

21 DAYS

of prayer & fasting

n e w b e g i n n i n g s

JANUARY 8 – 28, 2023

"IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED..."
GENESIS 1:1A

OUR MISSION IS TO...

**CONNECT ALL PEOPLE TO THE LIFE-GIVING MESSAGE OF
JESUS AS WE EXPERIENCE GOD, FIND FREEDOM, DISCOVER
PURPOSE, AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR WORLD.**

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How to sign up to receive devotions sent directly to you.

Please visit our church website www.ctkcharlotte.org/events, click on the link to 21 Days, and you can register to receive the email. The site has helpful resources on prayer and fasting. You need to sign up yourself for the emails as the church cannot do it for you.

Text message: receive a link to each day's prayer via text messaging. Send **21days** to **704-703-0041**, and each day the link will be sent to your phone, and you can read each day's message of the link on your phone.

Praying Community

We are a praying community, we believe that when we pray miracles will happen, God moves. Please join our CtK community to pray for our church, our community, our nation, and one another. With full anticipation for all God will do, individuals from our congregation have worked and prayed this fall to plan, write, and share devotions, prayers, and have prepared fasting resources.

New Beginnings

Often with the new year we think about New Beginnings but there is more than just a new year that is starting. We see New Beginnings with the building of our additions at Christ the King, our establishment of Steele Creek Community Place, in our outreach focus - we see new beginnings all around us. In our families, the new year often brings New Beginnings, weddings, births, graduations, promotions, new teams, etc. New friendships will happen, new relationships, we see people being baptized, learning they are beautifully and wonderfully made by our creator God. We see newness around us if we only look.

Where does this newness come from? Is it under our own power, our own creative actions, our money, our efforts, or does it come from the God who created everything out of nothing! Before the universe there was nothing, a void and He created out of nothing. He does this with new life, He does this with ministries, He does this with our daily lives and salvation. He creates and holds together everything in His hands.

We see New Beginnings also in the changes in our lives - this may include deaths, divorces, job losses, illness, struggles with families or children. These aren't the New Beginnings that we often want but in the midst of struggles when we turn to Jesus, He will turn our mourning into dancing. This doesn't come quickly or easily but we see the daylight breaking through when we are in Christ. This year let's focus on New Beginnings that can only come from relationship with Christ and seeking Him in our lives, families, and communities.

New Beginnings also reflects in our building program. We see the Steele Creek

Community Place nearing completion. This is not just a building but a place and mindset that will seek to reach our community for Jesus. New Beginnings with outreach, healing, coffee, fellowship, community is breaking through. This is most definitely New Beginnings. Please continue in prayer as we near completion and seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

As you focus, fast, read, and pray about New Beginnings, be reminded that creation is happening daily around us – God is breaking through creation and is building his Kingdom.

We will also be entering into a time of fasting and asking the congregation to join us as we seek God's New Beginnings in our lives, our church, our community, and the world. Fasting helps us focus better on what God wants of us, it breaks our self-centeredness and helps move us from inward looking to outward looking. It helps breakdown our own pride, so the Holy Spirit breaks through and renovates us. This has been one of the earliest ways that followers of Jesus seek to do God's will. Jesus did this himself when he was led by the Spirit into the desert and fasted for 40 days. Join us as we seek to go deeper in what Christ calls us to do.

Fasting

At Christ the King, we encourage fasting for 21 days each year in the month of January. This is part of 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting, a season of focused prayer as a church family. You may also choose to fast at other times during the year for your own spiritual development. It's very typical to fast a single meal, a whole day, or three days or more. The timing of your fast is not as important as the strength of your focus on God as you fast.

Why Fast?

Why do we fast? Fasting is a biblical way to grow closer to God so that we can hear him more clearly. It opens our hearts up for him to renew us and prepare us for His blessing in our lives. Biblical fasting involves giving up something we need, or eliminating things that distract us from God, AND replacing that time, focus, and energy with God. We fast to draw close to God, hear him more clearly, and depend on His strength and power rather than our own.

Biblical fasting always has to do with eliminating distractions for a spiritual purpose; it hits the reset button of our soul and renews us from the inside out. It also enables us to celebrate the goodness and mercy of God and prepares our hearts for all the good things God desires to bring into our lives. Remember, your personal fast should present a level of challenge, but it is very important to know your body, your options, and, most importantly, to seek God in prayer and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do.

How?

How do I fast? Fasting may include a fast from food for a limited period or denying yourself something you rely on, so you must instead rely on God's power. Some may fast a single meal daily, a few hours, a whole day periodically, or other. We may fast from things that we spend a lot of time on that distract us from God (e.g.; social media, television, gaming) or eliminate beer or wine, shopping, or other activities or ways we sometimes use to relax or fill up. The purpose is to deny yourself something each day and replace that time with prayer and seeking Him that will cause you to draw closer to God. The timing of your fast is less important than the strength of your focus on Him. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge, but it is important to know your body and your options.

Make sure that fasting is directed by God, by praying in advance about your fast and seeking His guidance.

Scripture References

- *Matthew 6:16-18*
- *Matthew 9:14-15*
- *Luke 18:9-14*
- *Acts 27:33-37*
- *Nehemiah 9:1-3*

Types of Fasts

Complete Fast

In this type of fast, you drink only liquids, typically water with light juices as an option.

Selective Fast

This type of fast involves removing certain elements from your diet. One example of a selective fast is the "Daniel Fast", during which you remove meat, sweets, and bread from your diet and consume water and juice for fluids and fruits and vegetables for food.

