

Turning Upward

Loving the Lord Through
Fasting

Turning Upward
A series focused on women

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my Parents. Thank you for building a home around Jesus. Thank you for teaching me how to Love Him. Thank you for your example of Christian living.

This book is also dedicated to my Pastors and Church Family at Faith Bible Church. Thank you for your support and encouragement during the process of writing. And thank you for the opportunity to minister.

And to my brother and friend, Ian Thornton; thank you for your selfless servant's heart, your constant encouragement, but most of all, for ALWAYS pointing me toward Jesus.

Natalie Crawley

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PREFACE

Find below introductory summaries for the seven lessons presented in this book.

Lesson One: ***Jesus – Victory through Fasting***

Lesson One is about the 40 day fast of Jesus Christ found in both Matthew and Luke. In this lesson we see that because Jesus was willing to push aside his own desires and longings for a period of time Satan was unable to tempt Him. After all, who can be tempted when their desires and longings are set aside and their view is completely turned upward and focused on the Father? We see Jesus use His fast as a weapon against the attack of His enemy. We see in this chapter that Jesus' time in fasting left Him changed as he finally left the wilderness in "the Power of the Holy Spirit." He was changed by the power of the Holy Spirit and ready to continue his Ministry of Redemption in this world.

Lesson Two: ***Nehemiah – Finding a place for Grief through of Fasting***

In the story of Nehemiah we find a man with a broken and grieving heart. And he finds a place for his grief as he turns upward and searches out the Heart of His Father through fasting. What we find in this story is a remarkable moment of Relationship as Nehemiah cries out the very grief and pain that His Father is feeling over the broken relationship with His people.

Is there a better place to bring our broken and grieving heart than to the One who formed it with His very Hands? In this lesson we see Nehemiah take his view off of his circumstances and focus his view on his Father. And because his upward view was undistracted through fasting he was able to see the plans and purposes of His Father.

Lesson Three: ***Elijah – Understanding God's Vision through Fasting***

In the story of Elijah we see a man fall from a place of tremendous Victory into a place of deep depression and seeming failure. Elijah came to a place where his wrong view of himself distracted Him from seeing the will of God in his life. Elijah was unable to take his view off of his circumstances and found himself wounded and weeping under a tree. It is there that God met with His wounded son and shared with Elijah the truth about who He saw when He looked at his son. It was then that He was also able to share the vision He had for Elijah's life. It was in a time of fasting that Elijah was able to take on a new vision – God's vision. It is because Elijah was forced to take his eyes off himself and turn upward that his life was changed and he continued to live on in a victorious ministry.

Lesson Four: ***David – Returning Upward during a time of Repentance through Fasting***

From a very young age David's heart was a pure place of Relationship with God. But there came a time in his life when David's heart became ravaged by the sins that he had committed. In the story of David we find a man whose upward view was completely distracted by his own desires. We see David's heart, soul, mind and body turn upward in repentance. And God cleans him up, and restores his heart to the beautiful and

pure place of relationship He intended. This is a story of Grace, Mercy and Love between a Father and a son.

Lesson Five: ***Paul – Transformation in a time of Fasting***

Paul was a man who was driven by his passion and desires. In fact Paul's passions and desires brought him to a place where he was fighting against the very One he believed he was fighting for. In this story of transformation we watch as a man full of passion is transformed until his only passion is to know Christ. This is a beautiful fast. It is the only fast that takes place after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and it is the only fast where we see a complete and total transformation take place in the life of the one fasting. In this fast Paul turns completely upward until God's will becomes his will, God's desires become his desires, God's steps become his steps. During this time of fasting we truly see Paul become a new creation, the old has passed away and behold, the new has come!

Lesson Six: ***Daniel – Intense Intimacy through Fasting***

Daniel was one of the finest examples of faithfulness that we see in Scripture. In this lesson we look at Daniel's last fast that is recorded for us. We see that even before this fast begins Daniel is in a place of intimacy and depth of relationship with God that most of us never imagine. As Daniel turns upward in this fast we see him choose to bear the burdens of love for his people and his God. But God is with Daniel, sustaining him through the entire time. Daniel's view of God was so clear during this fast, that this time of fasting becomes one of the most intense spiritual experiences recorded in the Bible. During this fast God reveals not only Himself to Daniel but also some of the most important prophecies for the people of God.

Lesson Seven: *Turning Upward*

In this lesson we discuss the importance of finding the similarities in all of the fasts that we have studied in this book. It is in the similarities that we can find the purpose of fasting in our own walk of Faith. In this lesson we talk about the deeper and richer relationship these individuals were able to have with God because of their time of fasting. We discuss how we are able to see clearer the plans and purposes of God when we purposefully position ourselves in a place where we remove the distractions of our own desires and turn our focus upward. And we talk about the Magnificence that God desires to create in us when we empty ourselves of our own desires and live a life in which we desire to always be Turning Upward.

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LESSON 1

Jesus – Victory Through Fasting

Why do we fast? As I tried to answer this question, I found that there were more questions than answers when it comes to fasting. There doesn't seem to be a particular order or routine that is neatly laid out in scripture. Where did this practice come from? What is its purpose? And what does the Bible tell us about fasting?

This particular study is not necessarily to determine how and when we should fast. It's not to create a set of rules to follow in order to achieve a certain desired result from a fast. What I would like to do is simply look at the men and women in scripture and study and examine their experience with fasting; and in doing so I'm hoping we can catch a glimpse of the exchange that took place in their relationship with the Father.

I believe that the ultimate purpose of a fast is not necessarily to achieve a desired result, but it is to place ourselves in a position where the Spirit of God can speak to us in an intimate and

personal way. We fast so that we can experience God not only with our heart and mind; but with our soul and body as well.

Write out Mark 12:20

Scot McKnight wrote the book *Fasting*, in which he states “Fasting is the body talking what the Spirit yearns, what the soul longs for and what the mind knows to be true.” During a time of fasting we are not focused on our own needs and desires. Instead we put ourselves in a position where we can turn upward in worship and sacrifice.

So then, when we purposefully position ourselves in such a manner, when we come to a place where our own personal desires are no longer distracting our upward vision, what then will be the result? How will that affect the relationship with the One to whom our longings are focused? Answering those questions will be the focus of this study.

I wanted to begin this study with Daniel. I wanted to learn about the fast in Daniel 10 - it is fascinating! However, while preparing I felt that God wanted to take us in a different direction for our first lesson. He wants us to begin at the beginning.

Write out John 1:1

At some point in this study we will get into Daniel's fast and when we do, I'm expecting the Holy Spirit to blow us away. So keep that in your mind, and be excited about it because there will be a proper time for it, but now let's spend some time with Jesus and His fast.

Look at Luke 4. Now, this passage is usually titled something like "The Temptation of Christ." However, in this lesson we are going to look at it a little differently. In this lesson we are going to look at it as the fast of Christ. Please take a moment to read through Luke 4 and Matthew 4.

I want us to keep in mind that fasting is a time when our selfish desires are momentarily pushed out of the way and we are in a position where our entire selves have the potential to sincerely worship our Father. During the fasting time our desires become our sacrifice of worship.

We need to look both at Matthew 4:1 and Luke 4:1 to understand the purpose of Jesus' fast.

What does Luke 4:1 tell us about who led Jesus to the wilderness?

What does Matthew 4:1 tell us about why Jesus was led into the wilderness?

Luke tells us that Jesus was "...led by the Spirit into the wilderness" Matthew tells us He was led "... to be tempted." So basically, Jesus was in for a battle with Satan.

Now we don't know the back-story, but we do know that Satan has a tendency to ask permission to battle with God's chosen. Most famously he did it in Job. But do you remember also Jesus' words to Peter the night before the crucifixion?

What does Jesus say to Peter in Luke 22:31?

"Satan demanded to have you that he may sift you like wheat." Several times in the Bible we see that Satan is given free reign to mess with people. Now, when Jesus was preparing to begin His ministry on earth, I think it's fair to assume that Satan was asking to take a whack at Him. Look at this closely, if he could

get Jesus out of the way before His ministry even began then there would be no way for the Redemption of Man. The evil one would be victorious in his plot to destroy and devour the people that God loved so dearly. The Bible tells us that Satan goes "...to and fro over the earth...seeking whom he may devour." If we go back to the night of Jesus' birth, we can see that Satan was trying to stop Him even then and that is why we saw a horrific outpouring of evil in the mass murder of innocent babies. Thirty years later, Satan knew Jesus was about to begin His Redemptive work on earth as an adult so his first strategy to derail that purpose was to tempt Him. If Satan could get Him to sin, He who knew no sin, then there would be no redemption for mankind. The winner would then be Satan.

Let's look closely at Luke 4:2. "Being tempted for forty days by the devil and in those days He ate nothing. And when they were ended, He was hungry."

What we see here is the purpose of this fast. We see that Jesus' fast is in direct response to the Spiritual attack taking place. He chose not to eat during this time as a defense against the attack. This fast was His weapon.

Why?

The Spirit led Him to the desert. God was aware of the fact that Jesus would be battling in that wilderness. And Jesus chooses to fast in response to being attacked by Satan. What, not eat? Wouldn't that make Him weak in a time of battle? Wouldn't that mess with his mind? And oh, the pain of hunger! What was He thinking?

The human side of Christ had to be set aside so that the Divine could have Victory over the one set on destroying Him.

Take a moment to copy down that last sentence. And as you write it out, ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight into what that means. Write out any thoughts or insights you might have as you consider that statement.

Hmmm...that's a little heavy, I know, but I promise He will help us through this.

We are still in verse 2 – "...and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry."

When the forty days were over, then Jesus was hungry. But until the battle was over, Jesus used this fast as a weapon against the temptations of Satan. It is important to remember that Jesus wasn't alone—do you remember who led Him there? _____ The Spirit did. Remember, the purpose of Him being in the wilderness was that He would be tempted, so where it says, "...when they ended he was hungry," it seems to me that Luke is saying that the battle

was over, He no longer needed to fast because Satan and Jesus, led by the Spirit, had finished the battle.

For forty days Jesus fought on. He was under direct attack and in response He chose to fast. Look. Satan's battle plan was based on derailing Jesus' purpose by tempting Him to sin. So, Jesus responds by setting aside His personal desires and longings and focuses His entire soul, mind, spirit, and body on the Father. How could He be tempted when He had set aside His needs and desires?

What a brilliant Strategy! What a brilliant Weapon this fast was!

How frustrating it must have been to the tempter to be tempting One who had set aside His own personal desires, and had even neutralized the tempter's weapon of "need." Can you hear him strategizing? *But He needs to eat. That's not a desire, it's a need of the body.* But Jesus had given up that need as sacrifice of worship; it could no longer be used as an angle of attack.

So while the tempter's gaze was fixed on his Target, the Target's gaze was fixed on the Father. Do you see?

While the tempter's gaze was fixed on his Target, the Target's gaze was fixed on the Father, rendering the enemy's weapon of temptation USELESS. Brilliant!

