2018 EASTER PRAYER & FASTING GUIDE

CALLED



WHY "CALLED"? In John's Gospel (11:38-44), Jesus calls Lazarus from the grave, foreshadowing of his own death and resurrection. Before the miracle occurs, Jesus does two things. He acknowledges his Father, and that this sign is for others so they might believe—heeding God's call to become his children. Then the Lord calls Lazarus by name. Jesus, who did this, is the same today and yesterday and forever (Heb 13:8).

He still displays his power to demonstrate God's great love for those who do not yet believe. He also calls us by name to help reach them. Sometimes that's a personal call, where we hear God speak our name. But it is *always* a common calling for our church and the Church. Because Jesus has already called our community to be about his mission—to make disciples. That's what we strive to accomplish together.

For the next 21 days, let's pray that what God did before Jesus Resurrection still rings throughout our community this Easter, calling those who have yet to receive Jesus by faith. Let's also contend for those who are hearing that call and who need to turn toward the One who will save them.

PREPARING FOR A HARVEST In Proverbs 14, the Spirit of God encourages us that an abundant harvest comes from "the strength of the oxen." A literal harvest requires careful preparation. So does a spiritual harvest. Many times God uses the image of lovingly tended crops yielding an abundant harvest. It's a picture of the miraculous work he does while bringing people into his Kingdom. It's work to which he's called us. Do we believe that? Yes? Good. Let's prepare. Here's how.

21 DAYS TOGETHER First, decide what you want to fast and for how long. There's some tips on how to do that in the back of this guide. Next, use this booklet for your daily devotions, or along with them, starting 21 days before Easter. It's simple:

- Read the passage and devotion for each day.
- Jot down a few thoughts prompted by the response questions.
- Pray as suggested in the daily prayer focus.

DAY 1: HIDING READ GENESIS 3:9

"Where are you?" It's perhaps the saddest question recorded in Scripture. God was looking for his children and they were hiding from him. They'd never done that before, but they'd also never sinned before. Now everything was different with Adam and Eve. Their trust was displaced by fear. Love had grown cold and turned inward, away from their Creator. Intimacy was replaced with suspicion and indifference. They were naked and ashamed. It still happens today. When we sin, there is forgiveness, but there is also a relational barrier we feel that would beg us to hide from God's call. He still asks, "Where are you?" Thankfully, we can answer, "Here, in Christ."

want to hide from your Creator, feeling unworthy and isolated?		

PRAYER FOCUS: Confess to God what you've written above and ask for his healing touch and forgiving love to strengthen your heart.

DAY 2: RISE UP AND GO READ GENESIS 12:1-4

God is a good communicator, who invites us to trust him when he calls. The issue isn't what God chooses to tell us, or not tell us. The issue is this: Do we trust what he says? Abram was by all accounts an idol-worshiper, living among an idolatrous people. There's no certainty that he knew God before being called in Genesis 12. This mysterious God tells him to go "to the land I will show you." So, Abram decides to pack up, move, and go believing that land held his future and God's promise. To his credit (Genesis 15:6) Abram believed that God was trustworthy. We have all been called to that same simple, childlike trust that Abraham displayed.

RESPONSE: Where is God leading you? What is he saying and what do you think he wants to show you?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for a tender heart that you may hear God clearly. Pray also for others to hear and trust God's call as Abram did.

DAY 3: SENT READ JUDGES 6:11-16

Gideon was reluctant to answer God's call. He did not feel worthy (6:15), and he was unsure if God's favor still rested on Israel (6:13). From a human perspective, Gideon sounds like a prudent man making reasonable observations about himself and his circumstances. He'd only left one variable out of the equation—God's presence. The Angel of the Lord offers no rebuttal to Gideon's leading questions. No defense of God. Instead he asks a question of his own, "Am I not sending you?" He also makes a promise, "I will be with you..." God never sends us out alone. He is the God who is with us, and in us, as John 14:17 teaches.

RESPONSE: Where are you sent? To family? Friends? Neighbors? Where do you need God to go with you?		

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that God would send you where he wills, that you would hear his call clearly, and know his presence wherever you're sent.