Partial Fast

This fast is sometimes called the "Jewish Fast" and involves abstaining from eating any type of food in the morning and afternoon. This can either correlate to specific times of the day, such as 6:00 am to 3:00 pm, or from sunup to sundown.

Soul Fast

This fast is a great option if you do not have much experience fasting food, have health issues that prevent you from fasting food, or if you wish to refocus certain areas of your life that are out of balance. For example, you might choose to stop using social media or watching television for the duration of the fast and then carefully bring that element back into your life in healthy doses at the conclusion of the fast.

As we seek to hear God, we also can enter a time of fasting, Today fasting is uncommon but we see that Jesus calls us to fast to enter a deeper relationship with him. We seek to fast to hear God more as we seek out our vision as a congregation.

Fasting helps us subject our bodies to subordination. (1 Corinthians 9:27)

Fast for the Lord. (Zechariah 7:5)

Fasting brings us direction. (Acts 13: 2-3)

We fast for the needs of others. (Ezra 10:6)

Understand the correct meaning and purpose of fasting. (Isaiah 58:3-9a)

Fasting leads us to repentance. (Joel 1:13-14)

Our fast should be joyous. (Zechariah 8:19)

Fasting accompanies our supplication, the requests we ask our Father in prayer. (2 Samuel 12:16)

God hears those who fast and pray. (Nehemiah 1:4-7) (Luke 2:36-38)

Fasting should be carried out with the right purpose, seeking God's glory and will, not man's glory or desire. (Acts 23:12-13)

Fasting brings connection with God, who hears and answers our prayers. (Acts 10:30-31)

We ask you to participate in both the prayer and fasting for the 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting.

Step One:

Set Your Objective for Fasting - Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

Through fasting and prayer, we humble ourselves before God so the Holy Spirit will stir our souls, awaken our churches, and heal our land according to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Make this a priority in your fasting.

Step Two:

Make Your Commitment for Fasting – As you fast to come into a deeper relationship with God and to see what this next year will bring for you, it helps to make a specific commitment. Below is space to write what you are committing too.

I commit to fast during the 21 Days of Prayer by sacrificing?

I will do this, this many times of day, week, or the whole 21 Days

Jan. 15 - How am I doing? _____

Jan. 22 - How am I doing? _____

Jan. 28 - How did I do? _____

**How was my fasting experience? What did I hear God say to me?
Was it hard? Easy? Did it change anything about me?**

**Use this page for Prayer Journaling, as desired,
during this 21 day journey.**

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**DAILY PRAYERS,
DEVOTIONALS,
& SCRIPTURE**

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Ezekiel 11:19-20 NIV

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

Stuck. Wheels in deep mud and raining all around. No forward movement, no easy way out.

That scene driving your car might also describe your emotional or personal state. You find yourself in a place you don't want to be, with little prospect of things changing.

The people of Israel were stuck in a foreign country, little freedom to do what they wanted, no hope of any change any time soon. It was called "exile".

To those in exile, the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah spoke of God bringing them back home. God also spoke about a new thing He would do in them - more than the external change of place or situation.

He wanted to bring about a "heart change" in his people - a new heart, one heart with God, not a stony heart, but a heart of flesh. "Heart" speaks of the center of our person - where we think, desire, choose, as well as feel. We could say that the heart is the real you, or the real me.

The people needed more than a release from the exile of captivity in a foreign land. They needed a heart that was released to be responsive to His Word and His Voice.

God was prepared to give His People, Israel, a new start. Yes, he would bring them out of Babylon. More, he would give them a new heart, one open to His leading, His Word, His Voice. God will write his word "on our hearts" as we come to Him and read His Word. God will give us His Spirit to "cause you to walk in my statutes..." God's heart work in us will be for your own good, and the good of your children after you. And there is a promise: "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God." What a hope - a new heart, a new source, a new teacher, a new relationship with God!

Perhaps you feel like you are stuck...or that you cannot make forward progress... or that there is no hope - like you are in "exile." God wants to change your life, beginning with a change of heart. Turn to Him and ask Him to give you a heart that will respond to His Voice speaking to you. Take this step! Then, with your responsive heart listen to His Word, for His Voice - and respond in following Him. He wants to help you get un-stuck, with a new heart, to follow Him.

Prayer: Lord, I bring you my hardened heart and ask you to exchange it for a softened heart – one that will hear your Word, your Voice, and respond by following You. Your new beginning in me can begin today, with my heart. Thank you, Jesus, for un-sticking me, for giving me hope, for helping me step out in a new direction. Amen.

Revelation 21:4-5 NIV

**4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.
5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"
Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."**

"No more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away". Talk about a wonderful new beginning. Do you notice how the words used in verse 4 are all similar and often mentioned in life's negative moments? It's because every negative life throws at us does not matter anymore in the end if Christ is at the center of everything we do. The hard part is keeping Christ in the center of everything we do because we are human and we are sinners.

Throughout our lives Christ offers us New Beginnings, whether through baptism, trials, people we meet, etc. Sometimes we can see what Christ is wanting us to do in situations and other times we don't but if we keep Christ at the center, we have the greatest New Beginning of all coming our way. Now the thing I have always heard from people thinking of this is "Well, if I do this I'll get to Heaven" or "Well, I can't be perfect so why should I even try". The great news is only Christ is perfect, and we aren't expected to be. Heaven isn't just about checking off boxes, we need to have true faith and a relationship with Christ. We need to be digging into his word daily. Congratulations, you are doing that today! We should be living it though! If we read His word this morning, we shouldn't just check it off, but instead we should ask God what you should be getting from what you've read and find a way to live it out in your day.