This is a good place for us to stop for a moment and consider the idea of Jesus using fasting as a weapon against temptation. What do you think of the idea that Jesus did not feed his

other aspect of this for a moment. What do you think is going to happen to a person who has denied themselves and focused intently on the Father for forty days, winning battle after battle, Victory after Victory? Would they become tired from the battle? Would they become weary and battle worn? Or, would they have experienced the Wonder that comes from knowing God in such an intimate and personal way. God had supernaturally strengthened Him during this time, God had been Provision, God had been Victory and Strategy, God had been Warrior, God had been All Sufficient, God had been Joy in the Suffering and a Door of Hope in the Wilderness. Jesus knew even more closely the One to Whom He had fixed His gaze for so long as the enemy hammered away at Him.

Can you think of a “wilderness” time in your own life? What truths did you learn about God during that time? Did the lessons you learned in the wilderness prepare you for another time in your life that was still to come?

You see, Jesus' weapon during the fast was to humble Himself—temporarily set aside His desires and needs during the time of battle and look at his Father, and THEY Won.

“And when the battle ended, He was hungry.”

Jesus again felt that need. The Fast was over—and guess who was back—the tempter.

Do you see that the fast that was initially in response to the battle had now prepared Him to fight? That time of looking upward—seeing clearly Who was on his side, seeing Victory after Victory, seeing the Authority with Whom He walked, had prepared Him to handle the one set on destroying Him. Can you hear the evil one? *What? He’s hungry? He has laid down His weapon? Now is my chance!*

But little did he know that Jesus had not laid down His Weapon. During his time of fasting, during His time of complete upward focus with His mind, soul, spirit and BODY, He had become even more equipped to fight—He hadn’t laid down His weapon—He picked up some new ones.

(vv 3-4) “Make this stone into bread.” Thinking now he could tempt Him. Oh, look closely at verse four!!!! “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every Word of God.”

Let me ask you something. Who is Jesus? He is WORD! John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

Do you see what weapon He used here? Truth. He spoke the truth about Himself. It seems the truth about Himself might be a little something He picked up over the forty days of intimate

and complete, mind, body, soul, and spirit focus on the Father.
~Victory

Why is that so significant? In a battle with the enemy it is imperative to know the Truth about ourselves, and Women, our Father is the ONLY One who can speak the Truth about who we are into our hearts, mind, soul, and spirit. We need to know the Truth. Who do we belong to? And in Whose Authority do we walk? How beautiful it is to have that Whispered into our ear when we remove the distractions of our own needs and desires and our entire person is turned upward in worship and sacrifice.

Just take a moment right now. Close your eyes, and sit in the presence of the Father. Turn your heart, soul, and mind upward for a moment. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you. Allow the Whispering Voice of the Father to speak to you and share with you the Truth about who you are to Him. What did He say? What did He share? Write it down so you don't forget and walk in the freedom of that Truth

.

(Matthew 4:5-8)

Then the devil took Him to the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command His angels concerning you, and On their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone."

Excuse me; did Satan just try to use the Word against the Word? Satan, Bad move because Jesus just brings down the Smack of His entire Authority when He says, ***"Do not put the LORD your God to the test!"*** Oh yes Jesus did just claim the ENTIRE Authority of GOD. I wonder if the earth shook when He said that. ~Victory

Do you see that in this verse Jesus claims to be God? Go back and read that verse again and explain in a few sentences how Jesus' statement shows His claim to be God.

(Matthew 4:7-10)

The tempter tries one more time. Don't underestimate the persistence of Satan in his desire to destroy us. *"I will give you all of this if you will fall down and worship me."* Jesus had just spent forty days offering his entire heart, soul, mind, and body

as a sacrifice of worship to the true and living God. There was no question; this fast had prepared Him to walk deftly through this battlefield.

What was Jesus response to Satan in Matthew 4:10?

Be Gone Satan, for I know the One that I Worship and He alone shall I serve.

And with that command Satan had to leave. Luke 4:13 tell us that, "...he departed from Him until an opportune time."

~Victory

And Matthew 4:13 tells us that after Satan left, the angels came and were ministering to Him. What a beautiful celebration of victory that must have been out there in the Wilderness when the angels came to minister to the One who had just fought and Won. How amazing that time of fellowship must have been among Jesus and those mighty Warriors of His.

The story doesn't end there. We see in Luke that Satan does continue to look for a more opportune time, but Jesus returned from the wilderness "...in the Power of the Holy Spirit." His return was marked by living and ministering in POWER. His time of fasting left Him changed.

Turning Upward

Remember, our goal in this study is not necessarily to come up with a personal system of fasting. But rather it is to look at passages where we see men and women of the Bible fasting and try to catch a glimpse of the exchange that took place between them and the Father because of the fast. What are some *glimpses* we were able to catch in this lesson in the relationship between the Father and the Son?

What we saw in this passage is that Jesus used fasting as a weapon to fight against an attack of Satan. We saw that it was a response to something that was occurring in His life. How might we apply this idea to our lives?

I stated at the beginning that the focus of this study would be to answer three questions. Based on the scripture we studied, how can we answer the following questions? When we come to a place where our own personal desires are no longer distracting our upward vision, what then will be the result? How will that affect the relationship with the One on whom all our longings are focused?

LESSON 2

Nehemiah – Finding a Place For Grief

This is our second lesson in our study of fasting. We are going to look at a fast experienced by Nehemiah. Before we begin, I would like to restate the premise of this study which isn't about finding the proper way to fast, or even to find a reason to fast. We are looking at the practice of fasting as it played out in the lives of individuals in scripture. And in doing so, we can hopefully catch a glimpse of the exchange that took place between them and the Father.

Again, I believe the ultimate purpose of a fast is not to achieve a desired result. Instead, it is all about the relationship between the person and God. Fasting is when we purposefully position ourselves to be undistracted by the desires that exist in us and we focus our longings upward. While fasting we have the opportunity to express our Love and Worship for the Fa-

ther, not only with our heart and mind, but with our body as well.

In Lesson One we saw how Jesus pushed aside His physical desires and focused those longings on His Father. In Lesson Two we are going to see how Nehemiah pushed aside the longings of his heart and focused those longings on His Father and in doing so positioned himself to see more clearly and intimately the One on whom He was focused.

Write out Proverbs 4:23

“Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.” There is abundance in our hearts. It is in our hearts that we love deeply, we long desperately, we bear the pain that we can not put into words. Our hearts carry the secrets of our soul, the things that are visible only to our Father. Our hearts are the precious place of Relationship with our Savior. “Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

As we look at the fast of Nehemiah we are going to see the heart as a precious meeting place between the brokenness and longing of Nehemiah and the Healing Hand of the One who created and knows the human heart most intimately.

Please take a moment to read through Nehemiah Chapter 1.

It's important for us to understand the context of this story in order to understand the longings and desires that existed in the heart of Nehemiah. This story takes place after the time of the kings in the Old Testament. The Assyrians had come and taken Israel captive. Later, Judah was captured by Babylon. God's chosen people had been scattered. However, there were the faithful few. We saw the stories of Faithfulness in the lives of Daniel and his friends, in Esther and her people, and in Ezra as he courageously began to lead a remnant of faithful back to Jerusalem to restore the temple.

You see, the kingdom that God had graciously set up for the Israelites had been destroyed, but not without plenty of warning and coaxing by Word of the prophets; and not without forgiveness and mercy from the heart of the Father. However, Israel was unwilling to keep the covenant that they made with God in the desert after their dramatic escape from years of slavery.

Find and write out the covenant between God and His people in Exodus 19:3-8

Loving the Lord Through Fasting

After years of unfaithfulness in this covenant relationship with God, He said He would have to scatter them, but He also always provided a Door of Hope and He shared that He would one day bring them back together again.

Read Jeremiah 25:4-11

Write out the actions of God to warn His People of coming judgment.

Now, write the people's response to God's warning.

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Read Jeremiah 29:10-14

According to these verses, what Hope did God give his people?

“I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.” Okay, I know I’m giving you a lot of background, but it is so crucial for us to understand the heart of Nehemiah. So, God poured out His Heart to His people for years, constantly asking for them to return to Him. His Hand was forced to execute the judgment they deserved. He mercifully held back this punishment for a long time, but He was unable to continue to hold back the wave of destruction that sin had brought into the lives of His chosen people. And even so, His final message to those who were about to receive the consequences for their unfaithful behavior, was one of Hope. The Lord declared that He would bring them back to the place from which He sent them. He would bring them back to Jerusalem. And we saw that beginning when Zerrubabel and Ezra led small groups of the faithful back to beautify the temple and get it in order for worship.

Before we move forward, just take a moment to be in awe of a God who is so full of Grace, Mercy, and Steadfast Love that even in times of deserved destruction His Heart desires to Forgive. Be in awe of God, who leaves open the Door of Hope in the Wilderness. “For God showed His Love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) Take a moment to speak with Him the greatness of His Mercy and Grace in your life.

Loving the Lord Through Fasting

Read Ezra 1:1-4

Whose prophecy was being fulfilled at this time?

What specific actions did Cyrus, king of Persia request of the Israelites?

Although a small remnant began to return to Jerusalem, there were many who remained in Persia. Nehemiah remained in Susa, the capital city of Persia, and waited for word on the temple—the dwelling place of God. If the temple was to be

restored, would God then draw all of the people back to Him? Nehemiah's heart longed for the day. His heart and mind were set on it. He was waiting for the promise of God to come true.

(vs 2) Then one day Nehemiah's brother and some others returned to Susa. Nehemiah could hardly wait for word and he asked them to tell him what was happening in Judah. Has the temple been restored? Would Jerusalem be ready for the return of her people?

And the answer he received broke his heart. *"The remnant there is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."* Why did this break him so? Because Nehemiah knew God; Nehemiah trusted in the promises of God. Nehemiah trusted in the Grace and Mercy of God. Nehemiah was faithful to God and loved Him. Nehemiah loved His people and He longed for them to be made right with God again. He longed to worship God in the Temple. He longed to be back in the land of promise, the land that God had given them. He longed to walk again in the streets of the city where David had once leapt and danced as the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the city. Nehemiah longed for his people to return to this city where Solomon had built the Temple to God, the Temple where the people could meet with the very Presence of God.

Write out Nehemiah 1:4

(vs 4) *“As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of Heaven.”* This statement stirred my soul when I read it. This man was bringing his broken and grieving heart to the Father. Any of us who have done so, know the pain of it. Nehemiah did not hide his pain. He did not put on a false smile in front of the bearers of the bad news. Nehemiah did not complain about the unfairness of the circumstances. No, Nehemiah brought his broken and grieving heart to the Father. He offered the brokenness of his heart to God, never doubting the promises of God, never losing his faith, but only expressing his pain in an honest and vulnerable way.

And in Nehemiah’s open and honest grieving we must, we must understand the blessing we have that this story was recorded for us, because we get to watch Relationship take place in the heart of Nehemiah. You see, we get the benefit of seeing that when a person brings a grieving heart to our Father, the One who formed our Hearts with His own Hands and the One who knows every bit and broken piece of it, is the Only One who knows how to Gently heal the areas that leave us weeping. And dear women, that is Relationship.

