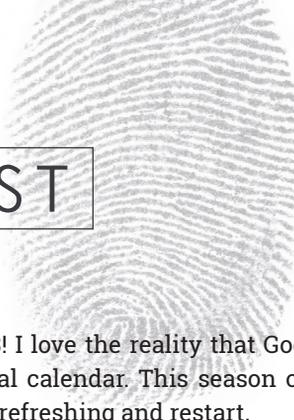


IN CHRIST

21 days of prayer and fasting



IN CHRIST

Happy New Year and welcome to the year 2023! I love the reality that God has set the cycle of fresh starts into our annual calendar. This season of prayer, fasting, and focus is a wonderful time of refreshing and restart.

If you regularly use electronic devices such as computers and handheld devices (which most of us do), you know that it is a good habit to regularly shut it down and do a restart. Over time, computing devices continue to run apps and programs that drain the energy and power needed to do what really needs to be done. A shutdown and restart is a way of best utilizing the energy where it is needed.

That illustration might be a stretch, but a season of prayer and fasting can serve as a restart for us. We take a step back from the clamor around us to focus on the Lord and then take action based on the Lord's direction. As we have said in the past, life flows from "the secret place to every place."

For 2023, we've discerned the simple theme of "in Christ" for this season, and we've developed a basic guide to lead you through the New Testament letter of Ephesians. This guide is designed to help you develop the good habit of reading and meditating on Scripture, which we will be doing much of in 2023.

The goal in this season of prayer and fasting is for us to focus on Christ formed in us, and as that happens, Christ represented by us, to the world around us. In addition to fasting of specific foods, we'd ask you to be very intentional and purposeful in fasting all forms of media during this season. We want to focus on one thing: Christ and His glory!

I know that fasting can be challenging, but it is worth it. God consistently encounters those who seek Him!

In Christ,



Kevin Eshleman

DAY 1

Read: Ephesians 1:3

This passage makes a profound statement which is worth pausing to consider. "We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Really? It's true! There isn't one blessing that is withheld from those who are in Christ.

You may find it difficult to accept but consider a newborn child who, simply because he is born, receives the blessings of the family he is born into. The blessings of attention, love, protection, and provision, to name a few. At the moment of salvation, you have been born into a family where God is your Father, and as a child of God, it is your birthright to be blessed with all the blessings He has to offer.

I would encourage you to make a list of blessings. Consider what specific blessings you have received from your parents or family, or what blessings you have provided for your children. What blessings do you imagine were available to Jesus? What blessings have you observed in others? Reflect on your list and receive the truth God wants to bless you with.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____



DAY 2

Read: Ephesians 1:4

God has always been dreaming over humanity. We are told in today's reading that God was dreaming of our fullness in Christ even before He created us. I've found expectant parents to be similar. Even before conception they are dreaming of life with a little one—a child that they can care for, invest in, and do life alongside. It's a wonderful thought that God imagined us in Christ long before He saw us gardening, naming animals, or slumping into depravity. In the midst of all that Paul could have said in these opening verses as he discusses heavenly realms, he decides to highlight, first and foremost, the spiritual blessing that we are chosen and adopted by God, in Christ. Praise God that He has always dreamed that dream over us.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 3

Read: Ephesians 1:5

We all long to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. It's in our nature to want to feel loved, included, part of a community, a family. God invites us all to be a part of His family through salvation in Jesus Christ. John 1:12 says "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." When you say "yes" to Jesus, you become a part of something bigger than yourself! You're adopted as a son or daughter of the Most High King. You're a brother or sister to those who are also part of the family. In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul writes, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." No matter what your family status looks like here on Earth, it brings peace to know God is calling you and me to be adopted into His family. Joy and contentment come when we are confident we BELONG! In the words of an old Bill and Gloria Gaither song, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God!"

Have you answered the call to join the family of God?

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 4

Read: Ephesians 1:7

Kintsugui is a Japanese art form that repairs broken pottery with gold. Rather than throwing away the broken pieces, they are mended together with gold which makes the object more beautiful than its original design. Think about how this art form can be applied to your life and your relationship with God. The pieces of the broken pottery are your life story, and the gold is Jesus, who freely gave his life for you. He shed his blood so that you could be saved and forgiven. When He died, His blood was then poured out to mend the brokenness of your life. He died to redeem you so that you can live the life that God planned for you.