DAY 4: "NO" READ RUTH 1:15-17

Naomi spoke human wisdom over Ruth. It is hard to argue with the older woman's logic. She knew how the world worked and her advice reflected that hard-won experience. But as the Scriptures reminded us, there is wisdom "from above" (James 3:17) with a different source from any other human advice we might receive, good or bad. When God calls us, his direction can run counter to prevailing "wisdom", and that might mean we need to learn how to say, "No." The school, or job, or marriage that seems so right to so many may actually be a barrier to what God has in mind. And we sometimes need to hear "no" from God in order to follow him faithfully.

RESPONSE: What do you need to say no to in order to follow God's call?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray to hear God's voice clearly when you need to say, "No." Pray for faithful supportive people who hear God in your response.

DAY 5: ANSWERS IN THE DARK 1 SAMUEL 3:1-10

We need each other when we're trying to hear from God. As the young Samuel heard his name called multiple times, he did not realize it was God who was speaking. But Eli did. Despite his ebbing strength, his failings as a leader, and distant memories of God speaking, Eli could still recognize the Lord's voice. And the young Samuel needed Eli's guidance, the benefit of his experience. But there's a larger lesson here. We may be called individually by God to a specific ministry, but we always confirm that, and are strengthened in it, through our community of fellow Jesus followers.

RESPONSE: Who is your Eli? Do you have more than one? Who helps you recognize God's voice? Express your thanks below for them.

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for your community—whether a Life Group or some other—that together you would encourage each other to heed God's call.

DAY 6: A WILLING HEART READ ISAIAH 6:1-8

Imagine God giving you a mind-blowing vision of Himself. You're undone, conscious of the vast gulf that separates you from God's holiness. Suddenly, God collapses the distance and cleanses you. Yet in the midst of that experience, he laments the lack of anyone willing to go and do his will. How would you react? Would you feel afraid? Would you sense an opportunity to shine? Or would you, like Isaiah, reply with a simple, "Here am I. Send me." God's response to this eager prophet? He calls Isaiah to, "Go and tell this people..." The message is uncomfortable and unwelcome, but it's necessary. And the messenger need only have a willing heart.

RESPONSE: Are you willing to go where God calls you? What are your thoughts about embracing any assignment God has for you?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray to see God's call, and his intent for you, clearly. Pray also for the willingness to go where he sends you.

DAY 7: BY NAME READ ISAIAH 43:1-3

God is a great savior. There is no other like him. Isaiah's favorite reference to this saving God is "The Holy One of Israel." It would be easy to think of this God as someone who is so exalted that he fails to notice us individually. We might think of ourselves as faces in the crowd of God's family. But God declares that he has called, or summoned us, by name. In fact, those whom God saves will receive a new name from him (Rev. 2:17), known only to God and the one who receives it. While Revelation 2:17 may be a bit mysterious in it's exact meaning, what is clear is that God knows his family intimately and rejoices in sharing that intimacy with each of His children.

RESPONSE: How does it make you feel to know that God knows you in community, but also individually? That he calls you by name?		

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that God would show you afresh that he knows you, and that you would hear him uniquely speak to you by name.

DAY 8: WOUNDED LOVER READ HOSEA 6:1-3

Repenting can be hard, but it is always necessary. It clears our spiritual "pipes" and restores intimacy with God. Without that closeness, it's hard to hear his voice. But repentance is almost always characterized as turning away from something bad. While that's true, it's only half the story. God also calls us to turn towards him, or re-turn to him, and he will sometimes allow us to experience pain to hasten the process. Hosea reminds us that while God may allow injury, or even initiate it, he only does so to bring his children to their proper place at his table. And any injury we suffer also receives divine healing.

RESPONSE: Where are you hurting. Is there an injury that needs God's gentle healing touch, and is there any invitation in that wound to repent?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray along these lines: "Dear God, forgive me. I turn to You, trusting in your tender healing care. Speak to me afresh."

DAY 9: "COME TO ME" READ MATTHEW 11:27-30

The first call of God is always, "Come to me." Before we're sent anywhere, we come to Jesus. There is no higher calling. But it is not a one-and-done. When we come into a relationship with God through faith in Christ, he transfers us from death to life, from darkness to light. But he also says that we are to continually walk in the light (1 John 1:5-7). There are in us mutually exclusive desires that shape our walk. New holy loves given by God beckon us towards him. Opposed to those are what the Bible calls desires of "the flesh." When we come to Jesus, we are refreshed and our holy desires are strengthened. As he said, "Apart from me, you can do nothing."

