

Pursuing

21 Days Worship, Prayer, & Fasting

Devotional Guide
By Rev. Faith E. Parry



Fasting

Fasting is a core piece of our spiritual lives. Christians have been participating in a variety of fasts since Jesus first walked on earth, following the example of the Jewish fasts. Modern protestant Christians do not have a habit of fasting.

When one fasts to be drawn closer to God, as scripture teaches, one will experience God in more profound ways and receive direction. We can also fast on behalf of others, which is very powerful as well (i.e., our family, our church, and our nation).

Fasting is not magical. It is not about creating a checklist so that you unleash God's power that he will only unleash when you perform the proper ritual. Fasting is about removing distractions from this world so you can properly connect with God's Spirit.

And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. – Ezra 8:21, NLT

Every January, we encourage our congregation to consider fasting during our 21 Days of Worship, so that as a church, we can focus on God together. We can not think of a better way to start the new year, then refreshing our souls and concentrating on God.

You may be wondering why we do such an old practice. For our founder John Wesley, fasting is a spiritual discipline and a means of grace. Wesley encouraged his Methodists to fast twice a week.

But, if we desire this reward, let us beware...of fancying we merit anything of God by our fasting...Fasting is only a way which God hath ordained, wherein we wait for his unmerited mercy; and wherein, without any desert of ours, he hath promised freely to give us his blessing.¹

1 "Sermon XXVII, On Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount" by John Wesley

After the 21 days, when you discover that fasting has positively impacted your spiritual life, consider the Wesley fast moving forward. Wesley encouraged all of his Methodists to fast on Wednesday and Friday, sundown to sundown. His Methodists would abstain from food and increase the amount they prayed during that time. It's a powerful thing when God's people pray together.

How to Fast

If you have never fasted before, it is essential to be sure you do not do something that will put your health at risk. If you have any concerns, talk to your doctor about how many calories you should consume each day. If you plan on cutting out things like caffeine, reduce your intake for 4–6 weeks prior (depending on how much you consume), so that you do not get hit hard by the withdraws.

The following are situations when you should not do a food fast:

- Persons who are physically too thin or emaciated
- Persons who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders
- Those who suffer weakness or anemia
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs
- Individuals who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem such as hyperglycemia
- Women who are pregnant or nursing²

General Fasting Guidelines

In Matthew 6, Jesus warns us to be careful when we fast so that we are not like the hypocrites; fasting needs to be about the inner transformation, not about others seeing how holy we are because of our fasting. The goal is to have a soul-cleansing, not to be so focused on the rules you've set up for yourself that you miss God in the whole event.

Fasting is like a deep cleaning that gets rid of all the gunk that has built up unnoticed over time.¹

Consider these guidelines to keep yourself focused on the spiritual effects of the fast:

- Be flexible and listen to the Holy Spirit
- Decide whether you're going to do a complete fast (water only), a no-solid-food fast that allows milk, juice, coffee and tea, a no-meat fast, or some other kind of fast – It's OK to change it up
- Only fast for more than one consecutive day after you've consulted with your doctor and only if you're sure you're physically able to handle it
- Make sure you drink plenty of water while fasting, no matter what kind of fast you choose ²

Food Fasts

Scripture and church history tells us about different combinations of food fasts. There are many different ways to fast around food. The traditions "giving up something" in your diet is how many protestants have fasted around lent. Here are some examples of how you can fast when it comes to food.

- **Choose a single food.** Usually, when you give up one item, this should be something that you enjoy and something that often is not healthy. i.e., sweet tea, sugar, coffee/caffeine, etc.
- **Give up all meat.** This is a typical fast in scripture and church tradition. Giving up meat and eating only plant-based foods is

1 *Awakening* by Stovall Weems, p. 70

2 The Wesley Fast, www.methodistprayer.org/wesleyfast

usually a sacrifice for people, but a reminder that God always provides.

- **Give up delicacies.** This would mean things that are wonderful to eat, but probably not the most healthy. Traditionally, this has been the most common fast in church tradition: meat, sugar, alcohol, junk food, etc.
- **Don't eat while the sun is up.** Some people choose only to drink water during daytime hours and then in the evening a light meal. This is a very extreme fast and should only be done if you are cleared by a doctor to do it, especially for an extended period of time.
- **Consuming only liquids.** The most extreme fast would be only to have liquids for weeks at a time. Most people would include smoothies in this list. Just like the one listed above, do not attempt this form of fasting without speaking to your doctor.