Redemption is an ongoing part of your life. Most days you are working to keep the pieces together but if you continue to always keep your eyes focused on Jesus—which is the gold in your life—you will live in abundant freedom, just the way God intended!

Today think about the areas of your life that may seem broken or where sin may lie and lay it before the feet of Jesus. He can mend everything, restoring you to the beautiful masterpiece He intended you to be.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 5

Read: Ephesians 1:7

Have you ever had seasons in your life where sin abounds and grace seems nowhere to be found? You are trying your best but that habit, that addiction, that stronghold in your life is getting the best of you. There is one grand hope! That hope is "In Him."

Ephesians 1:7 states that "In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses (sin), according to the riches of His grace!" That is such good news; we can hardly believe it. Shouldn't I pray more, fast more, be spending more time in the presence of God? Yes, absolutely, but not for forgiveness of sins. We have to understand that "In Him..." is all we need for forgiveness. All the rest of those things mentioned above; are just to get to know Him better. When you get to know Him better, the riches of His grace becomes real to you.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 6

Read: Ephesians 1:9

It can be a common experience to wonder what the Lord's will would be, and sometimes it's uncomfortable. The word "mystery" in this passage is appropriate as it so often feels that way when seeking God's guidance.

However, what a beautiful promise that the God we serve loves to reveal His will to us. You can find this promise in many places in scripture. For example, Romans 8:14 describes those who are children of God as those who are led by His Spirit. In John 10:27, Jesus so simply shared, "My sheep hear my voice." Knowing God's will is 100% part of what it means to be a child of God?

If you're feeling like God's will for your life is a mystery, it's ok. Start a conversation with God that begins with thanksgiving, share your request, invite the Spirit to lead you, and follow-through with His leadership even if it isn't a direct answer to your prayer. Here's an example. "Thank you, Father, that you love to share Your will with me. I ask for your clear guidance, and I trust you to lead me because I am your child. I give you my attention today, and I will follow your leading. Amen."

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 7

Read: Ephesians 1:10

Distractions abound in the information age in which we find ourselves living. Texts, emails, news alerts, phone calls, the latest and greatest news invade our space. With all this coming our direction, it is easy to get pulled away from the end goal. Verse 10 contains words that impact us if we permit them to do so: “according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him...”

Let me focus on one word, “unite.” You are familiar with the prayer of Jesus in John 17. In verses 20–26 of that passage Jesus prays for us, that those who would believe in his name, that we would be one. He prays this no less than four times in that passage. Wow! We cannot ignore that!

One of the descriptors of our current culture is that we are polarized, divided. What a witness to the world we could be as the church if we unite as one, even in the midst of differing opinions. We can disagree about many things, but we were united in the very person of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps God would cause you to reflect on your own life and turn from the lesser things that have caused you to divide from others in the Body of Christ. Look at your home, work, community. What practical ways can you cooperate with the work of the Lord to see unity increase?

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 8

Read: Ephesians 1:11

Talk about a run on sentence! The words "chosen" and "predestined" used in verse 11 serve to modify a thought that isn't complete for another three verses. The thought is that you were included in Christ when you heard and believed the gospel and then marked by the Holy Spirit.

Being chosen, or what some call elected, means we are all invited into a plan where God, through the Holy Spirit, is working everything toward his purposes. It's exciting news to think our chosenness is God inviting us to join him in accomplishing his will. The well-respected pastor and missiologist, Lesslie Newbigin, said it well, "To be elect in Christ Jesus... means to be incorporated into his mission to the world, to be the bearer of God's saving purpose for his whole world, to be the sign and the agent and the first fruit of his blessed kingdom which is for all." The Holy Spirit has sealed us for such great purpose—one in which he himself joins with us. What a great inheritance we have as prodigals who have returned home to find not only a good father waiting for us, but one that saves us and authorizes us to join him.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 9

Read: Ephesians 1:12

Picture yourself as a child the night before a big snowstorm is coming. Remember the feeling of expectation as you pressed your forehead against the cold window. The fluttering of excitement in your stomach as you prayed that the news reporter was right and that school would be closed. THIS is the feeling of hope!