Do you remember earlier when we said that our hearts are where our Relationship with God takes place? Then we must understand that our hearts are of utmost importance to God.

Turning Upward

Don't move on in this study if you have brokenness or pain in your heart that you need to bring to God. Enter into Relationship with Him. Be open, honest, and vulnerable with Him right now, and allow His Healing Hands to minister to your heart. You might want to write some things down or you might not.

Remember fasting is a time when we choose to offer our soul, heart, mind, and bodies as worship and sacrifice to the Father. And that is what we see happen here with Nehemiah.

The longings in Nehemiah's heart were deep and strong, and they were good desires. He didn't want anything wrong; he wished his people to be back in a covenant relationship with the Father. Nehemiah loved his nation and he loved his God. Seeing the brokenness in the relationship between God and his people broke Nehemiah, he was broken to the point where he wept and mourned for many days.

He saw the brokenness and he grieved it.
He heard of the destruction and He grieved it.
He saw what the nation could have been had they not walked away and he grieved it.

When we really take a look at Nehemiah's heart, we see that his desire and God's desire are the same. Throughout the Old Testament we see God grieving over the loss of relationship with his people. In fact in Hosea 4:3 we see that God's grief over the sin of his people was evident even in his creation. "The land mourned."

God's own heart was broken and grieving. God's heart was broken before the captivity took place, during the captivity, and afterward along with Nehemiah. There was no better place for Nehemiah to bring his grief than to The One who grieved even more deeply than he. Surely the heart is the precious place of Relationship, and nowhere can we see a clearer picture of that than here, as Nehemiah's heart cries out the very pain of his Father. This fast was a special time for God and his faithful son, Nehemiah.

What I find so fascinating about Nehemiah's response to his grief is that he never fell into selfish, self pity. Nehemiah responded to his grief by worshipping the God of Heaven with all of his heart, soul, mind, and body. Nehemiah did not take the longings of his heart and focus them on himself. He didn't cry, "Why is this happening to me? I just don't understand." Instead, Nehemiah took the longings of his heart and during his fast directed those longings upward and worshiped the Father with everything he had; his heart, soul, mind, and BODY.

And we will see that because he did this, his understanding of their bleak circumstances wasn't any clearer, although I think he picked up on some perspective; BUT what he was able to

do was to see clearly the God who He was worshipping. While fasting, he pushed aside his own needs and desires and focused all of his longings upward, and what he saw was beautiful. I believe that when we seek out God in such a complete and purposeful way, God will reveal Himself and His heart to us.

Go back to Jeremiah 29:13. Write out God's promise to those who seek Him with all their heart as Nehemiah did.

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Nehemiah's prayer is recorded next in this lesson and in reading through the prayer we can see the beauty of this relationship.

(vs 5) "O Lord God of Heaven, the Great and Awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments..."

Nehemiah is able to see God clearly. His grief did not muddle the characteristics of God. Do you see what I'm saying? Often times when we become discontented with the Father it is because we have focused on our circumstances, allowing them to distort God's true characteristics.

God never changes. We do. And here we see that Nehemiah knew exactly the One to whom he was directing his worship, his sacrifice, and the desires of his heart. Nehemiah was crying out and mourning the loss of the covenant relationship and here he states, “Awesome God who keeps Covenant and steadfast love...” Nehemiah knew that his God was Faithful. He was also honest about who had the problem—those who didn’t keep covenant—the people.

“Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night...”

When did Nehemiah stop praying? When did he cease in bringing his heart to God?

What did Nehemiah ask of God while Nehemiah prayed unceasingly for his people?

God is present and attentive. Look, the people at this time were scattered, and Nehemiah was away from Jerusalem. How important it was for God to show Himself present and attentive. Nehemiah was crying out his heart to God. That is

important to God! When someone is in great grief like that, when they are bringing their heart to the Father and crying out to Him, it is important to know that He is present and He is attentive to our call. We see in these verses that Nehemiah was not crying out in vain, but that God was very present and attentive to the grieving of Nehemiah's heart.

"...confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses."

God is Just. Nehemiah is humble at the feet of the Father. He knew who God was and he came to him in a spirit of humility in this fast. He had focused his own desires and longings upward toward the Father instead of inward. In doing this he saw the greatness and justice of God and the sinfulness and weakness of humanity and he began to confess his sins, those of his family, and his nation. Here is where we see Nehemiah gain a bit of perspective. Having a clearer view of his sin and the sin of the people gave him a better understanding of why the circumstances were now so very difficult.

How is it that when Nehemiah acknowledged his sinful state and the sins of his nation he was able to gain some perspective about why the circumstances had become so difficult for his people?

“...but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.”

God is Mercy. God will leave open the Door of Hope. Nehemiah trusted that God loved them and would be Faithful to them. Nehemiah trusted God in the covenant relationship that God would be Faithful to His side of the promise. Nehemiah trusted that God would gather them and bring them back to His chosen place, and that He would dwell with them again. Perhaps it was in this meeting place with God, in this place of Relationship between Nehemiah and the Father, that God began to remind Nehemiah of the promises He made to restore His people. The prophecies of Daniel, when God told him they would be in captivity for only seventy years, may have reassured Nehemiah of God's Faithfulness. Perhaps he was reminded of the voice of Hosea who cried out to the sinful people, *“And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together...”* and that promise brought encouragement to his broken heart. Or maybe it was the hopeful and tear-filled words of Jeremiah (29:10) which brought him hope and comfort, *“For thus says the Lord, When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for*

evil, to give you a future and hope...You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all of your heart..."

How could looking back on the promises of God bring healing and encouragement to the heart of Nehemiah?

"They are your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand."

Nehemiah saw clearly God's Redemption and Love for His people.

Nehemiah was reminded of the Redemption that God gave his people by His great power and strong hand. He knew that God desired once again to restore His relationship with the people that He loved so dearly.

(vs 11) I stressed earlier that in this study in fasting, we are not particularly interested in the result. Rather, it is all about the relationship. However, with Nehemiah's fast, and others to come, we will see some really amazing things happening as a result of fasting. But I do want to emphasize the importance of

the sincerity of Nehemiah's heart toward God. Nehemiah didn't fast because he was expecting a good result, he fasted because the grief in his heart was more than he could bear and he chose to bring that grief to the Father in a fast. And, God does respond Faithfully to His faithful Nehemiah.

In verse 11 Nehemiah puts a request before God that "this man" would grant him mercy. Nehemiah is talking about the king. It was Nehemiah's desire to return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah's contrite heart carried the same desires as his Father. The desires of Nehemiah's heart, being the same as God's, put him in a good position to carry out that which the Lord was about to accomplish there. So, God provided the way for him to go by working in the king's heart to grant mercy to Nehemiah to head back to Jerusalem. It was then that God began to do great things through the life and obedience of Nehemiah.

Perhaps Nehemiah would have been content to simply repent before God, but God didn't stop there. When God's heart met with Nehemiah's heart, God began to reveal what He was about to do and Nehemiah sought God's mercy and favor to be apart of it and to carry out what He knew God was going to accomplish.

I find it overwhelmingly encouraging that when Nehemiah's heart became aligned with God's, He gave Nehemiah a purpose and a mission that Nehemiah never would have dreamed of on his own. Nehemiah was going to be asked to step out in faith in ways that He never would have dreamed. But God knew that He could trust this man and Nehemiah knew he

could trust His God because of the Relationship that was built between them.

Nehemiah's heart's desire, and his sacrifice of self through fasting, opened the doors for him to be aligned with God and to see God's plans and purposes. His fasting positioned him to be conduit for God's intentions. It was the emptying of himself that gave God room to fill him with His purpose and power.

You know, often times when we are grieving, we can't eat. Our bodies don't allow us to because the pain is too deep. Doing something as normal as eating becomes difficult because we don't want to feel the pleasure of a need met when our world is so wrong. But we saw Nehemiah bring that pain and grief and focus it on the Father. He poured his heart out to God and God met him there. He revealed Himself to Nehemiah in a deep and personal way.

Nehemiah's journey was still going to be long and hard, BUT this time of fasting and crying out to God did bring Nehemiah into an even more intimate place with God. It provided him with a proper perspective and plan to accomplish the things that God had already determined to accomplish.

The premise of this study is to look at these experiences of fasting and see if we can catch a glimpse into the relationship between God and the one who was fasting. What are some of the insights you were able to uncover in the relationship between God and Nehemiah?

Loving the Lord Through Fasting

When Nehemiah came to a place where the personal desires that existed in him were focused upward and not used as an inward distraction, what was the result?

Nehemiah used this fast to bring his grief and mourning to the Father. We saw that this fast was in response to Nehemiah's great grief. How might we apply this idea to our lives?

One of my favorite insights into this story is that when Nehemiah came humbly and contritely to the Father with his broken heart, God then shared His plan with Nehemiah and he gave Nehemiah a purpose, or a mission for his life or at least the next few years of his life. How do you think that brought healing to the heart of Nehemiah?

Do you feel Nehemiah's outpouring toward God, his time of fasting-praying and worshipping God, positioned him to be used by God to address his grief? What then is your grief—your heart-felt hurt—the pain in your soul that only God can address? And if God can position Nehemiah to address his pain and grief, do you believe He can do the same for you?

Loving the Lord Through Fasting

Let's take the challenge ... let's empty ourselves so that God may fill us with His power and strength to address our grief and pain.

LESSON 3

Elijah – Understanding God’s Vision

Please take some time to read through I Kings 19:1-19

In this lesson we are going to take a look at Elijah’s 40-day fast. This being our third lesson, and the third fast we are studying, I find it fascinating all three fasts are so completely different.

Now, although the length of this fast, 40 days, is clear and obvious, the purpose of Elijah’s fast is a little more difficult to discern. In fact, we don’t see Elijah choose this fast for himself. What we find is his fast was required by God and Elijah responds obediently to God’s “request”.

Rarely do we see a man so passionately obedient to God as Elijah. God asked him to stand separate from the world and at times be the only voice for God in the land—even among the

faithful prophets of God. God's power and purpose flowed through the life of Elijah and he did many wonders in the name of the Lord. To get a little background, we need only look in two chapters.

Read through I Kings 17:8-16. What miracle occurred in this passage?

Read through I Kings 17:19-24. What miracle occurred in this passage?

What did this miracle prove to the widow according to verse 24?

1 Kings 18:20-40 is one the most victorious moments in Elijah's ministry. Briefly summarize what happened in this story.

What did Elijah hope this victory would prove about his God?

In Chapter 17 we see the miraculous provision by God for Elijah, the widow, and her son. In Chapter 18 we see one of the most victorious moments in Elijah's life and ministry as he called down fire from God and his water-soaked altar was completely consumed showing victory and power over the gods and false prophets who challenged Him. After God showed his strength, power, and Authority over the satanic prophets of Baal, Elijah slaughtered them all.