Your Prayer Life

When Methodism started, our religious habits looked a lot like the Anglican church and the Catholic church. In addition to fasting, we also used formal prayers that kept us in a rhythm of speaking to God, even if we didn't know what to say. Today, that piece of our tradition has gone to the wayside for most of us.

I encourage you to try out a mixture of styles of prayer during these 21 days to deepen your prayer life and to open yourself up to new ways for God to speak to you.

For each day's devotion, you'll find a prayer to guide your thoughts. Here are some suggestions on how you can use that prayer:

- Find a quiet place where you can be undisturbed during your prayer time
- Take some calming breaths to bring yourself into the moment with God
- Ask God to use the words written, then pray them
- Reflect on the scripture passage for the day, reading over the words and reflecting on any word that stands out
- Ask God why those words are essential in that moment
- Write down any thoughts that come to your mind so you can reflect on them later
- Read the scripture as a whole again
- Close with a few more cleansing breaths
- Thank God for his Spirit's presence with you in that moment

You may need to experiment with what time of day this process would work best, where it is a distraction-free space, and what posture you can best focus. Maybe you have a clear mind sitting up in bed still in your pajamas. For others, stopping at lunch in the house when it's empty is a refreshing way to pause the day and hear from God. You need to see what works best for you. The key is to find the time and stay with it consistently.

Join a Group

The Methodist movement's foundation was a system of groups. That is what made Methodism different from the Anglican church. John Wesley believed that too many Anglicans were showing up for Sunday worship to receive their communion, check their "God Box," and go home unchanged.

To fix the issue for his Methodists, he created a system of groups where people could talk about what God was doing in their life, how they were challenged, what questions they had, and to share their struggles. They were living life together.

These groups transformed thousands of people in Europe and America. I encourage you to consider trying a group during these 21 days and see how it affects you. You can join a group we already have, or you can start your own. Visit sumc.io/adultgroups to find a current group.

Starting Your Own Group

If you want to start a group for the 21 days, it's pretty simple. Talk to your friends and see if you can find 3–10 people who would like to do this devotional guide with you. If you all came to worship together, it would give you a more profound impact, but do what parts you can do.

Figure out where you want to gather and when. We have some spaces available at the church. Please call the church office to schedule if you want to use them, but feel free to be creative as well. Gather in your home, at a favorite coffee shop, or even at the park.

If you do start your own group, let me know. I'd love to be in prayer for you and support you any way I can.

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Pursuing

Our theme for our 21 days in 2020 is Pursuing. The Holy Spirit pursues us from the moment of our birth. It is this preemptive work of the Holy Spirit that leads us to pursue God. As we study the Gospel of John, we will be looking at the passages through the book the Holy Spirit moved during Christ's ministry, how God pursued people, and where people pursued God. I challenge you to keep this idea in your mind as you fast, pray, and worship over these next three weeks. Look for places that God is seeking you and be actively seeking God.

But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval. –John 6:27, NLT

"If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you." –John 14:15–17, NLT

More Reading

Resources on Fasting:

- *Awakening: A New Approach to Faith, Fasting, and Spiritual Freedom* by Stovall Weems
- *Your Personal Guide to Fasting and Prayer* by Bill Bright

Resources on Prayer:

- *A Bead and a Prayer: A Beginner's Guide to Protestant Prayer Beads* by Kristen E. Vincent
- *Field Guide for Daily Prayer* by Windfield Bevins
- *This Day: A Wesleyan Way of Prayer* by Laurence Hull Stookey

Resources on Wesley's Groups:

- *New Room Bands: A Guide to Micro-Community Discipleship* by Mark Benjamin and J.D. Walt
- *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten Small Group Experience* by Kevin Watson

INTRODUCTION

Sunday

JANUARY 5

When this vision came to me, I, Daniel, had been in mourning for three whole weeks. All that time I had eaten no rich food. No meat or wine crossed my lips, and I used no fragrant lotions until those three weeks had passed. -Daniel 10:2-3, NLT

Daniel is one of those stories we learn as a young child. The brave young Jew who faced the lion's den, and helped Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and upheld his dietary laws in Nebuchadnezzar's house. Some of us may remember that he interpreted the king's dreams. Daniel was also a great prophet, receiving powerful messages from God. When he needed to get clarity about what God was trying to tell him, Daniel fasted for three weeks (21 days), praying and seeking God. His Jewish upbringing taught him to clear his mind and heart so that he could hear God's voice. After weeks of preparation, God spoke to him. We never know what God will say, but when we spend time focusing on God, seeking his voice, and preparing ourselves to listen, he will speak to us. That is what the next 21 days are all about!

