead. When we get an understanding of the Word we can apply the Word to our lives, then the foolish thoughts about being saved will be eliminated because we will become more like Christ and less like the world.

FURTHER REFLECTION

The writer rebuked his readers for their spiritual immaturity, but he knew that nothing was gained by treating them as immature. So he moved on to other ideas. This has the idea of “rudiments” or “ABCs.” They are basic building blocks that are necessary and must be built upon, or there are only a foundation and no structure. We need to follow what the Word says and not add anything to it. Read the entire book of Hebrews 6, and you will see that Christ is our High Priest and He has paved the way for us to heaven.

MY THOUGHTS

APRIL 15

I have never stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you wisdom to see clearly and understand who Christ is and all that he has done for you. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can see something of the future he has called you to share. I want you to realize that God has been made rich because we who are Christ's have been given to him! – Ephesians 1:17-18

There's a story about a caterpillar who was transformed into a beautiful butterfly but still acted like a caterpillar. The caterpillar didn't realize it could fly, so it tried unsuccessfully to climb its way to new heights. When he finally saw himself as a butterfly, his life was forever changed. Let God's Word flood your heart and mind so that you can "see clearly and understand who Christ is, and all that he has done for you." God has transformed us into new creatures; we don't have to act in our old ways, stay in low-down situations, or see ourselves as guilty and insignificant. We can fly!

FURTHER REFLECTION

God considers Himself rich "because we who are Christ's have been given to him!" How valuable we must be! Write down a few thoughts about, "who Christ is" and a few important things, that he has done for you. Will this wonderful God, who has done so many caring things for you, not give you a future worth living?

..... **MY THOUGHTS**

APRIL 17

There is a right time for everything: A time to be born; A time to die; A time to plant; A time to harvest; A time to kill; A time to heal; A time to destroy; A time to rebuild; A time to cry; A time to laugh; A time to grieve; A time to dance; A time for scattering stones; A time for gathering stones; A time to hug; A time not to hug; A time to find; A time to lose; A time for keeping; A time for throwing away; A time to tear; A time to repair; A time to be quiet; A time to speak up; A time for loving; A time for hating; A time for war; A time for peace.
– Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

If we're honest, we think managing our time means cramming more into the day: acting as if we have 27 hours instead of 24, going without ceasing, and learning how to chew gum, walk, read the paper, and talk on the cell phone at the same time. It is not busier lives that we need, but better use of the time we have combined with a biblical view of time on earth. It is not about doing more things: it's about doing the right things. Christians are to be good stewards of our time. Our time is a resource given by God - entrusted to us to manage well. We need time for Jesus, family, work, personal, and quiet. As Christians, we want to manage our lives based on the principles of God so that we may have life and have it abundantly.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Take a step back and ask yourself:

1. What is the purpose of my life?
2. What things am I doing to help fulfill this purpose?
3. What can I eliminate to help achieve this purpose? Share this information with two Christian people you trust and ask for their feedback.

MY THOUGHTS

APRIL 19

Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don't just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and in what they are doing. Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus Christ – Philippians 2:3-5

In this passage, Paul is instructing the church of Philippi on what it means to imitate Christ's humility. What would it look like if people began to work with one another as opposed to every man or woman for his/herself? What a beautiful example of unity, which Christ has called us to do. To achieve this, we must practice humility. We must see ourselves in proper perspective. No more manipulating, backstabbing, or selfish pursuits to get ahead. Instead, we must humble ourselves enough to care for the needs and interests of others, adopting the same attitude of Jesus: being willing to give up/lay down our desires to obey and serve God and others out of love and reverence of God.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Take time this week to do these three things:

1. Spend time praying and meditating on this passage.
2. Journal your thoughts about this passage, and ask God to show you the areas of your life where you need more humility, where you need to adopt the same attitude of Jesus.
3. Be of service to someone without trying to make an impression or expecting something in return.

MY THOUGHTS

Afterwards Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish religious holidays. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was Bethesda Pool, with five covered platforms or porches surrounding it. Crowds of sick folks—lame, blind, or with paralyzed limbs—lay on the platforms (waiting for a certain movement of the water, for an angel of the Lord came from time to time and disturbed the water, and the first person to step down into it afterwards was healed. – John 5:1-4

Often we are hoping for a miracle, but we find ourselves at a place of disappointment. There are times when we want something so badly that we will believe or do just about anything to get what we want. We all have been in a place of sickness and misery. We find ourselves sitting and waiting for the water in our pool to move by making faithless excuses as to why we are not participating in our own healing process. Take care of your health, eat properly, take your necessary medication, and exercise. Jesus brings healing. Not only can He heal our diseases, but also we have eternal life through Him. Jesus wants us to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit. Thank God for your health, reflect on His Word, allowing the Word to transform you in mind, body, and spirit.

FURTHER REFLECTION

Read John 5:1-15 for the full context of this scripture. Then:

1. Make a list of family and friends who need healing. Pray for those individuals daily.
2. List several ways that you can participate in your mind, body, and spiritual healing. Read, pray, and reflect on God’s word daily.

..... **MY THOUGHTS**

CONGRATULATIONS!

You have completed our 2019 Fast. As a church family, I pray we have been strengthened during this time of focused meditation and listening to God.

Our God is awesome, mighty and able to do exceedingly more than we can ever imagine. Don't stop with the fast. Continue to set aside time every day to connect with God through prayer. Hear what He has to say. Your life will be better for it. Your experiences will bless and encourage others!

Jeffrey A. Johnson, Sr.

Senior Pastor



EASTERN
STAR CHURCH

GROW
UP!

EPHESIANS 4:15 (NLT)



JESUS EXALTED + WORD EXPLAINED
EASTERN STAR CHURCH