We also see in Chapter 18 (1-19) the faithful prophets of God were hiding and fearful for their very lives. Obadiah hid them

all except for Elijah. Obadiah let Elijah know the king was after his life—in fact the king was more set on taking Elijah's life than any other prophet.

In the later part of chapter 18, Elijah was given the opportunity to save Ahab's life. Not only does Elijah save his life, but he also showed Ahab great respect and honor as he ran in front of his chariot leading him to safety. (18:41-46) Hang in there with all of this background, it is so important for us to spend time learning about what was going on in Elijah's life leading up to this fast.

Now Ahab, being evil, chose to repay the mercy and honor shown by Elijah by sharing Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal with his even more evil wife, Jezebel—who becomes livid. As one who served and loved the satanic, she worshipped and dedicated her life to evil and the evil one. There is no doubt Jezebel was wicked as she was the reflection of the evil she served.

Jezebel sent a clear message to Elijah; she wanted his life because of the prophets of Baal he did not spare in the great victory at Mt. Carmel.

Because of this “contract” on his life, strong, bold, faithful Elijah was gripped with fear.

With “Fear” as his focus, Elijah ran to hide. Now I believe it is important to remember the other prophets were hiding during this time as well. God had kept those prophets safe, but Elijah's mission was different than theirs. God had Elijah out

doing the work. Elijah had always been obedient, so it is difficult to understand why Fear had this hold on Elijah. Why did Elijah allow Fear to lead him instead of God? How is it that a man so bold, a man who participated in some of the greatest and most miraculous victories recorded in the Bible, was suddenly consumed by Fear?

Well, let's look at it this way. After the victory on Mt. Carmel, where Elijah clearly displayed the power and glory of the One True God, he may have thought the nation and king would surely repent and turn to God. He may have envisioned himself being a beloved prophet proclaiming the Goodness and Mercy of God to a people and king who loved and honored the God of Israel. Instead, he found himself a hunted man. If the outpouring and display of God's power was not enough to turn the nation back to God, what would?

When Elijah allowed his eyes to turn inward, he believed he had failed and he left the opening for fear to creep in and grip his heart. Take a closer look at this with me. When Elijah allowed his eyes to turn inward, he believed he had failed. But did he? We've already concluded that Elijah participated in victory after victory. When Elijah took his eyes off of God and turned them on himself, not only did he have a distorted view of God, but He had a distorted view of himself. He went from believing God for Victory over hundreds of prophets of Baal, to believing that Jezebel was more powerful than the God who had led him this far. Elijah went from believing that he was a "man of God whose word of truth was in his mouth" to believing that he was no more than a failure.

So he hid. Now there was a time in Elijah's ministry when God asked him to hide (17:3). Perhaps since he hid before and others were still in hiding Elijah may have felt it was a reasonable plan of action. But from scripture we see no indicator of God asking him to hide and no indicator that Elijah inquired about hiding. We do know Fear motivated Elijah to hide.

Consider for a moment how Elijah's view of God and himself changed when he looked away from God and he focused his view inward. What were some of the lies that Elijah began to believe about himself and about God when this happened?

Consider for a moment, has this ever happened to you? What lies have you believed about God or about yourself when your view was focused inward rather than turned upward? Have you ever believed that God was too small to handle your circumstances? Have you ever believed that you weren't worth enough for God to take of you? These are the kind of lies we tell ourselves when our view of God is blocked by our view of ourselves. Truth is an important weapon for us to use when we are going through times of doubt.

(19:3-4) Elijah left his companion. *“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat under a broom tree.”*

I believe there is a depth of pain in Elijah that is easy to overlook. And in these verses we see him alone, crying out his pain to the Father. I imagine that day’s journey to the broom tree was a day of questioning – Why Lord? Why didn’t they repent? Didn’t they see your power? Your Victory? Is my work in vain? Have I devoted my entire life and ministry to people who will never see you for who you are?

I imagine, also, there were no answers to his questions that day.

Let’s look at the rest of verse four *“It is enough now, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”*

All he saw was his failure. He thought he failed his nation, he thought he failed his God. His pain was deep. Oh man, I gotta tell you, the girl in me just wants to go hug him right now! I’m a sucker for a failure. Honestly, march a man in front of me who can only see his failures and I’m hooked.

Because I always see it. I always see it. I always see the soul for whom Christ died—because his soul is so much more beautiful than the perceived failure. The man is so much more valuable than the outcome of his experience. And I think, maybe, if he could just catch a glimpse of what I see, maybe if he could just take on a new vision, if he would just take on MY vision, he would see it too!

That is what we begin to see here with Elijah. God needed Elijah to have a new vision. God needed Elijah to have His vision. God needed Elijah's eyes to be turned from his inward vision which only allowed him to see the lie of failure and He needed Elijah to take on a new vision, HIS vision.

(vs 5) "And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold an angel touched him and said, 'Arise and Eat.'"

Does this verse bring a tear to your eye? Does it stir something inside of you? God's Gentle Warrior speaks words of comfort, provision and direction to this wounded servant. You see, "wounded" is what God saw. He did not see a failure. He saw His wounded child sleeping under a broom tree. God did not bring punishment or shame upon Elijah. He brought everything a Loving Father would bring His wounded son. "Arise and Eat."

My wounded son, I AM here to care for you and provide for you.

Elijah looked and saw the tangible gifts from his Father. Beautiful.

*What were the tangible gifts God gave Elijah at this time?
What do you think these gifts meant to Elijah?*

“He ate and he drank and he lay down again. And the angel came again. Arise and eat for this journey is too great for you.”

For this journey is too great for you.

Elijah’s journey was just beginning. He would not be alone. And with these words, the journey began, the fast began. *“And he arose and ate and drank and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the Mountain of God.”*

Here we see that Elijah did not choose this fast. God chose this fast for Elijah and he responded obediently to the 40-day fast—the journey God laid in front of him. Not as a punishment—it was a time of healing, a time of communication with his Lord. It was a journey to gain a New Vision. God had ordained this time for Elijah to respond to Him with his heart, soul, mind and body. Whether or not he understood why, Elijah was obedient in his response.

Let’s take a minute to talk about Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai. On this mountain Moses encountered God in the burn-

ing bush. On this mountain Moses met with God and received the Ten Commandments and the law. On this mountain Moses also experienced a 40-day fast. This mountain was a place of Salvation, Restoration, Redemption, and Freedom. It was a place of Wonder, Amazement, Power, and History.

The physical manifestations of God's Faithfulness and encounters with His servants could be seen all over this mountain. Elijah could not look anywhere without seeing the evidence of God's Faithfulness. The top of the mountain was charred black from the Presence of God being lowered as fire upon it. The altar and places of sacrifice still left over from the presence of the Israelites. From Elijah's cave, did he look out and see the Rock that poured holy water to quench the thirst of his people? Did he see the boundary markers still standing around the foot of the mountain? Did he know that at the backside of this mountain there was a bush that once burned with the presence of God!?!?

It was no coincidence God brought Elijah to THIS place. This is where the story began. God's Redemptive Plan, this is the place where The Law was Spoken Forth, Written down, and shared with man. Without the Law being Spoken Forth, Written down, and shared with the people, they would have no idea that they were incapable of Redemption on their own. This was the place where man's need for God was made evident. Wait, what was that?

Man's NEED for God was made evident.

Write out Hebrews 10:1

You see the Law was necessary in order to show the people their NEED for Jesus. The law and sacrificial system that was in place was only a shadow of what was to come—Jesus Christ, and the final sacrifice. There was purpose in this law and sacrificial system. Its purpose was to point to Jesus Christ.

Yes, this was no coincidence that God brought Elijah to THIS place where man's NEED for God was made evident.

Yes, *"This journey would be too great for him."*

This is where Elijah's need for God would be made evident.

Take a moment right now to ponder this. *Who is this God who can Provide Redemption for All of Humanity, yet reveal it so personally to one wounded man? He is our God. He is the LORD.*

During this time of fasting, Elijah's eyes would be **forced** to turn from inward to upward. Elijah needed God. As we continue in this study we will see that Elijah had become helpless; he was unable to view his life in Truth. He needed God to step in and give him His Vision, His Truth. It is while fasting that Elijah's past would remain in the past, his desperate need for God would be made evident, and Elijah would receive a New Vision.

This fast is so different than the others. It's so fascinating to me. I have the words in my heart, but I'm struggling right now to get them down on paper. In the other fasts we see the man pushing aside his desires and focusing those longings upward. In this fast we see the man in complete and desperate need of a Savior. His longings and desires were gone. His desire even to live was gone. We see a man empty, lying in the dirt, under a tree, broken and in need of being filled by the Divine. God FINDS HIM and says, "Look to ME." I have something to show you. I have a New Vision for you. I'm about to do great and mighty things that you would not believe even if you were told.

"And the word of the Lord came to him. And He said to him, "What are you doing here Elijah?"

God does not waste His words as a matter of fact, God speaks words of life.

Upon reaching the mountain, God's first words to his wounded son were, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So often God speaks to his children in questions, and the interesting thing is God never needs the answer. God asked Elijah this question because *Elijah* needed to know the answer.

"What are you doing here Elijah?"

Elijah's response is so interesting. He expresses his disappointment by saying, "*I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword.*" Secondly, he expresses his concern about his failure "*And I, only I am left.*" And then he expresses his fear, "*...and they seek my_life, to take it away.*" Only a few verses ago, Elijah asked God to take his life, yet here he expresses a fear of losing it to Jezebel.

Please go back through the last paragraph and underline, highlight, or circle every use of the word "I" or "my." Do you notice the difference between this prayer and Nehemiah's prayer from the last lesson? Nehemiah had turned his focus upward immediately, and was praising God and acknowledging His works and attributes. Elijah takes a little bit more time. He eventually gets there, but God needed to point Elijah in the right direction. Praise God, that He does not let His children wander far, without actively pursuing and drawing us back to Him.

What we see happening here is Elijah sharing with God what he sees. When Adam and Eve were hiding, God asked them a question also. "Why are you hiding?" God wanted them to admit their sinful place before Him. Here, God wanted Elijah to let go of his past, so he could move on in victory into the next stage of his ministry. Here God confronts him with the past, but in Elijah's honest admission, God's vision and God's purpose were becoming clearer.

And so God begins to reveal himself to Elijah.

"Stand on the mount before the Lord."

A great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind.

And after the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.

Keep Looking, Elijah. Keep seeking, Elijah. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart. Keep looking, Elijah!

Was the plan of God for Elijah's life going to be obvious? Perhaps not. But this fast was all about the journey. God needed Elijah's view of Him to be undistracted so that He could share His Vision with Elijah. Don't be distracted by the strong wind.

Don't be distracted by the earthquake. Don't be distracted by the fire. Keep looking, Keep listening.

And after the fire, the sound of a low whisper.

Write out John 10:27

And when Elijah heard it, he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave, and behold there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

The gentle call of The Shepherd

"This journey will be too great for you."

Elijah responds with the same answer, unable to see for himself, he is helpless in his state, and so God steps in and rescues His wounded, empty son and gives him a new vision, a new mission, a hope for the future.