Prayer

Lord, help me seek you during the next 21 days. Bring to my mind any sins I need to confess to you in my life. Give me the strength to let you remove those sins from my life. Draw me closer to my church family so that we may dedicate 2020 to your work and your direction. Thank you for your wisdom and guidance in my life and the life of our church. Amen.

| WEEK 1 |

Week's Reading Schedule

January 6	John 1
January 7	John 2
January 8	John 3
January 9	John 4
January 10	John 5
January 11	John 6
January 12	John 7

Questions to Ponder This Week

- What sins do I need to confess today?
- Where have I seen God working in my life today?
- How has God given me strength to avoid temptations today?
- When have I sought the Holy Spirit's voice today?
- What are my expectations for the upcoming three weeks?
- What am I seeking from God?
- How has God transformed me in the past and presently?

Day 1 - Monday

JANUARY 6 – JOHN 1

Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God." – John 1:32–34, NLT

John, Jesus' cousin, has drawn some negative attention to himself from the religious community by reaching and baptizing people. He identifies himself as the one who will prepare the way for the Messiah (1:23, Is. 40:3). John was following God's commands and seeking the Messiah. When Jesus arrived, John recognized the sign of the Holy Spirit because he was looking. John then acts upon what he is seeing, declaring that Jesus was the one who would take everyone's sins away (v. 36). Reacting to John's words, Jesus gains his first two disciples. Jesus doesn't call them. Instead, they respond to what they have witnessed and choose to follow Jesus (v. 37). This story shows how we must pattern our lives daily and during these 21 days. We need to be looking for where God's Spirit will be. If we are seeking, we will be ready to recognize when God shows up in our lives. Then, when God does show up, we need to be prepared to respond to go where God is, following to new unknown places.

Prayer

Lord, help me recognize the Spirit within me. Like John, I am called to point others to you. Show me your presence in my life, where your holy hand is working, and where I need to follow you. Help me have eyes to see and ears to hear so that I will be ready for what you have in store for me. Amen.

Day 2 - Tuesday

JANUARY 7 – JOHN 2

The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." –John 2:3-5, NLT

John's first account of Jesus performing a miracle is at a Cana wedding. Newly commissioned for ministry, Jesus hasn't left home yet to travel and teach. Mary seeks Jesus out to save the family hosting the wedding from embarrassment. Jesus doesn't feel it is his time to demonstrate his power, but Mary has faith that he will do something. It is Mary's faith and her pursuit of Jesus that brings this miracle forward. John uses water throughout his gospel to represent the Spirit. John doesn't specifically mention the Holy Spirit, but references it through the miracle using water. Jesus uses water to show transformation through the Spirit instead of the old purification rituals. The act of water in the purification jars turned into wine could be understood as the Spirit transforming us by God's power alone.

Prayer

Lord, I pray that you will transform me just as Jesus did with the water. Do a mighty work in me today. Make me into something completely new so that I can bring you glory. I want to be purified by your power, not my own. Bring forth the power of your Spirit so that I can walk in your paths. Amen.

Day 3 - Wednesday

JANUARY 8 – JOHN 3

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' "...[Jesus replied,] "anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit." – John 3:5–7, 33–34, NLT

Here we see Jesus speaking both of water and the Spirit, strengthening John's continued parallel of the two. Nicodemus was a part of the Jewish ruling council (Pharisees), so he would have understood salvation to be through a strict following of the law. Yet Jesus emphasizes the importance of being transformed by the Holy Spirit, a work that only God can do. Nicodemus believed Jesus would have answers he probably had been seeking for quite some time. He also thought that God had sent Jesus. His faith brought him to Jesus, even if cloaked by night. The presence of God that Nicodemus recognized is what John referred to in verses 33–34. John acknowledges that Jesus not only has God's power within; he also has been given that power with no limits.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your gift of new life through water and the Spirit. Show me today all the places that you have granted me a new life. Remind me how you've renewed me. Reaffirm my rebirth and rejuvenate me through this new life that only comes from you. I affirm that through Jesus, I can enter the Kingdom of God. Help me spread that news here on earth until I join you in heaven. Amen.