Hope in Jesus is the foundation of our faith. Without hope we fail to live the life that God intended for us. Hope is the confidence and trust that God will always love us, will never forsake us, and that we were saved when Jesus died on the cross. Jesus is our salvation, and He models how to live a life that praises and glorifies God. In Him we know and long for the day when we will sit at the table in heaven beside Him. I encourage you to seek Jesus like a child waiting for the first snowflake to fall. With expectation, desire, urgency, truth, excitement, and hope which is found in trusting Jesus Christ.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 10

Read: Ephesians 1:13–14

The Holy Spirit has a job description, and He has invited us to join Him in fulfilling it. Jesus gives us a hint into the Spirit's role when he tells us that he will convict of sin, lead us into truth, comfort and advocate for us, and empower us for mission in the world. Oh, how we need all those things! The book of Ephesians goes on to remind us of our role in advancing God's kingdom and standing against the kingdom of darkness. That is no small opportunity (or ask), and to accomplish it you will need a fresh empowerment of the Spirit. Think of it like this, you can only be as generous as you have money in the bank. No matter how talented or gifted you or I may be, we stand little chance to advance ourselves in this world, much less the larger purposes of God's kingdom. To help us, God gave us what he promised—providing us His Holy Spirit to empower us for such things. Ask the Lord for a deeper encounter with His Spirit and His incomparably great power for those who believe.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 11

Read: Ephesians 1:15–23

“What you think about God is the most important thing about you.” -
A.W. Tozer.

Our battle is a battle over the knowledge of God. Satan doesn't actually have the power to harm God, but he does have the power to distort God's image to us as sons and daughters. We need the spirit of wisdom and revelation and the eyes of our heart enlightened to have a correct understanding of Him.

To gain that proper understanding, we need to prioritize the knowledge of Him over all other knowledge that exists. He is revealing Himself to us in thousands of ways every day, but we need to actively look for Him all around us.

This proper perspective of Him also comes with promises. He promises that in Him we have fresh hope, a revelation of our glorious inheritance, and the same power that raised Christ from the dead! Under His authority, we will then properly represent Him and display His glory.

The goal is that “the knowledge of the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14)

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 12

Read: Ephesians 2:1-7

Verses one through seven represent a single run-on sentence in the original language. The subject of this entire sentence is the word God in verse four; notice the symmetry.

We were dead (v. 1)

We were living in darkness (v. 2-3)

We were deserving of wrath (v. 3b)

But God (v.4)

Made us alive with Christ (v. 5)

Raised us up with Christ (v. 6)

Seated us with Christ (v. 6b)

Because of God we are both “in Christ,” as described early in chapter one, and “with Christ” as described in this chapter. This is not redundant language. “In Christ” speaks of our positional union to Him. “With Christ” describes our access to a heavenly status and power that overcomes sin and death. He was made alive, so we are made alive. He was raised up, so we are raised up. He is seated with God, so we are seated with God. “With Christ” we are a demonstration of His resurrection power on the earth today.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 13

Read: Ephesians 2:8-10

We are saved by faith! This is a foundational truth affirmed in many well-known passages including the beginning of Ephesians 2:8 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” And yet, it can be startling to see that all the scriptures teaching us about the final judgment say we will be judged by our works?! Jesus, Paul, Peter and John all teach that while we are saved by faith, we are judged by our works. This is a sobering statement and can even seem contradictory to our Gospel message of being “saved through faith.” How can both statements be true?

The truth that reconciles this seeming contradiction is that genuine faith is transformative. We are saved by faith, and this faith changes every aspect of our identity. Ephesians 2:10 describes this transformative process as “God’s workmanship” resulting in “good works prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Today, allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you not only the special way He has created you anew in Christ Jesus but also the good works He has prepared for you to walk in. Works you are uniquely created to do that glorify Him and manifest Jesus to the world.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 14

Read: Ephesians 2:11-12

There is power in proximity! A grizzly bear 300 ft away is different than a grizzly bear 3 ft away (yikes!). In a similar manner, being in the same room as a dear friend is much different than a phone call with that friend. In Christ, we have been brought near to God. Any delusion of distant proximity with our Father in Heaven was entirely redefined through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is good news! Ephesians 2:13 states, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ." No longer should we cling to any "lesser labels" to inform our personal (or corporate) identity as God's children. We have all been invited to feast and commune with God at the table He has prepared for us. He calls us "members of His household" (v. 19).