RESPONSE: What keeps you from coming to Jesus daily?		

PRAYER FOCUS: Release your burdens to Jesus, was specifically as you can, so that your heart may be at rest.

DAY 10: QUALIFICATIONS READ LUKE 5:27-32

We live in a dominant culture that trades on capacities. If you have vast resources, you can trade those to buy pleasure and avoid pain. You can even trade on your capacities with other high-capacity people to secure those resources. But God's economy is different. He calls the spiritually bereft and makes them new. He uses those who seem the least qualified and it's glorious because any effectiveness they demonstrate is clearly a work of God. That's not to disqualify smart, industrious people from ministry. God uses all who yield to His touch. But intelligence, money, influence, and status are never prerequisites for God-use. He called and used Levi, a hated tax collector. He can do so with anyone.

RESPONSE: What do you believe disqualifies you from God's calling?		

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that God would use you as he see fit, healing and strengthening you in the process.

DAY 11: GO, EVEN THOUGH... READ MATTHEW 28:16-20

This is the crux. The point at which following Jesus and continuing his work hinges. As he departed, he spoke to his followers, some of whom still doubted, and instructed them to go make disciples, teaching those new followers to observe all he had commended. He didn't discard those who doubted (28:17). They were included in this commission. Why? Because it's a very human response to doubt, and doubt is not the same as unbelief. John the Baptist doubted (Matt. 11:1-6) and Jesus honored his question with a reassuring answer, even while praising him (11:11). Do you doubt? Most do. But doubters are still invited to be about Jesus' work. They are also invited to seek answers from him, provided their doubts are honest and humble.

RESPONSE: What makes you doubt and how do you deal with it?		

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for the reassurance of the Holy Spirit, who makes Christ present to us by faith, moreover, ask your questions in prayer.

DAY 12: MERCY FOR DOUBT READ JUDE 1:17-23

Jude tells us that we're to be merciful towards those who doubt. What does that mean? If nothing else, it surely points to the fact that we're human, creaturely, and fragile. We're subject to uncertainty, doubt, and the anxiety it brings. When we contemplate that our call to God's missions is shared with a community of people, we must know that some will waiver and stumble. Some will doubt. That's when we get to be there for each other, to help shoulder the burden. The last thing we want to do is to shoot the walking wounded among our brothers and sisters. That metaphor might sounds harsh, but if you've ever been on the wrong end of an "exhortation" that feels more like a smack in the mouth, you get it.

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PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for those who are doubting and need the mercy of God, stimulating belief. If that includes you, pray for yourself. It's okay.

DAY 13: CALLED TO POWER READ ACTS 1:6-9

After commissioning them, Jesus instructed his disciples to wait (Luke 24:49). That seems an odd command at first, But he knew their need for the Holy Spirit's power—the dunamis of God—which Jesus promised would come upon them in the Person of the Spirit. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever. He does not change with respect to his essential perfections, one of which is the humility to include his followers in Kingdom work. The Lord knows that we are imperfect creatures involved in a perfect work, and as such we need the constant presence of the One who empowers his followers. We are called to be about Jesus' work, but we are to be led in that enterprise by the Holy Spirit, who indwells us with power.

RESPONSE: Where do you want the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life? Where do you feel powerless? Be specific.					

PRAYER FOCUS: Ask God to fill you afresh, that the power of God in the Person of the Spirit may come upon you.

DAY 14: STAND READ ACTS 26:9-18

When Paul appears before Agrippa, he defends himself as Christ's apostle to the Gentiles, and then gives a summary account of his Damascus Road encounter with the Lord (Acts 9). Paul quotes Jesus at a key point in the story, who says, "Now get up and stand on your feet..." (26:16) He says this immediately after identifying himself as the one Paul (Saul) was persecuting. And immediately before commissioning him to evangelize the Gentiles. God sometimes has to tell us to stand up when we've been knocked flat. Whether we're struck by a revelation of who God is, or laid low by circumstances, God will often say, "Stand on your feet." Because we need to do so before we can take the next step while following him.

RESPONSE: What's knocked you down lately? How has Jesus encouraged you to stand and follow him, if indeed he has?							

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for those laid low by discouragement or difficulty. Pray for them to hear Jesus encourage them, and include yourself if needed.