Day 4 - Thursday

JANUARY 9 – JOHN 4

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water." ...[Jesus replied,] "But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." –John 4:9–10, 23–24, NLT

Jesus physically needed water, so he crossed cultural, racial, religious, and gender divisions to ask a woman to assist him by drawing from the well. The result was a conversation that showed her a need for spiritual, living water. Then, Jesus explains that the divide between Jews and Samaritans doesn't matter because worship is from the soul. God is Spirit, so we worship him with our spirit. Jesus gets to the heart of the argument, something that still applies to us today. True worship is about us giving ourselves to God. It does not matter the building or the style, but the purity that we honor him. This hope of a new future is what prompts this woman to go and share Jesus' message with others. The unnamed Samaritan woman, or the women at the well, is credited with being the first missionary. She left everything so she could run back and share the news with others. Because of her actions, Jesus stayed in her village for two days, and many Samaritans believed.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the living water that never ends. Quench my soul today in the ways that only you can. Help me worship you in spirit and truth. I seek your Spirit to guide my worship today, and the rest of this 21-day journey. Teach me something about each day that I gather with the rest of your body to honor you. Amen.

Day 5 - Friday

JANUARY 10 – JOHN 5

When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?" "I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me." Jesus told him, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!" –John 5:6-8, NLT

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, seeing a pool with a significant number of people around it in need of healing. Each person believed that God could heal them, but only if he or she was the first touch of the stirred waters. Jesus saw a man whom he recognized has been waiting for healing for quite some time and was moved by him. This man was unable, physically or emotionally, to seek God in this moment; he was hopeless. Jesus did the seeking instead. Without identifying himself, Jesus gave the man something to hope for, and with just a glimmer of hope, the man responded with a large portion of faith. Sometimes, God pursues us even when we are not in a place to pursue him. At times, all we need is a nudge to have faith in his faithfulness again. Jesus' words later on in the chapter affirm that the Father never stops working (v. 17). God is always working in our lives, in the world, and through his Spirit, drawing us closer to him. He continues to guide us in purifying our lives so that sin is gone, and we are cleansed every day.

Prayer

Lord, heal me today of any physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, or relational things that are keeping me from living the life you want me to live. I believe you never stop working for my good. Renew my faith and remove any obstacles I have in my life so that I can do your work. Give me the strength and courage to follow the Spirit's guidance concerning these obstacles as well. Amen.

Day 6 - Saturday

JANUARY 11 – JOHN 6

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval."...[Jesus said to them,] "The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. –John 6:26–27, 62–63, NLT

Jesus has drawn a lot of attention to himself. After he feeds that vast multitude that has gathered to listen to him teach, he sneaks away from them and disappears across the lake. The crowd went across the lake searching for him. Jesus points out that the real reason they followed him was that he fed them the day before. His words about perishables things versus spiritual ones is a good lesson for us today, especially during a time of fasting. The crowd seemed more focused on the meal being free than its source. If we want eternal life (i.e., the bread of life), then we must focus on what God is doing and how he's doing it, not the product he's creating. The theatrics of Christ lured the crowd; we must safeguard ourselves against this. When we focus on the Spirit's works within us, we stay rooted in our transformation from within. We need to be fed by God, not by things of this world that can fade away. Just like the women at the well, Jesus is offering the crowd something more than bread; he's offering them eternal life. We see in this chapter Jesus first "I am" statement, when he calls himself the bread of life.

Prayer

Lord, I ask that you feed me today. I want you to be the nourishment that I need in every way. Help me reduce my dependence on things of this world and increase my dependence on you. Give me strength as I fast and pray. Keep my mind focused and encourage me on this journey. Amen.

Day 7 - Sunday

JANUARY 12 – JOHN 7

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.) – John 7:37-39, NLT

Jesus' words are not only attracting attention, but they are making the religious leaders unhappy. He knows going to Judea for the festival of Shelters was a risk because those who wanted to arrest him would be looking for him there. He eventually goes and teaches openly in the temple. Teaching here isn't a common practice for Jesus, especially in the book of John. The crowd is shocked by his knowledge, and the religious rulers are even more outraged. Then Jesus starts to talk of the living water again. The significance of Jesus' statement during this festival shows the availability for all people. The priests represented a level of control of God's presence and Spirit, but Jesus was introducing God's Spirit to everyone. In the Old Testament, water was a symbol of life, salvation, refreshment, and joy. Jesus was saying that Israel no longer had to go through the priests for these things, but could receive them directly from God's Spirit themselves. John is clear; these things would only happen after Jesus pays the price required, the sacrificed.