The last piece I want to touch on is verse 5. These "words are trustworthy and true". The hard part for me with this sentence is I can think of numerous times in my life I've heard someone, or I've told someone, "Trust me" or "It's true". Many times I've found out I couldn't trust what was said or I made something up myself. In school we were always told to write something down when it's important. The greatest teacher of them all does the same here. Through our trials we are going to tell ourselves maybe that verse is not true, but God wants to remind us of what he says is true. If we tend to read the same writer or the same column week after week, whether we like it or not, we start to believe that person for who he is. Maybe take that into your daily routine. Write down "God's words are trustworthy and true". After a while you just might find yourself having a little more faith. Know that you can trust in God! Nothing he has ever said has been untrue.

DAY 2 Cont

January 9
Nick Deahl

Prayer: Father, thank you for the day you've made. I thank you for always having your Word for me to turn back to. I thank you for speaking truth in my life, especially in the times I don't want to hear it. I thank you for forgiving my sins and making me new. I thank you for taking away "death, mourning, crying, and pain". Help me trust that you will make me new. You will continue to work in me to make me better. Help me to reach my community. Help me to reach outside my community. Help me to share this good news of a new beginning with the world. It's in your name I pray. Amen.

Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV

**18 “Remember not of the former things, nor consider the things of old.
19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”**

For these 21 days, our main theme is ‘new beginnings’. Isaiah is saying that we need to forget the things of the past because God is doing a new thing. He will make a way in the hardships and pain, and we just need to be willing to look for that path and start that new beginning.

This verse is one of my favorites and actually reminds me of a worship song by NewSpring called, ‘Ways in the Wasteland’. The chorus is as follows:

Behold, You are doing a new thing
Yes, we will believe
Making ways in the wasteland
Turning deserts into streams
Breathing light into darkness
for all the world to see
You are doing a new thing
Yes we will believe

This chorus reminds us that God is constantly working in our lives, even though we may not see it. Isaiah uses the active verb ‘doing’ which means God is STILL working in our lives. He is not just about what He has done but what He is doing now and going to do in the future.

Our response to this is demonstrated in the bridge of the same song. It goes:

God, you are worthy. God, you are holy.
We give you honor. We give you glory.
In all of your goodness, you go before me.
God, you are worthy. God, you are holy.

All we need to do is: believe that God can and is actively doing new things in our lives and praise him for what He is doing.

When was the last time you sat down and praised God for being active in your life? He deserves all of our praise. I challenge you today to look this song up on the internet, listen to it while praising God for the things he has done and is going to do in your life.

DAY 3 Cont

January 10
Ben Armstrong

Prayer: God, you are worthy. God, you are holy. We give you honor. We give you glory. Thank you for all of the new beginnings. Thank you for helping us look forward, and not into the past. We lift up our prayers to you God that we can experience your glory and power in our lives.
In your worthy and holy name, AMEN.

Lamentations 3:22-23 NIV

22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations is an Old Testament book most likely written by the prophet, Jeremiah. It's a book that speaks of the grief and sorrow at the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. The interesting thing is that while the five chapters mourn the loss of Jerusalem and its people, it's not all doom and gloom! There is a single message of God's goodness, hope, and faithfulness in the passage. We are reminded in this Word that God has made us a promise, a promise that His love and mercies never end, but rather are new every morning. The interesting thing is that God gives us exactly the mercies we need for one day; they don't roll over from one day to the next.

When tomorrow comes we have new mercies, a new dose of His love. We also have a choice as we begin each new day. We can choose to trust that God is going to do what He promised and provide us with new love and mercies for the day or we can go through the day doubting His Word. We can be on the lookout for His faithfulness or blind to His provisions.

We will have many opportunities in 2023 to see God living out the promises of Lamentations 3:22-23. Because God is the same yesterday, today and forever, we will receive the same new mercies and love as did the Israelites of so long ago. I pray that before our feet even hit the floor as we wake up each morning, we take time to thank God in advance for the mercies of the day that God has already planned for us!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are such a gracious and generous God. You have known us since before we were born and You have prepared mercies for each of our days. Help us to look for those mercies and to appreciate how much You love us. Help us to trust that when the new day begins, the mercies You have promised will be there waiting for us. We love You, Lord. Amen.

Matthew 26:27-29 NIV

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

For context, this passage takes place during the Last Supper. Jesus had just announced that he knows one of his disciples is going to betray him and another will denounce him. This whole chapter ends as a very grim scene, even though this moment is supposed to be about hope and celebration. But Jesus knows what's coming next, he reassures his disciples that they will all be anew with him, they will have a fresh start and be together again.

In the end they will have a new life with him in heaven. But you don't have to wait that long to experience a "new beginning". In fact, it can start tomorrow, or right now! God knows all your faults and mistakes before they happen, yet constantly offers you a new life with him. Like the twelve, you are going to be in denial at first, "I would never do that", "I'm not going to regret this", "Of course I know what I'm doing". Then in the end, feel overcome with grief and guilt once the deed has been done.

A new beginning doesn't mean forgetting the past. It means acknowledging our transgressions and making peace with them. Dealing with the past hurt emotions and working through them with God. So that way we can start a new chapter with him because he wants to forgive you. Just as long as you want to start walking with him again. This scene acts as a promise that we will always have a new life with Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for today and for offering me a new beginning. I pray that as we continue to walk together, I'm able to cherish what you have done, not just for me but for all of us, as we continue or start this new life with you. Thank you that I'm not alone in this journey, or the only one who is walking with you. Amen.