DAY 15: FROM DEATH TO LIFE READ ROMANS 4:16-21

Have you ever felt like you were talking to someone who was dead? You've loved them, laying your life down. You've faithfully served them, and you've earned a hearing. They've listened to your faith story, then...nothing. Where you had hoped to see life spring forth, you observe...nothing. That's when you need to be certain that God is the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not." Our role is to be faithful witnesses, but it is God who works to enliven those who hear the Good News.

RESPONSE: How does it make you feel to know God does this?					

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for those who need to come alive in God.

DAY 16: HE CALLS ME "SAINT" READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:2

A single verse an change everything. The church in Corinth was a mess when Paul wrote his first letter to them. You don't have to read much past verse 1:2 before you run into bickering among leaders (1:10-17), pride (1:18-31), and a shocking lack of sexual integrity (5:1 and following). But Paul starts his letter by calling them "saints", the called-out ones of God. It was, and is, an affirmation of their identity in Christ. Paul doesn't question their place among the saints of God. He affirms it. Indeed, the Holy Spirit affirms their calling through the apostle's pen, apart from their bad behavior. The letter offers firm correction along with affirmation. And isn't that always the work of God's Spirit as we're called deeper into being saints?

RESPONSE: How do you relate to the term saint? Is it encouraging?

Discouraging? Why is it important that God calls you a "saint" and how
do you see that expressing in your life?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that God establishes your sainthood as identity, and that he calls others likewise.

DAY 17: HOPE CALLING READ EPHESIANS 1:18

For all its wonder, the unaided human eye can only detect a relatively small part of an expansive energy spectrum. Every day, all day, we miss the far reaches of these frequencies that extend beyond visible light. Paul references another set of eyes, spiritual eyes, that look into the things of God, rendering them as a heart-fortifying enlightenment. Hope rushes into the void of our heart through just such eyes as these. When we need hope, when we feel hopeless, we have already been prayed for in this ancient text written under the Holy Spirit's inspiration. We need only open our eyes to see it.

RESPONSE: Where, or when, have you felt most hopeless. How did God call to you, and what did he say? If you haven't yet heard hope calling, what do you need God to do or say?						

PRAYER FOCUS: Hope. If you have it, pray for others along with Paul. If you need it, pray for yourself, and then others.

DAY 18: A WORTHY CALLING READ EPHESIANS 4:1-6

Have you ever had someone *implore* you to do something, where the full weight of their passion rests on a single request. That's the nature of Paul's exhortation in verse one that we "walk in a manner worthy of the calling". He is quite clear in the first three chapters of his letter to the Ephesians regarding our place in God's family. We are adopted children, made alive in Christ because of God's great love for us. We're saved graciously through faith. Paul then appeals to this marvelous calling in the strongest terms. The NIV renders it *implore*, another translation uses *urge*. The meaning is clear: that the outward expression of our life in Jesus honors him when it matches the inward reality of our being—who we are called to be.

RESPONSE: Do you feel a disconnect between the inward reality of your life in Christ and how it expresses externally? If so, how?

PRAYER FOCUS: Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any persistent areas of disconnect and then repent, turning to Jesus with open hands.

DAY 19: TURNING READ LUKE 23:39-43

Every day the Holy Spirit presents Jesus as our Savior. The One who bore our sin. How do we respond? Do we see a broken man on a cross and turn away, rejecting his overture with mocking indifference. Or do we turn to him, see the King of Glory, look at his face, open our hearts, and say, "You are my Lord. I want to be part of your Kingdom. Will you remember me?" Jesus will not give us the murky middle ground. He won't let us stand in the middle, waffling. The Spirit of Jesus will always gently confront us, insisting on a turn in one direction or the other. Away from the goodness of God in the person of Jesus, or toward him. There really are only two paths.

With which criminal crucified with Jesus do you identify? Does that sometimes change from day-to-day, and if so, why?					

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for a soft heart that turns quickly to Jesus. Pray also for others you know by name to have that same response.

DAY 20: FUELED BY BELIEF READ JOHN 20:1-10

What would make you run? The return of a prodigal child? A report that a loved one was missing? Both? Neither? Peter and John ran at Mary Magdalene's report of Jesus' missing body. They were fueled by belief...in something, their behavior shocking. It was unseemly, and even shameful, in an ancient near-eastern culture to run like that. They didn't care. There was something more important than decorum at stake. The hopes and dreams of a people hung in the balance, but their more immediate concern was for Jesus' body, and the possibility of desecration. They seemed still to be chasing after the dead (note verse 9). Meanwhile, the living Lord Jesus had already left the grave and was calling them to follow (Mark 16:7).