God's ultimate desire for His people is to be built together to become a dwelling place where He lives by His Spirit. This is not just our function, but it is our primary identity. Give thanks today for all that Jesus has accomplished.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 15

Read: Ephesians 3:1-13

The mystery of the gospel is that it is accessible to all people; it is within reach! Paul describes it three different ways. First, that the Gentiles are in fact heirs with Israel. In other words, God's gift is for those who appear to be outsiders just as much as it is for those on the inside. Second, Paul says that we are all members together of one body. The mystery of the gospel leaves no room for the rugged individual. We are members of one body and need each other. The body is dependent on the head, who is Christ. Third, we share together in the promise. Part of the shared promise is the Holy Spirit. God gives His spirit freely to all his children. The mystery of the gospel was not always fully known and understood but rather revealed through His church in the proper time. As His church, we are encouraged to access God with boldness and confidence. We can speak freely and openly with our Father in Heaven. This boldness is not presumption, rather it is faith in the accomplished work of Jesus.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 16

Read: Ephesians 3:14-21

There is a term that any adventure junky would know: spelunking! Spelunking is the exploration of caves. As we meditate on these verses, imagine the love of Christ as an expansive cave. You look inside and can't see the end. How high, how wide, how deep, how long is it? As you begin to explore the cave, you are filled with excitement and wonder! What treasure is waiting for you around each corner? As you continue exploring, strength and endurance are needed to overcome the mental and physical obstacles that arise to find your way through the cave.

Paul's prayer is that we, who are rooted and grounded in Christ's love, would together be strengthened with power by the Holy Spirit to never stop exploring how high, how wide, how deep, and how long His love is. This is not a love that can be learned through knowledge. as verse 19 states, it is a "love that surpasses all knowledge." This is an invitation from the Lord to experience and explore His love! As you dive into the cave of Christ's love and begin to experience it for yourself, my challenge to you is to never lose the wonder and adventure of exploring Christ's deep love for you.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 17

Read: Ephesians 4:1-16

The Old Testament book of Nehemiah is one of my favorites! Nehemiah was such an incredible leader, and his life and work is an example to us all. But there is one defining moment in the book of Nehemiah that is easy to miss if we are not careful. It is found in Nehemiah 8:1 which states, "And all the people gathered as one..." The unity of the people of God before the Lord released a transforming power that brought revival to the people.

The passage from Ephesians returns to the theme of unity among the people of God. "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father over all..." We continue to grow in unity until we "attain to the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God..." Psalm 133:1 "How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."

How is the work of unity in your own life and surroundings? What steps can you take to see a greater fulfillment of this Ephesian passage?

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 18

Read: Ephesians 4:17–32

A fascinating natural phenomenon to observe is the moment when a butterfly emerges from its chrysalis. There is a tangible sense of awe and wonder as this newly transformed creature exits its temporary home and enters into the world. The butterfly no longer carries the same characteristics that it did as a caterpillar. It has been given a new identity from which flows new functionality.

Ephesians 4:22–24 states, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

To truly be in Christ is to live in the state of a transformed life. Putting on the “new self” will impact our desires, personal behaviors, and our relationships. As children of God, we have been given a new identity from which flows new functionality. May Holy Spirit empower you to think like Jesus, look like Jesus, sound like Jesus, and love like Jesus this day!

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 19

Read: Ephesians 5:1–21

I love the way that Scripture uses the word “walk” to speak of the practical application of the truth of God in our lives. The New Testament writer Paul uses this word in this way 31 times in his letters. The truth is, God’s ways and God’s Word should make a practical difference in the way that we live our lives.

This chapter begins, “Be imitators of God... And walk in love...” God is love! He defines the practical application of love as we see the way He leads us and responds to us. Love is more than a feeling, it is an action. According to God’s definition, love is intentional action done for the benefit of another.