Prayer

Lord, fill me with your living water. Remind me of the sacrifice that Jesus paid for me so that I could have the Spirit with me daily. Show me all the ways that you renew my soul every day of my life. Free me from the stress of this life so that I can live fully in your hope and joy. Amen.

| WEEK 2 |

Week's Reading Schedule

January 13	John 8
January 14	John 9
January 15	John 10
January 16	John 11
January 17	John 12
January 18	John 13
January 19	John 14

Questions to Ponder This Week

- What sins do I need to confess today?
- Where have I seen God working in my life today?
- How has God given me strength to avoid temptations today?
- When have I sought the Holy Spirit's voice today?
- How have I seen God deepen my spiritual life so far?
- Has the Spirit led me in new directions?
- Am I pursuing God, or is he pursuing me?

Day 8 - Monday

JANUARY 13 – JOHN 8

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." –John 8:12, NLT

In chapter 6, Jesus called himself "*the bread of life*," with the first group of "*I am*," statements. Now, here in chapter 8, we see the next one with him saying, "*I am the light*." The Pharisees are quite upset that he has said such a thing about himself. He is still in the temple during the festival of Shelters. Lanterns are a significant part of the festival, so Jesus claiming to be *the light* would have had significant meaning. His first *I am* statement had a substantial connection with Moses and manna; this second statement about light did as well. The lighting ceremony was designed to remember the pillar of fire. God's Spirit leading Israel to safety through the darkness. Jesus was saying that he was going to take over the care of leading Israel. Today, we know that he fulfilled his promise. God's Spirit continues to guide us through the darkness and unknown places. The light draws us in, no matter how far away we are.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for always lighting my way. I trust no matter the situation that you will be there to guide me. Fill me with your light so I can draw others to you. Help me always to listen to the Spirit's voice so that I don't lead others in the wrong direction. Comfort me as I travel to unknown places. Amen.

Day 9 - Tuesday

JANUARY 14 – JOHN 9

When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man answered, "Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him." "You have seen him," Jesus said, "and he is speaking to you!" "Yes, Lord, I believe!" the man said. And he worshiped Jesus. – John 9:35–38, NLT

We move from Jesus saying, "*I am the light of the world*," to helping a man who has never seen the light, *see*. When Jesus' disciples notice this man who has been blind his entire life, they seek Jesus' wisdom on why he's blind. Jesus, however, realizes that they have missed it; this man wasn't born blind because of sin. Jesus goes back to the idea of light, then goes and heals the man. Just like the paralyzed man, Jesus sought out someone who had no hope and gave them something to celebrate. In the case of the blind man, he was so grateful for what Jesus did; he couldn't comprehend why the religious leaders would question his motives. When Jesus came back to the man, he was seeking spiritual fulfillment from him, which Jesus provided.

Prayer

Lord, open my eyes where I am blinded. Show me your will in my life and the world around me. I want to follow your path and see your glory. Help me be the bringer of hope to all that I meet through the power of your Spirit. Amen.

Day 10 - Wednesday

JANUARY 15 – JOHN 10

[Jesus] explained it to them: "I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures...I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd." –John 10:9, 14–16, NLT

We see the third and forth "I am" statements here in chapter 10, the "gate" and "shepherd." The idea of a shepherd and gate are interdependent. Jesus is pulling from Old Testament images and daily life to show that he is different in how he cares for Israel (i.e., his healing of the blind man). Jesus is claiming here that his voice is the only one that can lead us to God. Any message that is competing with his words is a thief in the night. Jesus protects us, guides us, instructs us, and lays down his life for us. He knows us in a way that no one else does. God's Spirit journeys with us every day playing the same role. The Holy Spirit guides us, teaches us, and protects us as we journey through our lives, seeking God's will each day. When we get off track, the Spirit draws us back to where God wants us to be.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for being my shepherd, keeping me safe, and guiding me. Help me always to have ears to distinguish your voice from all other voices in my life. Keep me from being fooled by thieves. Guide me in your path every day. Amen.

Day 11 - Thursday

JANUARY 16 – JOHN 11

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?" "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God."...Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me." Then Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" -John 11:25-27, 41-43, NLT

The story of Lazarus' death and resurrection in chapter 11 is one of my favorite stories in John. Martha seeks out to meet Jesus. Even in her grief, she continues to demonstrate her faith in him. In their conversation, Jesus says his fifth "*I am*" statement. Jesus calls himself the resurrection, resurrecting Lazarus but condemning himself to death. Martha's faithful actions are a witness to what it means to seek God in our daily lives. She was upset with the situation life had given her, and rightly so. But she turned to God, shared her heart, and trusted that God would take the situation and do something with it. Her faith paid off. Jesus made a point to be sure everyone knew what was happening when he approached the tomb, praying aloud so those present could hear him. Martha and all the bystanders were able to witness what can happen with God's acts and when someone has faith.