Romans 6:4 NIV

4 We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

What in the world does it mean to be buried with Christ through baptism? I would say it is making a choice to follow Jesus by giving Him full control of your life. You make a conscious effort to let the past go, with all its failures, regrets, guilt, and the icky stuff of life. You bury it. It's like taking all the scraps from your produce and putting it into the compost bin. You have to leave it all behind so that it can be made into rich fertilizer.

The next step is to follow Christ and let Him transform your heart. God's unlimited love is a gift that requires your simple acceptance of Him. It is a lifelong process, trusting God every day. His power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in me. It is the supernatural Holy Spirit that helps me to stay Christ centered. When I make a mistake, I know God's grace is waiting for me so that I can learn from my failures and experiences.

My new life is one of freedom and purpose. I am free from my limited thinking, selfishness, and the lies that the enemy tells me. I am free to worship and allow the Holy Spirit to guide me to understand Scripture and give me hope. Because I have hope, I can share it with other people. My purpose is to serve the Lord by telling people that they can have this new life in Christ.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank You for Your gift of Life. I choose to die to my old self and live for Christ. Please help me to see and understand this new life today as I trust God with all my heart. I praise You for all the blessings You have given me and continue to give me so that I may love other people. Amen.

Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Have you ever been to a large sporting event or a music concert? The crowd cheers like crazy when the players come onto the field or stage. I imagine that must be what it is like in heaven when we come to a place of accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. ...And the crowd (of the heavenly host) goes wild!

This heavenly crowd is on our side and rooting us on, from the moment we surrender our old lives for the new one that Christ offers. These witnesses know that beginning the new life, Jesus offers, has a learning curve!

For someone new to a relationship with Jesus, that might mean stopping old habits, perhaps changing the company we keep, or discovering a new way to "be" in the world. For maturing believers, God never stops searching our hearts and bringing us new understanding. Often, He digs deeper into our hearts than He did in our early days, purging deeply layered thoughts and patterns.

We can't live in the world without it hindering our walk with Christ, from time to time. Sin is ever present, and temptations never go away. The good news is that we have a Savior who did the impossible! He lived a life free of sin!

Hebrews 12:2 says that "for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross". Our Savior loves us enough to have had joy in going to the cross— just so that He could have a relationship with us. Amazing!

Did you know that we get a new beginning every day? Every single morning, we have the opportunity to sit at the feet of our Lord and receive renewal. In fact, if we do stumble in sin, we can offer a prayer of confession and He offers an instant new start. We can do this whenever we have need, and God welcomes us. He does this because of the righteousness that we now have due to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. What a mighty God we serve!

I hear the heavenly cloud of witnesses cheering for us... do you?

DAY 7 Cont

January 14
Jane Ann Simon

Prayer: Father, thank You for my new life in Christ! Thank You for offering me daily renewal as I seek to walk with You. Thank You that You offer me forgiveness when I slip, and after confession, my relationship with You is restored immediately! Thank You, Jesus for enduring the cross so that I could have access to Heaven one day. Until then, I am comforted and guided by Your Holy Spirit. I praise You and Thank You for that. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 40:31 NIV

31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Today's scripture is out of the book of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah unveils the full dimensions of God's judgment and salvation. This is revealed to us in the scripture leading up to today's verse. The nation of Israel was preparing for its coming judgment and knew that it was not going to end well. This is because the nation as a whole had been unfaithful and failed to keep God's promises, which later led to the Israelite's exile to Babylon, an event that shook the nation of Israel to the core. This could have easily been the end for the Israelites, but instead we step into a new world of hope for Israel and the coming Messiah in today's scripture.

The scripture says that "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength". Even though Israel did not keep God's promises and were unfaithful, the Lord showed grace. He offered them a new beginning, forgiving them of all their previous sins and granting them peace in a season of many unknowns. He does the same for us and through this passage, we are reminded of how He washes our sins clean.

Christ reveals to us a number of different truths and provides us comfort in our new beginning. First, no matter what you have done in your past or been through, you can still find a new beginning. The Israelites had done a number of unfaithful and unworthy things, but still were given comfort. We are not hopeless, unworthy or too far gone for God to still give us a new beginning. We are reminded here that no matter what happens, our new beginning is represented by the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for each one of our sins. If we believe in the resurrection of life and the coming of the Messiah, we will be granted a new beginning. We can follow Christ and return to connection with Him through the laying down of our own sin, regret and guilt at the cross.

The next truth that is revealed to me through this passage is through the word "hope". The word hope means a feeling of expectation or desire for something to happen. Through the first truth we were able to find comfort in knowing that God forgives us for our sins and that we are never too far gone for a new beginning in Him. The Lord is a God of comfort and grace. Now we are able to find hope in our new beginning and hope in what lies ahead. Keeping this in mind, today we need to reflect on areas in our lives that we need both comfort and grace. While turning to Jesus through prayer and scripture, we are able to rest assured in our new found beginning.

DAY 8 Cont

January 15
Kaitlyn Whisnant

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for paying the ultimate price on the cross for us and making us new each morning. Help us to continue to follow in your footsteps and renew our strength each day so we can bring glory to your Kingdom. With your help, no matter how big or small we mess up, you will still love us and give us boundless grace. Give us the strength to be able to admit when we mess up and start fresh in a new beginning. And give us your generous heart to be able to offer a new beginning to others, just like you do for us. Amen.