(vs 15) Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the

sword of Hazeel shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Yet I will leave 7000 in Israel.”

Look how God saw Elijah. He didn't see him as a washed up failure. No, this time of fasting was so important because Elijah needed to see God still had a purpose and plan for him. Elijah still had work to do with the Father. Elijah still had to prepare the one who would come behind him, Elisha. Although there was not a national repentance, there were 7000 faithful left in Israel. No, Elijah was not alone. There was Hope.

Reading on we would see that after this time of fasting Elijah did return to a victorious ministry, and he mentored the next great prophet of God to the nation. So honored was his life and ministry at the end, Elisha asked that a double portion of Elijah's spirit be left on him to carry on Elijah's ministry. After God wrapped his consuming arms around Elijah and carried him home, Elisha was left with the visible change that others saw and stated, "The Spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." It was powerful, and Elisha carried on the vision and work of Elijah.

So far we've seen that the fast is rarely about the result. It is about the relationship which grows more intimate between God and the one who is fasting. This lesson's fast is no different. There was a result and it was good, but the sustaining element of this fast, the thing which remained long after the fast was over, was the intimate bond between God and his son, Elijah.

Turning Upward

This study is not necessarily to find a personal application for fasting in our lives, but I do feel there are many ways we can look at this time in Elijah's life and relate them to our own.

What are the things we see, that God doesn't see in us?

What are the things we look at in our lives and call failures? How do we take our eyes off ourselves and find a new vision, God's vision? What happened in the life of Elijah that brought him to a place of emptiness, and how did God respond in that place?

What does Elijah's experience teach us about the purpose of "wilderness experiences"?

God's heart is FOR you and not to harm you. He requires your obedience and not for you to control the outcome. The result is NOT your job or your responsibility, and God's view of you is NOT dependant on the final result. He cares for and watches over you on the journey—He is there to meet your needs, provide for you, keep you safe from harm, and help you “see”.

Look at your life through His eyes. Understand His vision for your life, then walk in power and confidence.

The first step is to answer His question to Elijah for yourself. “Daughter of Mine...*What are you doing here,* _____?” Listen for His answer, don't look for it! For God did not “show” His vision in the wind, in the earthquake, or in the fire—He spoke it to His son in a still, small voice.

LESSON 4

David – Returning Upward During a Time of Repentance

Before you begin this lesson please take some time to read through Psalm 51.

Fasting—a time when we completely focus every desire upward. It is a time when our heart, soul, mind, and body are undistracted by the desires which reside in us and we spiritually see our Father more clearly.

From our studies so far, I believe we can be confident in the above definition of fasting. When teaching, I often see the lesson principles play out in my own life and journey. As you can imagine studying Jonah and Gomer was difficult, but eye opening, and I found the same to be true as I studied this passage. But, as always, time spent in study has given me a

clearer understanding of the Father, which is always something I cherish.

In this lesson we are going to look at the story of a man whose heart, soul, mind, and body were completely distracted by the desires within him but through fasting he was able to return upward.

Take some time now to read 2 Samuel 12:1-23

There he sat nine months later. His good friend Nathan standing before him, asking simple questions in the form of a parable, and he sat there. King David was a man after God's own heart. Beautiful David, whose very life was a celebration of the Glory of God.

A man whose heart had poured forth the Beauty of the Father

What does David say about the Beauty of God in Psalm 27:4?

A man who loved nothing more than to lie on his bed and meditate on the Lord.

What does Psalm 63:5-6 tell us about how David felt about remembering the Lord? How often did He meditate on God?

Turning Upward

A man on whom God's Spirit would rest and a man from whose heart and mouth would burst forth psalms of glorious praise, blessing the Heart of his Father and bringing peace to all who heard it.

What does I Samuel 16:23 tell us about how God showed Himself through the life of David?

Nine months later...

... there he sat—not the same man, as something was broken. How cleverly he played it as he sat in front of Nathan—keeping up his pretences; this king, who was so blessed by the Lord.

For nine long months he outwardly played the role of the godly king, but inwardly, oh David, the filthy mess of sin had distracted and destroyed the beautiful heart that was once a pure offering to the King of Heaven.

For nine months the sins David had committed ravaged his heart and his soul.

Adultery, Murder, Deceit, Lust.

When Samuel first anointed David as king he said “For man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.” David’s heart had always been beautiful to God, but consider the irony if Nathan would say to him now, “For man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.”

We’ve talked about the heart. David’s son, Solomon, would eventually call the heart “the wellspring of life”. He knew it needed to be guarded carefully because the heart is the precious place of Relationship with God. It is where our relationship with God begins, and where it grows. David understood the importance of keeping his heart pure as well.

What does Psalm 17:3 tell us about David’s heart?

What does Psalm 19:4 tell us about David's heart?

But David became distracted by his own desires and he no longer guarded his heart—he chose NOT to guard his heart and for nine months his heart took a beating.

And then, God had enough.

How it must have hurt God to watch His beautiful son's pure heart be ravaged, distracted and destroyed by sin. The pure place of relationship with God was broken. But God does not abandon His children and God did not abandon him. This was His son!

God has been so gracious to teach me His tender view toward His children. We are going to take a moment to look at a passage in Hosea. I believe it's important to look at this passage because in it we see a Tender and Loving Father interacting with His children. In order for us to understand and be in a proper and growing relationship with God we have to see and understand, in the depths of our hearts, this side of God. In this passage we see God's view of His children and what is so remarkable is that He shares this with them when they are

deep in sin. I believe this passage shows us clearly the way sin breaks the heart of God.

Read through Hosea 11. Then I'll point out a few verses that I want us to concentrate on. You can either write out these verses in the lines provided, or underline, or highlight them in your Bible.

Hosea 11:1

Hosea 11:3-4

Hosea 11:8-9

God knew judgment was coming for Israel. He begged them to return to Him so He would not have to execute the coming punishment. Yet often we miss how sin in our hearts breaks God's Heart. Can you hear His cry, "*How can I give you up? How can I hand you over?*" I believe it is also important to notice that God was talking about sin in His children, not sin in unbelievers, for it is the sins of the children which break the heart of the Father, and our relationship with the Father.

Take some time to consider the grief we hear in God's voice when He cries, "How can I give you up? How can I hand you over?" Would you like to talk to Him about it?

We see this same pain in God when his relationship with David was broken for nine long months. God did not leave David to mire any longer in his sinful state. God sought him out to repair what was broken. God did not want David's heart to be distracted and separated from Him any longer. So He sent

Nathan to set a “mirror” before David allowing him to see the sin of his heart and the separation of relationship between God’s heart and David’s heart. *How could God give up on David? How could He hand David over to his sins?*

God asks David a question through Nathan, *“Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in His sight?”*

David needed to STOP and REFLECT. This question had power beyond the words Nathan simply spoke. This question addresses David’s actions and the motives of his heart. God wanted David to STOP, REFLECT and ANSWER this question of “WHY...” No more covering the filth inside with nine months of “right actions”. No more “looking good on the outside”. The time had come for David to stop his charades, admit his sinful state before God, repent and turn upward.

Now, this lesson gets a little hard to handle, don’t you agree? Do you remember when I mentioned that I often find myself living and journeying through the lessons that I’m teaching? It wasn’t fun to have God turn to me, stop me, and ask me, “Natalie, why have you despised My Word to do what is evil in My sight?” Stop Natalie, Reflect Natalie, and Answer Me. Here is where I get to choose, do I want to ignore this request of my Father and move forward going through the motions of a relationship? Or, do I want to Stop, Reflect, and Answer my Father and in doing that enter into a more intimate, vibrant, and growing Relationship with Him? You see, when God spoke that question to my heart I couldn’t help but hear the pain and the Love within it. How can I not spend the time to sit and speak with Him about it?

Repentance means to turn from a course of action. In this case David needed to turn from his internal desires which had distracted him from His proper relationship with God and return upward.

So, how did David answer Nathan's question? He said, "I have sinned against the Lord." But in Psalm 51 we see a more detailed answer to the question and we cannot help but admire David's repentant heart. Think about it—nine months of running from the LORD, he did things he knew he should not have done. He said things he knew he should not have said, and he spent time with a woman that he knew was off limits. David's separation from his Father hurt him as well.

In Psalm 51 we see David cry out with his heart, soul, and mind, and turn back to God in repentance.

Notice that David's answer is repeated in this prayer, what does he say in Psalm 51:4, that he also stated in 2 Samuel 12:13?

Write out or underline or highlight Psalm 51:6

In Psalm 51:10 what is David asking God to repair?

What is the first action word in Psalm 51:14? What did David recognize about God when He cried out this word to Him?

*(vv 16-17) For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it, you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken **spirit**, a broken and contrite **heart**, O God, you will not despise.*

What did David recognize about himself when he cried out the words in Psalm 51:16-17?

And Nathan replies...

The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.

God, in His grace and desire to make things right between Himself and David, forgave David and accepted his broken spirit and contrite heart as a sacrifice for the sin which caused this broken relationship. However, sin causes pain and there were still consequences to be handed out. David's consequences affected one who was innocent; let's just be honest, ALL of our sin caused pain to the Innocent One.

(vs 16) This is probably the most difficult verse of the passage. *“And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick.”*

Right after the painful reminder of the innocent bearing the consequence of David's sin, the next verse shows David putting his repentant heart and spirit into action. Here is where David's entire person, his heart, soul, mind, and body respond to God in repentance—every aspect of David turns upward.

By David's actions—his fast, his true repentance is shown.

Write out James 2:18

I believe the purpose of David's fast is twofold. First, it is in response to his great sin. David's sin was that his desires became more important to him than honoring God, as he shows us clearly in his adulterous actions, his deceit, and the murder of Uriah. David's sin had caused pain in the heart of God, pain and loss for Bathsheba, pain for his innocent baby, and he hurt his own relationship with God.

Secondly, David prayed and fasted in response to the judgment which was proclaimed by Nathan, "...*the child that is born to you will die.*" David's prayer along with his fast was to ask God to spare the life of his innocent child. David understood his own life was spared by God's mercy, (13) "*The Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die*" and his prayer was that God would show even more mercy and save the life of his child.

It is also important to notice that David sinned with his body and now David was showing his repentance with his body.

David's sins occurred because he chose to make his own selfish desires more important than honoring God. He was unwill-

ing to control his desires in a way that would bring honor to God and keep his heart pure before his Father. **His view of God was distracted by his own selfish desires as he removed God off the throne of his life, and replaced God with himself.** In David's repentance, God honored the offering of his broken spirit and contrite heart. In his fast, David was given the physical opportunity to display the inward repentance.

In fasting we have the opportunity to take our needs and desires and push them aside for a short time in order to show God's rightful place of authority over our lives, our needs, and our desires. This was especially important for David to do at this point in his relationship with God.

Read vs 17. Explain David's physical condition during this fast.

You see, in this fast, even the way David positioned his body was telling of the purpose of his fast. His spirit was broken; his heart contrite and the position of his body, lying on the floor, showed his humility and brokenness before God.