Prayer

Lord, my hope lies in my future life with you. I trust that this mortal life is only a moment compared to eternity with you in heaven. Thank you for conquering death so that I could live with you forever. Help me have faith as Martha did, even when life looks hopeless. Amen.

Day 12 - Friday

JANUARY 17 – JOHN 12

Jesus replied, "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me. –John 12:23–26, NLT

In verse 20, we read about a group of Greeks who had never heard of Jesus. They came to Jerusalem for Passover, probably as Jewish converts. The city was all talking about Jesus, and the Greeks wanted to know why so they sought him out. Jesus' response to hearing that this group wanted to meet him was to give one final public teaching. He recognized that his time to die had almost come. Like his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus talks about transformation, but this time in more seriousness. We need to be born again in the Spirit, but it goes farther than that. We must die to ourselves so that we can have a spiritual harvest and eternal life. Seeking God daily and dying to ourselves is the only way we will live into the future God wants for us.

Prayer

Lord, I want to die so that I can live. Make me into a kernel of wheat that produces an abundant harvest. I want to serve you so that I can multiply your Kingdom on earth and in heaven. Help me trust your Spirit's guidance so that I can do this work. Amen.

Day 13 - Saturday

JANUARY 18 – JOHN 13

"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you."... "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." – John 13:13–15, 34–35, NLT

Jesus teaches us a powerful lesson about serving others here in chapter 13. None of us is too important to serve someone else. Jesus who was from God, returning to God, and had the authority of God, knelt to serve those whom he had been instructing for three years. Filled with God's Spirit, he knew he would die on the cross for those 12 and all humanity. Washing the disciple's feet must have seemed simplistic compared to that task. Jesus goes on to tell them to follow his example, serving and loving each other. Out of everything he taught them, he wants them to carry forth the characteristic of love. They have no idea in that moment what he truly means by that. Jesus is giving everything to them because of his love. The only way we can truly love others as he loves is through the power of his Spirit. Only by seeking God and allowing his Spirit to transform us can we love our enemies to the point of laying our lives down for them.

Prayer

Lord, I want to be a servant like you were. Show me how to serve others through love. Help me follow your Spirit's guidance so that I know who to help and how to help them. Give me eyes to see people as you see them, not as they are but as what they could be. Amen.

Day 14 - Sunday

JANUARY 19 – JOHN 14

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!" ... "If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you." – John 14:6–7, 15–17, NLT

We come now to the sixth "I am" statement made by Jesus. As he sees his death on the horizon, he takes these moments to give final instructions to his faithful disciples. He knows they will be confused when the events unfold, so he clarifies things for them as best he can. For us today, we understand that Jesus' death paved the way for us to have eternal life with God in heaven. Jesus goes on to ask his disciples to live out their love for him by obeying his commandments (like chapter 13, to love each other). He doesn't ask them to do this on their power. He gives them hope that the Father will send someone like Jesus to help them obey all that Jesus has commanded, the Spirit. Then Jesus points out that only those who are seeking the Spirit will find him. He's there, all around, but many people will miss him. We must have faith in the Spirit so that we can journey with him into a more obedient life.

Prayer

Lord, I believe that you are the only way to get to the Father. Help me walk your path and help others find it as well. Help me live into the Spirit's truth so that I can be a good witness. Keep me always seeking him in my life. Amen.

| WEEK 3 |

Week's Reading Schedule

January 20	John 15
January 21	John 16
January 22	John 17
January 23	John 18
January 24	John 19
January 25	John 20
January 26	John 21

Questions to Ponder This Week

- What sins do I need to confess today?
- Where have I seen God working in my life today?
- How has God given me strength to avoid temptations today?
- When have I sought the Holy Spirit's voice today?
- How have I been challenged over the past two weeks?
- How does Jesus' sacrifice influence my spiritual life right now?
- What sacrifices can I make for Jesus today?