Nehemiah 9:5-6 NIV

5 The Levites Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah said, "Arise, bless the Lord, your God, from eternity to eternity!" The Israelites answered with the blessing, "Blessed is your glorious name and exalted above all blessing and praise." **6** Then Ezra said: "It is you, O Lord, you are the only one; you made the heavens, the highest heavens and all their host, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you gave life, and the heavenly hosts bow down before you."

I can't tell you how many times I have needed a "new beginning." At least for me, my desire for a new beginning did not always arise when I was facing difficult times. On the contrary, more often than not, it was because I realized that something is "off" or missing. That something was God. I had stopped focusing on God and His will for my life. I let secular concerns and interest distract me from my daily devotions. I sought loopholes for why missing church was okay. You know the story.

That is exactly what Ezra and Nehemiah faced in 587 BC – the Jewish community had fallen away from the teachings of Moses to the extent that they routinely ignored the Sabbath and looked for "loopholes" in the law to justify their actions. Sound familiar? And just like today, it was easy to find like-minded followers to say these actions were justified.

Ezra and Nehemiah blessed us with the roadmap for how to create our new beginnings and Jesus is always there to welcome us. The roadmap begins with acknowledging our thirst for God and taking action to quench that thirst by reading the bible and praying. In Nehemiah 9:1-3 the faithful fasted and wore sackcloth and spent hours reading the scriptures and confessing their sins. In verses 5-6 the leaders praise God.

Jesus told us to love God above all things. What I find incredible, humbling, and exciting is how God is so patient and each day is a "new beginning" – one where we can rededicate our lives to following Jesus and His teachings. A new day, where you let your love for God shine like a beacon for others.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for sending Your Son to redeem us. Please give us strength to overcome the temptations that await us each day and to focus our eyes on You. Help us to embrace each new day as a "new beginning" to faithfully bring the Gospel to our community. Amen.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Oftentimes we as humans feel the need to control our lives. What we eat, how we dress, who we associate with, worldly things in our surroundings. Many get lost in the idea, the more they control...the more they are in control. However... it's the exact opposite.

Our verse today encourages us to relinquish our powerless control of our lives and rely on the wisdom of God. God knows every step and misstep of our lives. Our triumphs and struggles are laid out in God's perfect plan. He is the master conductor.

God has made us perfectly imperfect here on Earth. Yet, has set eternity in our heavenly home. God knows the struggles presented to his earthly children every day. He is always by our side...always knowing exactly what we need. The righteous will never be forsaken. God will never abandon us. He will always guide the way.

Placing your trust in the Lord comes with comfort and relief. God has the reigns, not us. God's timeline does not always fall into place the way we'd like. Many of us pray for quick resolution. What if instead we prayed for guidance and comfort in the good times and the bad? Trust that God has us from beginning to end.

With this New Year place your trust in God for new beginnings needed. Ask for comfort and guidance every day. Knowing our Heavenly Father holds the map of our lives and gives us eternity in heaven.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for guiding us in every step of our lives. Forgive us of our imperfect sinful nature. Guide us through the obstacles of life, comforting and encouraging us along the way. Thank You for where we stand today. Please help guide your sons and daughters to the understanding that Your perfect plan will unfold in Your time and not ours. Encourage us daily to take comfort in You and not worldly items. Help us find comfort in Your control and the perfect path You have laid out before us. Thank You for your never ending love. Amen.

Phillipians 3:13-14 NIV

13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

I am hoping, at 59, that I am not the “know-it-all” I was at 29. Don’t we all think we are so wise and knowledgeable at one point? Yet, here Paul, who knew more about Christ than most of us do in a lifetime, was not foolish to think he had attained what God designed. It is a lifelong journey to gain what he talks about in Phillipians 3 – to fully know Christ and the power of His resurrection. I find this passage so encouraging. No matter when we start, or where we are in the journey, we all get to spend a lifetime understanding Him and His power. There are new things to learn and begin every day of every year.

As a new Christian, 47 years ago, I was told to put aside childish things. I thought this meant I was to ignore what I was taught and forget about the past. It was a poor understanding of what Paul meant here and elsewhere. Hebrews 6:1 describes this forgetting as leaving elementary doctrine and moving to maturity.

In our ministry with couples, Pam and I often find people weighed down trying to avoid their past instead of embracing it. If I do not take time to learn from my family of origin and upbringing, I miss a humongous part of who God made me. He gave us amazing brains that can create meaning from our past, while looking forward. It is not, “I move ahead, but avoid the past.” It is “I move ahead AND I appreciate my past.” As I hold onto the “good stuff,” I can let go of the things that are not helpful for me today.

In the past, when I considered what it was like to press on in ancient Greek times, I did not have an accurate picture. I assumed athletics were leisurely and athletes moderately engaged. But this was not so. Imagine, as a runner, going full speed ahead for half a mile in full armor weighing at least sixty pounds. And then running in loose sand for a few more miles. In other sports, there were no time limits, no rounds, no rest periods, and no respite from the midsummer sun. Obviously, the hearers of this passage knew something about pressing on.

The task of beginning again and again and again to walk with the Lord and follow His ways is not for the faint of heart. Paul knew that it was work. So, let us not pretend we have arrived or even that we know what to do today to get there. As you and I begin today’s job of pressing on toward the prize – let us encourage each other, and all the more as we see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25). It is okay if it seems like more prep work than we can manage. It is okay if the past is a lot to hurdle over.