RESPONSE: What do you believe, really believe, about Jesus and his life?						
How does that fuel what you do, and to whom you run?						

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for a deeper belief and trust for yourself and others to whom God calls you as an ambassador for Jesus.

DAY 21: RECONCILERS READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-20

Blessed are the peacemakers. When Jesus spoke those words (Matthew 5:9), he foreshadowed what Paul would later write about Jesus' disciples as ambassadors of reconciliation. If we belong to Jesus, then we are part of his ministry of reconciliation. We represent that mission whenever we meet people, get to know them, and they us. Ambassadors have a charge to represent well those who send them. But ambassadors of one country to another are single individuals. They don't represent their country in community with others. They stand alone, in a sense. We don't. We "ambassador" together, but as one body with one head, Jesus. The unity we contend for (see Day 18) is for more than our comfort. We need each other to do Jesus' work.

RESPONSE: How do you see yourself as Jesus' ambassador? Does that put a						
finer point on what it means to be his "witness" and if so, how?						

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for a deeper understanding of what it means to be Jesus' ambassador and for unity among those who share that with you.

WHY FAST?

There are many benefits to fasting. Among them are an increased spiritual sensitivity, a heightened hunger for God, a focused intensity as you contend for God's best, seeing the bonds of stubborn sin broken, and experiencing a passion for evangelism. It's especially helpful when you have a major decision to make because it promises to make you more attuned to God's Spirit.

INSTRUCTIONS ON FASTING

Here are three kinds of fasts found in the Bible. Here's an example of each, and how to go about doing them:

The Partial Fast—like John the Baptist, who fasted from certain foods in favor of locusts and honey. (Matthew 3:4) You simply fast something selective, like a type of food.

The Normal Fast—The 40 days Jesus fasted, for example. No mention is made of whether he fasted from water, though it is possible. A normal fast is one where you eat no food and drink only water. Following the fast, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. (Mark 4:1–4, and Luke 4:14–15) Lots of people regularly fast for 1–3 days and find that it's not difficult for short periods of time if their health is good.

The Total Fast—like Moses on the Mountain of God. (Exodus 34:28) You don't eat or drink anything during this fast, including water (In Moses' case it may have been a sunup to sundown fast each day, or a supernatural occurrence because of its duration.) Only do a total fast for a short time, maybe 8–12 hours, and only if your care provider confirms you're healthy enough to do so.

Jesus told his disciples to keep their fasts a matter between themselves and God. Apparently, it was not uncommon for those who were fasting to draw attention to themselves, seeking recognition from men. Jesus instructs his disciples not to do that, but to look their best while drawing no attention to their fast. (Matthew 6:16)

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

There are examples of fasting throughout the Bible, but let's look at some instances in the New Testament. Anna fasted and prayed at the temple and was able to discern the importance of Jesus when he was presented by Mary and Joseph. (Luke 2:36–38)

In a parable about two men coming to pray, Jesus shows that ritual holiness, like prayer, fasting and tithing, can become prideful exercises that give men a false sense of security in their relationship with God. (Luke 18:12)

In the Book of Acts, fasting was used as a means of receiving direction from the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:1–3)

It's also recorded that prayer and fasting are part of the way Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for the churches that they planted. (Acts 14:23)

Fasting should not become a means of fulfilling a vow to God or of drawing attention to yourself. This does not honor God. A fast should be done with a proper heart toward God. Fasting is a sacrifice to God where you give up food, or something else, in order to devote your energy to prayer.

A PRACTICAL APPROACH

If you have a medical condition that could make it unsafe to stop eating for an extended time, check with your healthcare provider before fasting. You can fast food and drink as mentioned above, or if your health doesn't allow for that, you can abstain from something else like social media. Other options might include television, ESPN, or video games. Here's how to fast, or abstain:

- 1. Decide what to fast, or what you're abstaining from, and record it here.
- 2. Commit to a length of time for your fast. Write it down here.
- 3. Use the time you gain from fasting to be with God in prayer.

I've decided	l to fast _			
for:	_ days.			