Day 15 - Monday

JANUARY 20 – JOHN 15

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing..." "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father..." "But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry. – John 15:5, 8, 26–27, NLT

As Jesus continues his final words to the disciples, he makes his seventh and final "I am" (I am the vine) statement. He is talking about the importance of abiding in God, following Jesus' teachings, and having an abundant spiritual life. This has been a common theme in John. We should not merely know Jesus; we should follow his teachings with every part of our lives so that we produce much fruit. Jesus reminds the disciples that he isn't asking them to do this on their own. Just like chapter 14, he tells them that he will send the Spirit to help them fulfill his commandments and live a life of fruitfulness. We shouldn't worry if we are a part of the true vine. By knowing Jesus, we are one with him, and he is the vine. We need to focus our energy now on producing fruit.

Prayer

Lord, help me to always abide in you. I want to produce fruit that is worthy of being a part of you. Help me live a life that will testify that I am yours. Use your Spirit to nurture me daily. Amen.

Day 16 - Tuesday

JANUARY 21 – JOHN 16

"There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.' – John 16:12–15, NLT

The disciples are grieved at the news of Jesus leaving, but he tells them that he must go so that they can receive the Advocate (vv. 6–11). This is a far better situation for them. It's not a second-place substitute for Jesus. Instead, they each carry with them God's voice and power. Jesus spoke to them and did God's work, but his purpose was to die and return to the hand of the Father. He was never meant to stay here forever. The Spirit's mission is to be God's physical presence in this world, with each of us, for the rest of time until Jesus returns. He is everywhere every moment, which is something that Jesus couldn't be. The Spirit's role is to convict people of sin, transform hearts, and speak the truth in ways that only God can. He pulls us towards God, seeking each of us every day that we live. This is the essence of God pursuing us.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your Spirit, who always speaks truth to me. Help me have ears to hear his voice and follow his guidance. Open my mind to Jesus' teachings throughout 2020 in new ways. Challenge me so that I can go deeper in my spiritual life. Amen.

Day 17 - Wednesday

JANUARY 22 – JOHN 17

After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began." – John 17:1–5, NLT

Jesus lifts his voice in prayer to the Father. He is preparing to rejoin the Father back in heaven, where Jesus began (1:1). Now, as he asks the Father to fulfill Jesus' mission to glorify him, John reinforces, in these words, that it is God working through Jesus. Just as the Spirit will be sent down from heaven, so Jesus was sent down. Now, it is his time to return. Jesus repeats that eternal life comes only through knowing him. He knows his purpose, so he is stating it to remind his disciples who are listening. Only through a relationship with the Father, the sacrifice of the Son, and the truth of the Spirit, can a person receive eternal life. Jesus then prays for his disciples. He asks God to protect them (vv. 6–16) and sanctify them (vv. 17–19). We carry forward this same prayer today, asking God to protect and sanctify his people.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for Jesus' sacrifice for me. Protect and sanctify me today, just as Jesus prayed for his disciples, thousands of years ago. Help me live into his teachings and glorify him. Deepen my relationship with you so that I can better live out your will. Amen.

Day 18 - Thursday

JANUARY 23 – JOHN 18

Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. "Who are you looking for?" he asked. "Jesus the Nazarene," they replied. "I AM he," Jesus said. (Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.) As Jesus said "I AM he," they all drew back and fell to the ground! Once more he asked them, "Who are you looking for?" And again they replied, "Jesus the Nazarene." "I told you that I AM he," Jesus said. "And since I am the one you want, let these others go." – John 18:4–9, NLT

Judas knew Jesus' pattern of going to the olive grove to pray. This is how he knew where to go. Jesus was ready when Judas arrived with a large group of soldiers and guards. Yet, when Jesus identified himself, his words caught everyone off-guard. His choice of words wasn't abnormal, but as he spoke, everyone there recognized who he was. Romans and Jews alike saw him as divine and fell to honor him. The words "ego eimi" could be translated "I am the one you are seeking." They all realized Jesus was identifying himself as "I AM," the God of Israel. These soldiers and guards were seeking a man who was causing trouble for the Jewish officials, but they found God's Son, the Messiah. Jesus gave himself up at his arrest to prevent harm to anyone. He even healed the guard that Simon Peter attacked, acting out what it meant to love one another.

Prayer

Lord, I recognize that Jesus is both your divine Son and the earthly son of Mary. Today, I reflect on his willing sacrifice to follow your will when he gave up his life for me. He knew that his mortal body would feel pain and suffering, yet he still offered himself for me. Thank you for that loving sacrifice. Amen.