Because of the brokenness in David during his time of fasting, we will see that he was prepared to accept whatever answer God gave him in regard to his request to save his son. With the focus off of himself and completely turned upward, David had no choice but to be prepared to accept whatever result God chose. Do you see that? David did ask for a specific result, **but** his actions once the fast was over proved the true result of this fast. David was once again of the same heart and mind as his Father.

(vs 19) David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped."

David did not question God's choice. It was David's desire that his child be saved from death, but during the fast David's desires had become conformed to the will of God and there was only peace with the outcome as God had again been given His rightful place of authority over David's desires. And notice, the new positions of David's body were now showing what had happened spiritually—he arose, washed, anointed himself, and worshiped in the house of the Lord.

This was no easy Relationship. In order for David to be at peace with the outcome of these circumstances, his desires had to become conformed to the will of God. David had to accept God's rightful place of Authority in his life and submit his desires to that Authority. Please, take time right now to consider the idea of submitting our desires to the rightful place of

Authority God has in our lives. *What would that look like in your life?*

Ps 51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me, Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the JOY of your Salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit...Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise...

2 Sam 12:21 What is this thing you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.

Even David's own people were rightfully confused. David's great grief during the fast was enough to have these people worrying that David would harm himself, but David's answer

proves he was now willing to accept God's authority over his own desires.

"While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child might live? But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?"

Although David did have to live the consequence for his sin, God was Gracious and Merciful to David as He did create a clean heart in David. He did restore a right spirit within him. David was able to rebuild His Relationship with God.

Consider these questions as we close this lesson.

What weaknesses do we have churning in our hearts which prevent us from offering our hearts as a pure and beautiful offering to the King?

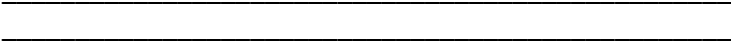
Do we truly believe that God deserves a pure and beautiful heart as an offering from us?

Turning Upward

Do we truly believe that God desires to take our distracted and destroyed hearts, and create new hearts? Are we willing to repent and give up those desires and are we willing to give God His rightful place of authority over those desires?

Are we willing to allow God to search our hearts and show us the things that are preventing us from giving God his rightful place of authority in our lives?

Loving the Lord Through Fasting



LESSON 5

Paul – Transformation in a Time of Fasting

Before we begin this lesson please take a moment to read through Acts 9:1-19.

One point I've been stressing throughout this study is that the purpose of a fast is not necessarily to achieve a desired result. We have seen, however, that many amazing benefits come from fasting. These benefits come when we put ourselves in a position where the Spirit of God can speak to us in an intimate and personal way. During a fast we give ourselves the opportunity to be undistracted by our own desires and offer our entire person, body, soul, mind, and heart as a worshipful sacrifice to God.

Look up Romans 12:1-2 and write out the verse.

Loving the Lord Through Fasting

In this lesson we are going to look at Paul's fast after his conversion. As we take a deeper look, I believe it will breathe a new life into the verse in Romans 12 which has become so familiar to us that we can miss its depth.

Whenever I discuss Paul, I'm so overwhelmed by how this man was so full of passion and desires.

Read Acts 9:1-2. What are some phrases in these verses that reveal Paul's passions and desires?

Read Galatians 2:13-14. What are some phrases in these verses that reveal Paul's passions and desires?

Psalm 37 tells us, “Delight in the Lord, He will give you the desires of your heart.” My Pastor recently preached on these verses and as he read them, I will admit my thoughts wandered as I considered I have not found that verse to be true, and I don’t know exactly how to reconcile my experience with that verse in order to call it truth.

In fact, I’ve found the opposite to be true. The more I delight in the Lord, the more I find He requires my desires to be offered as a sacrifice to Him. He doesn’t fulfill my desires, instead He requires me to give them to Him. So, from there I had to continue on in my thoughts, but I couldn’t let that be my final thought on the matter as this verse was hanging before me.

From the place of my desires becoming a sacrifice, burned on the altar, never to be again, what do I find? Honestly? I find Joy. I find Sufficiency. I find Peace and I also find that what I once desired is gone. I don’t desire it anymore. So, it’s a good thing He didn’t give them to me, right? But, again, that makes me question, does He really give me the desires of my heart?

From there I considered Paul in his later years. *Read Philippians 3:8-11. What are some words and phrases that reveal Paul’s passions and desires?*

“I want to know Christ—the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings that I may become like Him in His death.”

Paul’s desires are worth noting—Christ alone, the power and glory of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, being conformed to the image of Christ. Paul’s desire was to know Christ completely.

These are passionate desires, from a passionate man. How did a man so filled with passion come to a place where his desires consisted only of knowing Christ, every aspect, every angle, every glory, every suffering?

How can a man so filled with passion and desire have every desire removed from him until his only desire was Jesus Christ, alone? “...*Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.*”

Write Philippians 1:21

We can not doubt or overlook the passions that resided in this man. Before he even met the Risen Lord, Paul was driven by his passion for God. He was driven by his passion to protect what he knew and believed about God. Paul was so driven by his passion that he threatened to kill those who dared to “blaspheme” what he thought to be true about God. He sought out ways to find them, catch them, and murder them. Blinded by his passion to the truth of God, he saw this as righteous behavior.

So, at what point did Paul stop being driven by his passions? At what point did Passion consume him, change him, transform him?

How did this man, Paul, so filled with passion and desire, have his desires removed from him until his only passion was Jesus? Or rather did his passions need to be removed, or did his passions need to undergo an even more painful process than that?

Let’s return to Romans 12:1 -2 for a moment. “...present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed.”

You see, Paul was about to undergo a re-creation, a transformation, and it was going to be painful. Paul would need to be pressed and pulled and stretched and re – formed into an en-

tirely new person. Because the body that once held Paul, and all that he was—his mind, his heart, his desires, his passions, his thoughts, his accomplishments, his goals, his view of the future—that body would now have to fit the person of Jesus, and Paul’s “body” was much too small for that. Paul’s body wouldn’t be able to fit all of his own passions and desires and the passions and desires of Jesus. Paul was going to have to present his body along with all of its passions and desires as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to the Father. That is how he would be transformed, and all of his passions, desires, goals—his heart, would then be aligned with Christ’s. This is where it gets really exciting for me. Do you see it too? Are you as excited as I am?

Yes, that process would be painful, but Paul would also know the glory and the power of the resurrection as the old would die and behold, the new would come. Transformation; let’s look up the definition of transformation in a Strong’s Concordance. If you own one, please look it up, if not, I have legally lifted it for you and pasted it here, so just take a look.

μεταμορφωω metamorphoo {met-am-or-fo'-o} from 3326 and 3445; TDNT - 4:755,607; v AV - transfigure 2, transform 1, change 1; 4 1) to change into another form, to transform, to transfigure 1a) Christ appearance was changed and was splendid with divine brightness on the mount of transfiguration

Metamorphoo? Does that Greek word look familiar to you? What English word does that look like?

And what picture comes to mind when you hear the word metamorphosis?

(I hope you're thinking about a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. And, I hope you're thinking about how a caterpillar doesn't just take on the characteristics of a butterfly, it doesn't try to act like a butterfly, it is completely transformed into something new.)

In his old life Paul's passions drove him. They drove him until he found himself on a road to Damascus with the intent to harm and punish the very ones God had saved.

(vs 1) Paul was passionate about God. He KNEW what he believed and NO person could change that.

What are some of the qualifications Paul lists about himself in Philippians 3:4-6

He was convinced along with the other Pharisees and leaders that Jesus was a blasphemer and he deserved to die. He also believed passionately all those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah should die too. Paul thought he was walking in the truth, but Jesus knew he was walking in darkness.

Paul knew **about** God, but Jesus wanted Paul to know Him.

How could God not have loved this man? I imagine He looked down on Paul and was blessed by His passion to protect His name, and I also imagine God was crushed over Paul's confusion about who He really was.

So God came to meet Paul.

(vv 3-4) A huge light came around him, and a voice said. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Well, there is only one person Paul was persecuting wasn't there? Jesus. Here we find another one of God's questions. In this question though, God is also revealing Jesus' true nature to Paul—that Jesus is God.

Paul responds, "Who are you, Lord?"

Consider Paul's response. He acknowledges that this is God when Paul calls Him "Lord". Paul wouldn't have referred to anyone as Lord except for God. So he knew who he was speaking to.

But he also acknowledges his confusion about God when he says, “Who are you?” Do you see that? It just shows us even more clearly that he knew about God, but he did not *know* Him. He recognized God, but He was unable to fully relate to Him, because he didn’t fully know Him.

And God replies, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”

Here, Paul receives a new revelation about God. How amazing it is to watch this conversion play out. For Paul to admit that Jesus was God, he had to let go of all he was believing in so passionately before this new revelation came. In order to accept this new revelation as truth, Paul had to let go of everything that made him a Pharisee—everything that defined him as a man.

Paul had to let go of his own beliefs, his own desires, and all of the passions that existed inside of him in order to accept that Jesus was God.

“It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.” (KJV) This phrase is not found in all versions of the Bible. If your Bible is missing this phrase take it back to the store and tell them it’s missing a verse. Just kidding, please don’t do that. It’s an important phrase. It gives us insight into what is going on with Paul during this time. I’m not sure why it is missing from some versions, but please don’t let that distract you from the importance of this verse. The pricks were what the men would use to drive their oxen forward. If the ox would try to move outside of the direction of the one driving them, he would be pricked into submission. And so we see God revealing to Paul that despite his

his passionate efforts to protect the name of God, he was actually fighting against God, and God needed to get him to give up the direction that he wanted to go and fully submit to the direction and Authority of God. And that included Paul admitting that his view of God was wrong and that Jesus was God. God wanted Paul to be fully aligned with Him and His purpose.

At that point Jesus gave Paul some directions. "Rise and enter the city, from there you will be told what to do."

I believe it is very significant that Paul was given these directions. At first I wondered why God didn't just give him all of the information that he needed right there on the Road to Damascus. Why did He drag this out over three days? I see two reasons. First of all, Paul needed to be moldable, pliable, and in these small requests Paul was learning to push aside his pride and desire to control himself and he was learning to follow JESUS in blind faith.

The second reason was much more practical. Paul's reason for going to Damascus was to round up and persecute the members of The Way. God needed to provide a witness to Paul's conversion from the leading members of that community. That is what we see happening with the story of Ananias who was one of the prominent leaders of The Way, and probably one of the first on Paul's "hit list". So when God shared with him that Paul was no longer a threat to The Way, God was providing a witness for Paul, giving him credibility with The Way, that he was now a follower of Christ. Ananias' response is so beautiful. He goes to him and says, "Brother Saul," con-

firming that he was a witness to the remarkable conversion and transformation happening in Paul.

(vs 9) and for three days he was without sight and he neither ate nor drank.

This is the only fast in our study that took place after the Resurrection of Christ. I believe that is significant as well. This is the only fast in which a complete transformation could take place. After the Resurrection, faith in Christ meant that the one who believed not only received Salvation, but they were transformed into a new creation.