Want to know more? I’d encourage you to read 1 John 3:1–24. Notice the source of love, the definition of love, and the action of love. Then “walk” it out!

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____



DAY 20

Read: Ephesians 5:22–6:9

Life in Christ is all about making adjustments in our relationships: wives and husbands, children and parents, employer and employees, merchant and customer, and in making these adjustments successfully, we fight the contagious feelings of selfishness. In fact, have you considered that learning to be unselfish may be the greatest lesson God wants to teach us through our relationships? How true that fewer things in life challenge us more than relationships. Therefore, we need to keep inviting the power of the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts daily, making us more like Jesus. Then as we grow in our walk with God, making the adjustments for more of Him in more of us, it will be inevitable that our relationships will be impacted.

The test of real love in any relationship isn't what we say, it is how we act. So, what adjustments is the Spirit highlighting today in your relationship with either God or others? Real love is expressed through small, daily decisions to adjust and meet another's needs. By the way, the test of real love isn't what we say, it is how we act in relating with others.

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

DAY 21

Read: Ephesians 6:10–24

The battle in front of us is a spiritual one and not against difficult people and circumstances. God gives us His strength and power to fight and also sets us up for victory by giving us instruction (every piece of His armor) needed to defeat our enemy, satan.

To be successful, we must read and know the truth of God’s Word, and stand on His promises (belt). Next, we clothe ourselves with Christ and apply His blood which is our righteousness and protection (breastplate). We are required to be alert and ready to say “yes” to whatever God is asking of us, being willing to trust His leadership and direction (feet fitted with readiness). Faith is needed to believe that God always has our best interest in mind and wants to make the impossible possible (shield). This is a safeguard from the enemy’s darts of doubt and unbelief. Salvation protects our minds against hopelessness (helmet), and using God’s Word to battle against lies of the enemy is crucial (sword), just like Jesus did when tested in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11).

Then, pray anytime and anywhere with the help of Holy Spirit to be strong, valiant, and victorious!

FIRST 15

Today I express my thanks for: _____

FINAL 15

Today I saw the activity of God in: _____

THE LORD'S PRAYER



One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1).

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" (Matthew 6:9-13).

"OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN..."

1. CONNECT WITH GOD RELATIONALLY

You have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15 NLT).

God loves for us to call Him our Father. Establish your intimate relationship with Him and thank Him for the relationship you have with Him.

"...HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME..."

2. WORSHIP HIS NAME

God's name is a place of protection—the righteous can run there and be safe (Proverbs 18:10 MSG).

What are His Names?

Righteousness—He makes me clean.

Sanctifier—He has called me and set me apart.

Healer —He heals all my diseases.

Banner of Victory—He has defeated my enemy.

Shepherd—He speaks to me and leads me.

Peace—He is my peace in every storm.

"...YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN..."

3. PRAY HIS AGENDA FIRST

He will always give you all you need from day to day if you will make the Kingdom of God your primary concern (Luke 12:31 TLB).

God's Priorities:

Saving the lost

Guiding those in authority—parents, spiritual, governmental, and workplace leaders

His will in us

"...GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD..."

4. DEPEND ON HIM FOR EVERYTHING

I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth! (Psalm 121:1–2 NLT).

Ask God for what you want and need, and then trust Him for the answer.

*"...FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE
FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS..."*

5. GET YOUR HEART RIGHT WITH GOD AND PEOPLE

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Ask God to check your heart and motives. Receive His forgiveness for any area that He brings to mind. Forgive anyone who has offended you in any way. You can even forgive people in advance.

*"...AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL..."*

6. ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).

Take our stand against the enemy, and fight the good fight of faith. Every lie that the enemy has told you should be replaced with the truth of God's Word.

*"...FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM AND
THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER."*

7. EXPRESS FAITH IN GOD'S ABILITY

"Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you" (Jeremiah 32:17).

End your prayer time by reminding yourself of God's ability. Return to praise and make your faith declarations.

"Yours is the Kingdom"—All rule belongs to You.

"Yours is the Power"—All mightiness flows from You.

"Yours is the Glory"—Your victory shall be complete.



Ephrata Community
CHURCH