DAY 11 Cont

January 18
Mark Taft

We can get bogged down in the sand with all the weight upon us. AND, yet, what a privilege to be in this race that is such a high calling. We run each step in the power of the Holy Spirit and when we read to the end of scripture, we know that we actually do win! So, come on, you can do this with me.

Prayer: Lord, help us. We have a lot of baggage, and plenty of wasted time. We have not always taken this race seriously. We have tried to run it all alone. And yet, You call us to begin again. Right now, today. You would not have challenged us to it if You did not also know that we could do it. In Christ, we have what we need before we even lace up the strings! We are so excited that we get to know You and obtain Your resurrection. Wow, what a race this is going to be! Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

January is often a time we try to reinvent or improve ourselves, but oftentimes, before the month has even closed, we have given up on those resolutions and promises we made to ourselves on January 1st. Many of us find ourselves discouraged, wishing to change the deepest parts of ourselves and unable to do so. We think if we try hard enough or find the right program, the changes will finally stick.

But the road of self-effort and behavior modification is not the way of Christ! Praise the Lord! His way is better and will bring the fulfillment we are all longing for.

Paul is telling the Corinthians that following Christ isn't about following the rules, and a new life isn't about trying hard enough. Only Jesus can change our hearts and lives in the way we want. Following Jesus is about staying grafted into the Vine, seeking to know who our Savior is, and letting the Holy Spirit work in us.

The more we know Jesus the more beautiful he will become in our eyes, the more we will long to be like him. In Him and through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are made new. Not through our own efforts, but through the life-giving blood of Jesus.

This way is hard because we have to let go of ourselves and our agenda and our will. This way feels scary because we don't know where following Jesus like that will take us. But there is no safer place to be in life than within the will of God. Where He leads us there will be rest, and storms and trials of life will not overwhelm us. We are never alone as we follow Jesus and in Him we will find the change we all so deeply long for.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, you are good, you are holy, and you are the source of new beginning and new life. We worship you and thank you that you see us and know us. Holy Spirit, make us like Jesus today. May we say with joy, "behold the new has come"! Amen.

1 Peter 1:3-4a NIV

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

Peter gives us a beautiful reminder of how Christians can not only start each day but live each day in a unique calling as vessels of hope to the world. When Jesus teaches us how to pray in the Lord's Prayer, He begins with "Father in heaven, holy is your name". To begin a prayer with praise reminds us of the beauty and power of the one to whom we are praying. To begin a day giving praise to God simply for who He is, what He has done and His ongoing kindness to us, has us more fully live into the day with all its joys and struggles under the awareness of God's goodness in it all.

Peter reminds us that we have a living hope that comes because God has been so merciful to us. God has forgiven our sins and given us a fresh start, a new beginning to live with Him and for Him in the world and eternally with Him in heaven. Everyday, Peter reminds us, we can arise giving praise and thanks once again. Everyday we can arise freshly forgiven and hopeful for what God has planned. Everyday we can encounter person after person with a living hope – a hope that others see alive and well in our own lives. We display a living hope that meets each situation, struggle, unknown, or impossibility with our possible, powerful God. Each day we can walk with joy and expectation because the hope within us through Christ is real and our eternal future is secure.

Are you starting your day with this kind of praise and hope? Are you seen in your family, community, and with friends as one filled with joy and possibility that comes from the living hope of Christ? You can! Jesus wants you to be born again into His presence and grace. He is knocking on the door of your heart to make His home in you. He wants to save you with His mercy and fill your heart with His joy and hope. Today is a good day for a new beginning. If you are already in this place with Jesus, share Him with others so they can experience His mercy and hope as well.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Father, thank you for saving us through your son Jesus. Thank you for giving us a new birth through the cross and the forgiveness of our sin. We praise you for your kindness. We welcome your living hope within us. Help us through your Holy Spirit to awaken each day in the joy of your presence. Amen!

Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

Have you ever sat down with your hands held out in front of you, wondering what slipped through the cracks in the plans you had? You had it all mapped out, but something was missing.

Many of us have had some sort of moment like this! Oftentimes, we find ourselves leaning on what we think we know is best (our own understanding), and do not realize the effect it can have on our lives.

In a world that is constantly moving so quickly, it can be easy to create a picture in our head of what we want something to look like and start to work towards it. This could be in your career, your home, or even a passion. Are goals bad? Not at all! We mean well when we make goals like these, but we must learn to take a moment to pause each day and think about what it means to set aside our own ambitions — our own sense of control — and allow the Lord to work in and through our lives.

There is something so special about putting your trust in the Lord. When you put your trust in the plans He has for you, and lean into the knowledge of who He is, things start to fall into place. That “thing” may not look exactly how you imagined, but there is something greater ahead. May you find comfort today in knowing that the Lord has beautiful things planned for your life in this season, and the ones to come. Trust and see that the Lord will make your paths straight when you submit to His ways. For all things begin with the Father. Life, experiences, relationships — it all begins with Him. And because you know who your Father is, you can walk in faith knowing that every new beginning is for a greater purpose.

Prayer: Father God, we lift our lives up to You today. We thank You that we do not have to worry about where we are going next because You are our guide. Our prayer for this season is that You would open our eyes to what it means to truly surrender it all to You, and be confident that the plans You have for us are greater than we could ever think or imagine. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

Isaiah 65:17 NIV

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.”