Look up and write out 2 Corinthians 5:17

This three-day fast was so important in Paul's life. This was Paul's first experience talking to and relating with Jesus Christ. During these three days Paul was sitting with Jesus Christ, alone, and he was being transformed. If we go back to the word Metamorphoo, we could say that this fast was Paul's time in the cocoon.

Read Galatians 1:11-12. Who is it that revealed the truth of the gospel to Paul?

What does Acts 9:11-12 tell us was happening to Paul during this three-day fast?

What does Acts 9:14-15 tells us about what Jesus was specifically revealing to Paul during his fast?

We know from verses 11-12 that Paul was praying AND that God was sharing visions with him, and we know from verse 15 that Jesus was speaking specifically to Paul regarding the things that He would require of Paul. This fast was Paul's first step toward knowing Christ—the fellowship of His sufferings and the glory of his Resurrection. During these three days, the

old Paul would have to die and he would have to be born to new life. The old Paul would have to be reborn, re-formed, transformed into the image of Christ. "I want to know Christ, the power of his Resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings that I may be made like Him in His death."

Why did Paul lose his vision? I think what was happening to Paul physically during this time was a manifestation of what was happening spiritually. He had been given the rest of the story about God, he'd been given a new revelation. In that knowledge he knew he required Salvation. Also in that revelation he was going to require new vision. Nothing about how he viewed God, his life, his goals for his future, none of that was going to be acceptable anymore. His vision, his passions, his desires all had to die in order to be transformed and to receive all of the visions, passion, and desires that resided in Jesus. Does that make sense?

During this three-day fast, everything was being realigned in Paul. His vision was becoming God's vision, his heart was becoming God's heart; his passions were becoming God's passions. He was being transformed.

Let's go back for a moment to Ananias' conversation with God (vs 10-15). God revealed to Ananias exactly how He saw Paul. And we know during these three days of fasting that God also revealed this vision to Paul.

"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."

“...he is a chosen instrument of mine...” Paul, this man whose pious religious views had reduced him to being nothing more than a bully and a thug, yet when God looked he saw His Chosen instrument. The statement that God makes about Paul in this verse is so beautiful to me every time I read it. And I love that He shared this with Paul during this time of fasting. That is Relationship. That is intimacy with the Father.

He also shared one other thing with Paul, “I will show him all he must suffer for my sake.”

“I want to know Christ, the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings that I may become like Him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead.”

Paul’s three-day fast reminds me of this passage, “Buried in the likeness of His death and raised in the newness of His resurrection.”

What does Colossians 2:12 say?

(vs 17) At the end of the three days Ananias came to Paul, the scales fell off Paul’s eyes and he received a new vision. He

was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was baptized, and he took food and was strengthened by it.

Again, we see here the physical manifestation of what was happening spiritually. Let's look at the words that are used to show Paul's actions—arose, regained his sight, was baptized (washed as new) and was strengthened.

God needed Paul's desires to be His desires, Paul words, His words, Paul's steps, His steps, Paul's heart, His heart.

So let's go back to my initial thoughts. "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." What if God said to us, like he said to Paul, "You no longer get to be you. You need to be transformed to fit my mold, and I am too big for you. I am going to need to pull you, and stretch you, and transform you. There will be pain, you will suffer during this process, but you will also experience the glory of the Resurrection and the newness of life. I need you to bear my pain, speak my words, **have my heart and all the desires that reside therein.**" *Would we say, "I want that"? I want to know You, the power of the Resurrection and the fellowship of your sufferings that I may be like you in your death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead?*

Loving the Lord Through Fasting

Are we truly willing to go through the sufferings of being transformed, of being stretched to fit the mold of God, of offering our bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God? Are we willing to be transformed until our desires become one with His?

“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” I think I can now see the Truth in that verse, can you?

LESSON 6

Daniel – Intense Intimacy Through Fasting

Before we begin, please read through Daniel 10.

This is the final lesson in our study of fasting. The words that kept going through my mind while preparing were “Intense Intimacy”. We are now going to look at one of the most intense spiritual experiences found in Scripture.

It is important for us to take note that Daniel was a prophet during the time of captivity. This was a time of judgment and consequence upon the children of Israel. It was Daniel’s job to speak the words of God to His people while they were being disciplined. Daniel was a man of tremendous courage. He was faithful to God when few others were. Daniel faced death many times because of his passionate desire to remain faithful

to God. Daniel loved God, trusted God, and Daniel feared God.

What does Daniel 1:17 and 20 tell us about the type of man Daniel was?

What does Daniel 6:4 tell us about the relationship between Daniel and God?

Daniel was living out the consequences of his parents and grandparents; the ones whom God so desperately tried to call back to Him when He pleaded, "Return to Me."

What does God say to His People through His prophet in Joel 2:12-13?

Considering that Daniel was living through a time of punishment and consequence, he understood God was one to be feared. The reason, even though God loved His children dearly, if they turned away from Him He would execute the foretold judgment and Daniel was living the proof of God's discipline.

Daniel had received words from the Lord several times and he bore the burden of sharing the punishment of those words with people, but he also experienced the Joy of declaring the hope-filled future for the People of God. Daniel not only received words, he saw visions, he interpreted dreams, and in one case he even interpreted a different language that was written on the wall by a Heavenly Hand.

Please indicate below the way in which God chose to use Daniel to reveal His purposes.

Read Daniel 2:17-19

Daniel 5:24

Daniel 6:19-22

Daniel 7:1

What do these encounters show us about Daniel's relationship with God?

Let's look at Daniel 10:1. The word Daniel received here was very troubling to him. The ESV tells us, "...the word was true and it was a great conflict," while the KJV tells us "...the appointed time was long." Well, these two phrases confused me and I didn't see how the same phrase could be translated so differently. I spent a good deal of time trying to figure out what these words meant. The words "long" and "great" in these verses are the same. The word is "gadowl". I don't pretend to know Hebrew, but sometimes it is important for us to look up the meaning of the words that are translated into English to try to get a better understanding of what we are reading and studying. So here is where you need to get your Strong's Concordance out again. If you don't have one, I've written out the meaning of the word for you to see.

גדול **gadowl {gaw-dole}** or (shortened) **גדול** **gadol {gaw-dole}** from 01431; TWOT - 315d; AV - great 397, high 22, greater 19, loud 9, greatest 9, elder 8, great man 8, mighty 7, eldest 6, misc 44; 529 adj 1) great 1a) large (in magnitude and extent) 1b) in number 1c) in intensity 1d) loud (in sound) 1e) older (in age) 1f) in importance 1f1) important things 1f2) great, distinguished (of men) 1f3) God Himself (of God) subst 1g) great things 1h) haughty things 1i) greatness n pr m

The meaning of "gadowl" is "to grow, become great, make powerful or do great things". This word can also apparently be used as an adjective meaning, "large in magnitude or extent, in intensity, loud, and important". Because I don't understand

Hebrew, I still feel there is more searching to do, but I believe we are starting to see a little bit of the picture. Let's look for other places where this word is used in writings from about the same time period.

Ezekiel 25: 17

Ezekiel 38:19

*Well, I'm starting to see a picture forming, how about you?
Let's look up one more verse where this word is used.*

Genesis 15:12

Going back to the Hebrew, we've been able to resolve the conflict between the two translations. That definition seems to be giving the impression of a growing conflict. And given that this word was coupled with words like, horror, darkness, trembling and conflict, we can assume that the vision Daniel was seeing was one of the future, unfolding in a great and terrifying way. There was a great scope of time and terror involved in this vision.

(vs 1) The verse also tells us Daniel understood both the words he was hearing and the visions he was seeing. From this verse I believe we see Daniel is already in a place of intimacy, depth, and richness of relationship which many people never experience in any area of their lives. I think however, when we see the depth of Daniel's relationship with God and acknowledge the supernatural power for Daniel to receive words and visions from God, we can't overlook the burdens he bore because of it and the sacrifices he made in order to be in a position to be used by God.

We must remember Daniel is in his eighties in this chapter, and from the time he was a youth he had been standing up for the laws of God—Daniel remained *faithful* among the *faithless*. *“And I count it all loss compared to the greatness of knowing You.”* We see the same spirit in Daniel as we saw in Paul, giving up all in order to know everything he could about the God he loved and served faithfully

(Daniel 10:2) Daniel's fast begins in this verse. I want to mention here that Daniel entered a similar fast in Chapter 9:3, 20-23. Read those verses.

What was Daniel doing in these verses?

How did God answer Daniel in these verses?

In Chapter 9 we see Daniel desperately seeking God, who, in response, sent Gabriel to answer Daniel's pleas for his people. When Gabriel came, he laid out the entire timeline for the Jewish people from their current captivity under the Babylonians, to the birth and death of the Messiah, and into the new kingdom of the Messiah. It was a great and amazing revelation. So, understanding that Daniel had already received such a revelation, that he had already seen and interacted with angels in the spiritual realm, shows the depth and intensity of the relationship that Daniel had with God before he even entered into this fast in Daniel 10. I truly believe that we have to keep that in

mind because as we study this fast in Daniel 10 we are going to see an intensity that we see in no other. Daniel has a rare clarity in his view of the LORD.

As we read through Daniel 10 we see the intensity of this fast in the description of the fast. Look at the fast in Daniel 9 and compare it to the fast in Daniel 10. Do you see the difference in intensity in the descriptions of the angels that came to visit him?

Now, the first fast WAS intense, “Gabriel came to me in swift flight and said...,” but in Chapter 10 we see the intensity grow as Daniel is given a more detailed vision. In Daniel 9 the message given by Gabriel was full of hope. The second vision was terrifying in its scope and detail. If we jump ahead to verse 14 we see Daniel given a front row seat into the very end of times. Daniel was seeing visions which would terrify us, and today we have the technology and have seen the destruction manmade weapons can cause. This must have been terrifying for Daniel.

We must also remember Daniel was living through a time of consequence. He knew that if the people would not return to God, the visions he saw would become reality in the scope and

execution of judgment on the people and the earth. He knew this because he was living out the consequence of the ones who refused to “return” to their God. God’s word will come to pass, and Daniel had personal knowledge of this truth and a healthy fear regarding this aspect of God.

So Daniel fasted and mourned in response to the intimate information he had received. It was his burden to bear, Love bears great burdens. I’ve learned so much about Love over the past year, but the one thing which keeps coming back, the one lesson I keep seeing about Love, is the tremendous burdens He bears. Daniel took on that burden for his people because of His love for God. Because of the burden he was willing to bear, and the intensity of it, his intimate knowledge of the Spirit intensified.

“But I count it all loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing You.”

(vs 7) “I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see it, but a great trembling fell upon them and they ran to hide themselves.”

And once again Daniel alone remained faithful. The spiritual experience of this fast and the intensity of this spiritual experience was more than any of these men could handle, yet Daniel remained faithful to the burdens he was asked bear on behalf of his love for his people and his God.

Take a look at what the burdens did to him. (vs 8) “I was left alone and saw this great vision and no strength was left in me.