Day 19 - Friday

JANUARY 24 – JOHN 19

Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty." A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. When Jesus had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. –John 19:28–30, NLT

Jesus has gone through a lot to bring him to this point on the cross. He's been tried, humiliated, flogged, and carried his crossbeam up to Golgotha. His crucifixion put his body through an awful toll. His body was exhausted, and he craved something to drink. He is experiencing the cup the Father placed before him (18:11). After symbolically he drank of the cup (the soaked sponge), he bowed his head and released his spirit. This statement shows us that it was Jesus' choice to die. He had completed everything the Father had asked him to do up until this point. His last act of obedience was to surrender his life. This fulfills Jesus' statement that no one takes his life from him; he voluntarily gives it (10:18). We learn from this moment that we glorify God by obeying him, no matter the cost.

Prayer

Lord, I ask that you help me obey and glorify you every day. Jesus obeyed you up to his last breath. Now I have the same chance because of his actions. Help me to live in the Spirit's power and guidance so I can live out the life you call me to live. Amen.

Day 20 - Saturday

JANUARY 25 – JOHN 20

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." – John 20:19–23, NLT

Mary sat at Jesus' tomb, desperately seeking him. Her eyes didn't recognize him, but when she heard his voice, she knew it was her Lord calling her name (10:3). Mary ran to tell the others what she had seen. The disciples gathered to discuss what they heard from Mary, Peter, and John in a locked room. Jesus appeared in the room out of nowhere. He showed them his wounds to prove to them who he was and that he had conquered death. Jesus then tells his disciples that he came to send them just as the Father sent him. This is similar to Matthew's Great Commission. Jesus was giving them the Holy Spirit so they could succeed on their mission. With the Spirit's help, those they went to teach could be born again through faith. Jesus breathed the Spirit, the Giver of Life, to each of them. This paralleled Eden; they received eternal life through Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, fill me with your breath today like it was the first time. I know I've carried the Holy Spirit with me from the time you saved me, but I want a new outpouring of the Spirit today. I want to be touched by you, the Giver of Life. Help me live out all your commands through this power that you have given me. Amen.

Day 21 - Sunday

JANUARY 26 – JOHN 21

Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water, and headed to shore..."Now come and have some breakfast!" Jesus said. None of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish. This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead. – John 21:7, 12–14, NLT

Peter decides to fish after all that's happened. Why? Maybe he was hungry, or perhaps he needed some time on the water to process all of the events that had just happened. Fisherman fish while they wait. When John recognized Jesus standing at the shore, he announced his presence to everyone. John must have been looking for him. John was the first to believe in the resurrection by seeing the empty tomb (20:8). Peter's reaction here is more than seeking God; he pursued him. Peter couldn't wait for the boat to get to shore. He jumped in and swam ahead so he could be the first to get to Jesus. Peter didn't let anything stand in his way. This is the type of perseverance we need when seeking God in our lives and seeking his will.

Prayer

Lord, I pray that I forever seek you as Peter did on the lake. As I continue through 2020, make each day one where I seek your voice. Help me to look for your guidance in everything I do. Remind me never to stop seeking counsel from your Spirit. Transform me each day by your power so that I am made new every morning that I wake. Amen.

I Am Statements

1. Jesus replied, "**I am the bread of life.** Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." –John 6:35, NLT
2. Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "**I am the light of the world.** If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." –John 8:12, NLT
3. So he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, **I am the gate** for the sheep. All who came before me[a] were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, **I am the gate.** Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures." –John 10:7–9, NLT
4. "**I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep. **I am the good shepherd;** I know my own sheep, and they know me." –John 10:11–14
5. Jesus told her, "**I am the resurrection and the life.** Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying." –John 11:25, NLT
6. Jesus told him, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life.** No one can come to the Father except through me." –John 14:6, NLT
7. "**I am the true grapevine,** and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, **I am the vine; you are the branches.** Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." –John 15:1–5, NLT

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GROUPLink

2020 is a new year. Everywhere you look, you see advertisements for new health, new clothes, new cars, you name it and they want you to get a new one. What if this year, you spent 2020 focusing on your spiritual life. Carve out time to give to God.

In addition to our 21 Days of Worship, Prayer, and Fasting, consider joining a small group or Sunday school class so you can grow in community. We have lots of opportunities for you. Visit sumc.io/adultgroups to see all our options.

Don't see something that fits you, then use this guide to start your own group. We're here to help. Don't let another year, month, or day go by without making your spiritual self a priority. Use the 21 Days of Worship to kickoff your spiritual growth for 2020.