Do you enjoy the outdoors? I love being in nature, be in or near water, on top of a mountain or in a desert. It is one of the ways that leaves me in awe of the Creator who created the vastness of the landscape, to the very intricate details of each created being in it. Someone who can create new heavens and a new earth, deserves our worship and adoration.

Isaiah 65:17 doesn't stop at just creating this, but former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. How difficult it is to let go of things, to forgive but even more so, to not think about it. With God it is possible. In cross reference, 2 Peter 3:13 talks about this promise of God and 'a world filled with God's righteousness'.

The entire state of things is to pass away. All the muck and mire. The new heavens and a new earth will be so all encompassing that it pushes out any remembrance of the old. In eternity, past sins will not plague us or God, nor interfere with God's acceptance of us. And we will be capable of choosing not to recall our past troubles, sorrows and sins. We will be focusing instead on God and the wonders of Heaven.

What a wonderful promise to share with the people around us. Who isn't longing for a better world, a new way of living without the brokenness of our current situation dragging us down? Does this Scripture verse fill you with hope?

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank You for being our Creator God, You are awesome and mighty. Fill us with Your hope and courage and help us to focus on You, Your Word and Your works. Thank You for Your promises and help us cling to them and share them with the people we encounter. May we be Your ambassadors and pass on Your Light as a Beacon of Hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 John 1:1-5 NIV

1 We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. 2 This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. 3 We proclaim to you that we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy. Living in the Light. 5 This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.

Our theme for this 21 Days of Prayer is New Beginnings
Genesis 1:1a in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

In his Gospel, John shares clear evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, sent from heaven. He says numerous times; we've seen Him, we've heard him, we've touched Him. As I ponder on this message, I sense his plea for 'us to hear and feel' his message, to experience his experience. He says, we proclaim to you!

Think of a time, you shared with someone an exceptional experience of something miraculous happening or an urgent need to know. We wanted undivided attention. We might say - listen; I saw this with my own eyes, I touched it, I heard what was said! We might touch their arm, maybe turn them to face us to be sure they listen, hear, and understand.

Why is that?

We want to engage in a discussion so that they can see, feel, and relate to our experience through us. We want to share the reality of the details so that they experience the same joy as we do.

Why the sense of urgency in John's message?

He says, 'so that we may fully share their joy, that we have fellowship with them, fellowship with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ'. John wants to bring our hearts back to the moment so that we too fully experience the presence of Jesus Christ, just as he has.

Recall times of joy in our lives as we have New Beginnings and how eager we are to share our joy, the birth of a child, a baptism, an engagement.

John's joy is supreme joy. Joy to the world.

DAY 16 Cont

January 23
Deb Houston

Prayer: Father, thank You for glorious joy we have with Your Son. A joy that surpasses understanding. A joy that overwhelms our hearts. Causes us to live out this joy in a way that others may see You through us. Teach us and Lead Us Father, to be Your light to others and share Your joy in a way that others want to hear. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

John 3:1-3 NIV

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. **2** He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." **3** Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

An example of being born again is the butterfly. It started as a small caterpillar but after getting out of its shell, it spread its wings in the air, different and with a beautiful new shape. The change is total and it is a new creature.

New birth through Jesus is very similar. We arrived as a caterpillar without being anything close to perfect with sin and living for the world. Thanks to Jesus we found salvation and the change that we needed. We abandon our former selves to live our new lives as children of God ready to soar to new heights like a butterfly. No matter how we were in the past or how much money we have, God has a wonderful gift for us. He gives us this gift so that we can live happily and by trusting in him, he gives us a new beginning.

The meeting that the apostle John recounts in his Gospel between Nicodemus and Jesus is one of the most important in the New Testament. This is due to the topic they talked about that night, as it was new birth.

But what is being born again?

When a baby is born, he is born from his parents with human life. Being born again simply means that we are born of God with the life that God gives us.

Today there are also many people who, like Nicodemus, live trying to earn the Kingdom of God through their works. It is important to understand we will never be able to achieve it alone since it requires something that is impossible to do ourselves, that is, to be born of the Holy Spirit.

As it happened with him, we also pray that people who still do not know Jesus can be born of the Spirit and receive a new heart so they can believe in Christ as the only savior, receive eternal life, and get a new beginning.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for giving us the opportunity to be born again. Thank you that even though we don't deserve it, you give us the gift of having this new life in you. Help us to stay on your path, that we can ignore the temptation, that we don't fall in sin and we can please you, and so we can have the eternal life you give us. Amen.

Acts 3:19 NIV

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

New Beginnings in your life start with this verse. No matter where you are or what your situation, you can turn to God and have your sins wiped away. Repentance is more than the sorrow we feel for the sin that we've committed, but more importantly a changing of our hearts and minds and actions. When we turn to Jesus as Lord, we are forgiven and our lives are renewed as we focus on our future with Jesus.

This repentance is the chance, we as Christians, need to choose right over wrong, ethics over convenience, and maybe most importantly truth over popularity. It's easy to say that you've repented, but we need to actually live right over wrong and put Christ over all. Once you've turned to God, you can be an example of how the love of Jesus can impact your life and the lives of those around you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your forgiveness and the opportunity to wipe away our sins and receive the grace and mercy only You can give. Help us be an example of the forgiveness only You can provide and give us the strength to share Your word with a world that truly needs Your presence. - this we pray in Jesus name, AMEN.