My radiant appearance was fearfully changed and I retained no strength.” The burdens of this spiritual experience were too much for Daniel to physically bear and he fell on his face in a deep sleep with his face to the ground.

“But I count it all loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing You.” These are Paul’s words, yet we see them played out in the life of Daniel. How can we come to the same place as Daniel, where the only thing that mattered in his life was his relationship with God?

This reminds me of the Gospel account of the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, when they saw their Savior and Friend engaged in a battle where He was experiencing the greatest agony and burden any human body ever bore for Love. Because of the disciples’ great love for their Savior their bodies could not handle the intensity of the spiritual experience and the Bible tells us that the disciples slept because of their sorrow. And later, when Jesus woke them, He said, “...the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Although their spirit was willing to bear the burden of agony that their Savior was bearing, their

human bodies could not handle the intensity of the spiritual experience, and Jesus understood that about His faithful men.

Now look carefully at this. We've talked about how fasting is offering our bodies as a sacrifice to the Father. In no other fast do we see a body offered so completely that the body actually "gives out" because of the intensity of the spiritual experience of the fast.

Just as Jesus came to the disciples and shook them and woke them, so we see here that the "Angel" of God came to Daniel, whose body had given out under the burden he bore and the sacrifice he made and He set Daniel on his hands and knees. Let's just take a moment to be in awe of a God who loved his son so dearly that He reached down and physically touched him in order to give him strength to accomplish the task He had given him. Let's not miss out on the intensity and depth of richness in this relationship.

Let's talk about this "Angel" for a moment. I do believe this was an Old Testament appearing of Jesus. The main reason I believe this is because of the intensity we see in this entire fast and because of the description of the Angel. Daniel needed a personal touch from God and that is exactly what God gave Him. Also, if we look at the description given of Jesus in Revelation after John saw Him in a vision, it is almost the exactly the same.

Compare what Daniel saw with what John saw in Revelation 4:1-6

Since both Daniel and John’s visions of the plans of God were speaking of the same period in time, it does not surprise me they received similar revelations. I read one commentator who didn’t believe this was Jesus, because he later refers to needing the help of another in battle. I think the argument that Jesus would not need help from others in a battle is fairly weak, because although it is correct that Jesus would not need help, I think we see throughout Scripture that Jesus *enjoys* having those He loves along side of Him during battle.

Let’s take a look at the first words God spoke to Daniel—so beautiful. “Oh Daniel, man greatly loved.” Daniel had shown so much love for his people and his God. As he carried these burdens, God encourages him by reminding him of how greatly HE is LOVED! You see, when someone is asked to bear the burdens of Love, Love is right there sustaining them in such a dear and personal way. How precious it is that Daniel did not become offended by the burden he was asked to bear, instead he chose to push through to a greater understanding of God’s way, God’s purpose, and God’s heart. There is a depth of richness in a walk of faith that races forward into God, that exceeds the pain of the immediate experience, and that is what we see in Daniel’s relationship with God. This is Relationship.

This is Daniel being sustained by God through the very real physical pain of the circumstances. Daniel had a choice. He could have run and hid with the other men, but he didn't. He stayed with God through the pain, and God came to him, and met with him, and loved him, and revealed Himself to Daniel. That is an intensely intimate Relationship.

As we continue reading the conversation between God and Daniel we continue to see the beautiful and intimate nature of their relationship.

What are some of the words that Jesus spoke to Daniel in verses 12-14?

God says, *"Daniel you are loved, Understand My Words, Stand Upright, I have been sent to you, Fear not."* Can you only imagine what it meant to Daniel to hear these words spoken at such a time?

Can you bear witness to the comforting words of God? Describe a time when the Word of God was a comfort and encouragement to you?

What the Angel says in verse 12 is so important to this fast. “Fear not Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand...” Look, in this fast Daniel set his heart to understand what verse one tells us his mind already understood. Daniel was turning upward with his body, his mind, his heart, and his soul.

(vs 12) “Your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.” Daniel’s words during his time of fasting held GREAT power in the spiritual world and God’s unique response to them shows us exactly how intense this whole thing was! Daniel’s words and pleas to understand the mind and heart of God, and Daniel’s desire to speak the words and heart of God, was so intense that as he spoke into the spiritual world, warriors in the midst of tremendous battles broke free from the fight to come and meet personally with Daniel, to strengthen him and to help him understand the mind, heart, and vision of God. Read that again. Let the idea of this type of intimacy and intense relationship with God sink deeply into your mind, heart, and soul, and allow The Spirit to speak to you.

“The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make

you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.” (vs 14)

Intense Intimacy

(vs 15) *“When He had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was mute.”* This shocked Daniel so that he was mute. Allow yourself a moment of comic relief in the intensity of this chapter with this verse and then stand in silent awe of God as Daniel did.

(vs 16) The Angel touched Daniel again, and Daniel began to speak to him. Look at the honesty in Daniel and the freedom in which he shares with The Angel as he explains what the intensity of this spiritual experience has done to him physically. *“Pains have come upon me...I retain no strength...I can not even speak because there is no strength or breath left in me.”*

Write out Philippians 3:8

(vs 18) And for the third time The Angel reached down and touched Daniel and strengthened Him.

(vs 19) Read through this verse! Look at all of the blessings The Angel gave Daniel before they continued on with more visions of the future.

Love, Fear not, Peace, Be Strong and of good courage.

These blessings strengthened Daniel. Isn't that so interesting? In such an intense time, the reality of these words being Spoken forth into the spiritual experience strengthened Daniel. Verse 19 tells us, "...and as He spoke these words I was strengthened and said, 'Let my Lord Speak for you have strengthened me.'" It is amazing, really, when we consider these words strengthened a man whose body could not handle the intensity of the experience. The experience doesn't become less intense—from here the conversation between God and Daniel continues on for two more chapters.

Write out Psalm 119:50

This fast is similar to what we've seen in the others, except for its increased intensity. We see Daniel turn upward as did the others, but then we see God reach down to touch the heart and life of Daniel in a special way. We see an intimacy and depth of richness in the relationship between God and Daniel,

and as Daniel turned completely upward we see God allow Daniel to interact with the spiritual realm.

Intense Intimacy

Is this level of Intense Intimacy unrealistic in your life?

Is this level of Intense Intimacy reserved for the Prominent of Scripture? NO!!! Emphatically NO!

David was just a kid watching his sheep and longing to know God more.

Paul was just a Jewish teacher passionate about God.

Nehemiah was a simple cup bearer to the king with the heart of the Father toward his people.

Elijah was just a man of Faithfulness.

It was the depth of relationship, it was the desire to know God more that changed these lives.

David went from a kid watching his sheep to a King.

Paul went from a Jewish teacher to the builder of the Church.

Nehemiah went from a simple cup bearer to the one who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

Elijah was just a man of faithfulness who stepped out in bold faith and took part in some of the greatest victories ever recorded in the Bible.

It was not because of a Greatness in them, it was because of their willingness to Turn Upward with their heart, soul, mind, and body and seek God in an intense and passionate way. The Greatness in God met with them and their lives were changed.

LESSON 7

Turning Upward

Throughout this study I've pointed out the differences and similarities of how fasting affected the spiritual lives of the men who fasted. Yes, each fast was different, but I believe it's even more important for us to look at the ways the fasts are the same. I think when we find the common themes then we begin to see the purpose for fasting in our own lives.

One thing we noticed about all of the fasts was the intimacy that occurred in the Relationship between God and the one fasting. In fact, I believe that is the key to fasting. When I first started fasting I would fast for a day, then it would be over and I would think, *Well, I just didn't eat today!* It was nothing special, no Angel showed up with special cakes like in Elijah's fast. I didn't get any special messages from God. I just didn't eat. But as I continued to practice fasting I noticed that as I pushed

aside my own desires in order to try to understand God more, I sure did understand Him more.

What does Jeremiah 29:13 say?

YES! This is a promise! It is a promise that God made in the Old Testament and Jesus reminded us of the same promise again in the New Testament.

What did Jesus say in Matthew 7:7?

Seek Him. **Turn Upward** with your heart, soul, mind, and body. He has promised us that we are not seeking in vain. He will meet with us. Our relationship with Him will become deeper, more intense, and more intimate. If that alone was the only thing that ever came from giving up food for a short period of time, wouldn't it be worth it? Wouldn't it be worth it to count it all loss compared to the surpassing greatness of Knowing HIM?

Turning Upward

But that's not the only thing we noticed. As these men fasted, as they turned upward with their heart, soul, mind, and body, they became aligned with the purposes and plans of God. Do you remember when Nehemiah received the plan to rebuild the wall? Or when Elijah was given a new vision to carry on the plan of God? Or when Paul was completely transformed and his entire person came into alignment with the plans and purposes of his Father? Fasting is a time of Relationship. It is a time when both parties have a chance to speak and both parties have a chance to listen to what the other is saying. When these men were fasting, or after they finished their fast, they were each used to carry out a plan or purpose for God.

What was God's plan or purpose for Jesus?

What was God's plan or purpose for Nehemiah?

What was God's plan or purpose for Elijah?

What was God's plan or purpose for David?

What was God's plan or purpose for Paul?

What was God's plan or purpose for Daniel?

Through fasting, these men were able to become intimately aware of what it was God intended for them. We've already said that there was nothing particularly great about these men as individuals. It was their obedience in fulfilling the plans and purposes of God for their lives, and their humility, that allows

us to look back at them as examples of godliness and faithfulness.

What does Psalm 25:9 say about those who are humble?

I believe that in order for us to understand God's plan and purpose for our life we have to come to a place that our view of Him is no longer blocked by our own desires. We have to push aside our own desires and turn upward with our entire person, our heart, soul, mind, and body. When we do that in humility, empty of our desires, then we can see clearly the plans and purposes of the Father for our life. Is hard to empty ourselves of our own desires? Does it hurt sometimes? Of course! But, isn't it worth it? Isn't it worth it to say, "I count it all loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing HIM?" One thing the practice of fasting teaches us is that the pain is only temporary. The "surpassing greatness of knowing Him" follows soon after.

What does 2 Corinthians 4:17 tell us?

Yes, "...an eternal glory, beyond all comparison." Don't miss out on that because it's too difficult to let go of something you desire. Embrace Emptiness. God loves to work with "empty". Take a look around you and see what God did when the earth was empty and void. Magnificence! Oh dear women, just imagine how much more Magnificence He will create with our lives when we are empty vessels waiting to be filled up by Him. St. Augustine wrote in his book *Confessions*, "For the vessels which You do fill do not confine You, since even if they were broken You would not be poured out. And when You are poured out on us, You are not thereby brought down, rather, we are uplifted." Magnificent!

What does God say to us in Jeremiah 33:3?

At the beginning of this study I proposed two questions. These questions and the journey to answer these questions now become yours.

1. When we purposefully position ourselves in such a manner, when we come to a place where our own personal desires are no longer distracting our upward vision, what then will be the result?

2. How will that affect the relationship with the One on whom our longings are focused?

I hope you choose to step out in faith!

I pray that your experience with the Father will be Magnificent!

Enjoy your journey!