Isaiah 48:18-19 NIV

**18 If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea.
19 Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be blotted out nor destroyed from before me."**

The key verse that we have been focusing on these 21 days has been about the glory of new beginnings. We can see how God gives us new beginnings not only with the new year, but in every aspect of our lives. Often times in our human nature, we take for granted what God has promised us and the verse that we have today reminds us of how fulfilling our lives could be if we just slow down, take a minute and pay attention to the new beginnings that God places throughout our lives.

When we think about new beginnings, we often think about a clean slate or starting something brand new. Now this is true in some instances, but new beginnings can also mean stripping something from ourselves or refining ourselves in order for us to walk into something new with God without hindrance, baggage, or limitations. The passage in Isaiah 48:18-19 showed me that harsh reality but promising truth of God's promises for our lives. In this chapter, God invited the Israelites to return to Him and keep their covenants. He promised scattered Israel that He had not forgotten them and that He would restore them to their covenant blessings and gather them back to their lands of inheritance through the efforts of his servants. When he says in verse 18, "If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea". It reminds me of all the times, when I was younger, that my dad told me something and now I look back and wish I had listened to him because it would have made my life a whole lot easier.

God has plans for us to prosper in life and he cares for our well-being. Sometimes we can get it confused and say, "God put something hard for me to overcome in my life and when I overcome it, I can have a fresh start", when in reality we made it hard for ourselves and delayed our blessings by not listening to God in the first place.

With the new year here, let us keep in mind how we can continue this feeling of starting fresh by being servants of God and our neighbors. Take time to listen to God intently so that we can live in peace with one another and not delay what the Lord has in store for you.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for all the blessings in our lives, seen and unseen. As we begin this new year, help us to be more patient and thoughtful with You and our neighbors. Allow us to see new beginnings in our friends, family, community, and be intentional when listening to Your word. As we go through this new year, we pray for Your helpful, healing hand over our friends and families and we lift this up in your Son's precious name we pray, Amen.

Psalm 98:1-3

1 Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him. 2 The Lord has made His salvation known and revealed His righteousness to the nations. 3 He has remembered His love and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

This Psalm is a song of joy and triumph, praising God for His deliverance from the enemy and pointing to Jesus' even greater victory from the cross.

Verse 1 invites us to sing a new song to the Lord, but what does that look like today or this year as we think about new beginnings? What stands out to me about these verses is that they encourage us to remember. Remember specific aspects of God's character – His strength, love, and sovereignty. For some of us, remembering the goodness of God while we are stressed or overburdened may be tough and require a new or fresh way of approaching worship. It's helpful to keep in mind that all the Psalms would have been sung, stirring the soul, and staying with people like only music can do. We have opportunity to let God's word penetrate our minds and stir us much like music can – but we must clear time for Him and allow His Holy Spirit to lead us in drawing closer to Him.

I tend to be pessimistic, so intentionally remembering each day where I have witnessed God's love and victories keeps me grounded in His truth and helps me to recognize His power and purpose. Sharing these moments with friends or family members - or when others share with me - brings joy and encouragement to multiple hearts.

What new ways might you remember God's goodness this year and draw closer to Him? For some, that may be spending time in Scripture and journaling. For others, it may be beginning each day by sitting quietly with Jesus and letting His presence touch all the tender places that need Him before going out into the world. Still for others, it may be remembering the darkness God led them out of and coming alongside someone who desperately needs a new beginning in a life surrendered to Christ. God's Kingdom is advancing – where and how can you share that joyful and triumphant news?

Prayer: Lord, as we begin this new year, help us daily to remember the beauty of who You are and sing to You a new song – one that brings fresh praise because of time spent with You. Jesus, You have paid for our sins, and we are called to a new life in You...what better experience of new beginnings is there than that? Amen.

Joshua 24:14-15 NIV

14 "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

In verse 14, Joshua is calling up the Israelites to make some radical changes in their lives and put away the gods that their fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt. The Israelites, if they were to serve the Lord, needed to stop serving idols and put their faith in the Lord.

In verse 15, Joshua tells the listeners they can make up their own minds and worship whatever god they desire. God has always been a God of free will. God has never been One to force people to do right. Even back in the Garden of Eden, God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to give Adam and Eve a choice. From whence comes sin? Is it not my own desires? God plays no role in the tempting process, but it's our own desires, our own will, that leads to sin.

At the end of the passage, Joshua announces to the Israelite, by promising to serve the Lord himself before he pledges to lead his family. Joshua cannot lead his family in doing what's right unless he himself is doing what's right. This important principle reminds of that in order to lead others righteously, we ourselves must be right before God.

How many times do we "act" based on what we are told or see? If you stop and think about it, we all have done this at some point in time. In today's world of information overload, commercials, news, email, text, images, etc., we seem to take these little things that ultimately affect our life and put them before anything else. Anything that takes first place in our lives, above God, has become an 'Idol'. These things may not be wrong in themselves, but if it has become all-consuming it can be like an idol. As Joshua says here, we need to rid ourselves of these. We should fear God and serve Him only. God does not want to share the throne of our hearts with anything else.

Go serve the Lord. Put him first in your life and in your home. We can all start with a prayer and see how He will change you and your world.

DAY 21 Cont

January 28
Michael Lail

Prayer: Jesus, thank You for all that You have done for us. Thank You that You have loved us with an everlasting love, even when we are lost in our sins. Thank You that You have saved me by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and Savior. I desire to walk in spirit and truth to Your praise and glory. I pray that more people might say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." We pray in Jesus' name ... Amen.



21 DAYS

of prayer & fasting

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