

2024 *Penten* SEASON

Read Pray Grow

Devotionals

Weekly reflections for the Holy Season



MT. ZION
BAPTIST CHURCH

What is Lent?

The Lenten season is a 40-day season of prayer, fasting, sacrifice, devotion, and discovery. This year, it begins on Ash Wednesday (February 14, 2024) and ends on Holy Thursday (March 28, 2024) at sundown. It is a period of preparation to celebrate the Lord's resurrection on Easter Sunday. During this time, we seek to know the Lord more intimately by devoting time to prayer, reading sacred scripture with intention, and engaging in fasting to demonstrate self-control. All of this is done to reflect the example of Jesus as he prepared to die for our sins and expecting to encounter God. Jesus prayed, so we will pray. Jesus engaged scripture, so we will engage scripture. Jesus sacrificed, so we will sacrifice. And when this period is over, we will celebrate our Risen Savior.

What To Do During Lent?

During Lent, we Read, Fast, and Pray. This devotional was designed to aid you in directed reading and prayer for this season. Every week (7 total) will have a central devotional theme for you to focus on – an area for you to grow in. Within each week, you will have daily verses to read to yourself, with a spouse, a friend, or family. I encourage you to partner with someone and walk the next 40 days together. Finally, each week will have a central prayer. In short, begin each week with your central devotional theme. Read your relevant scripture daily. And pray the prayer daily. And again, do all of this with someone for accountability.

How you fast is completely up to you. You are challenged to give up something of significance, so make it personal. Consider what's commonly done: fasting for certain hours of the day, giving up fried foods, giving up sweets, fasting from social media, fasting from certain behaviors or habits, negative thinking...etc. The purpose is to remove something from your routine that you regularly need or do and replace it with God. For instance, if you give up sweets and feel a craving...PRAY! Ask God for strength in that moment and force yourself to lean on God in your sacrifice. This is a process. If this is your first Lent season, ease into it, but take it seriously. The objective is to experience God in your sacrifice.

You can do it! You will do it! Let's experience God together!

Rev. Dr. Curtis T. Bryant Jr.
Senior Pastor



Week 1: Feb 14-Feb 17 "I Choose Faith"

Back in April 2013, a great rainstorm canvassed the city of Chicago for days causing massive flood damage to the city and surrounding area. A young preacher named Peter Williams, describes his teenage memories of the flood in the following fashion:

I remember it raining non-stop for 2 or 3 days. The rain waters eventually came into the house and flooded the basement. We literally had 1 foot of standing water in the lower level of our home. Water was everywhere. It was hard seeing so many things that my parents worked hard for become destroyed from the flood. The days following the rainstorm were spent draining water and salvaging what we could. Soon after, an insurance adjuster came to inspect the damage and assured us that everything would be taken care of. However, I learned that more than just the home was damaged. My mother's spirit was damaged for a time too. In the days following the flood she was so shaken. She didn't sleep much; she watched TV all throughout the night for weeks. On the contrary, my father slept just fine during the same period. One day I asked him, "Dad, how is it that you're doing better than mom with the house flood?" He told me, "This is your mom's first house flood, but I've seen floods before from living in the south. She's never gone through this process before, but I have. And we have good insurance. So, since the adjuster says, 'it's under control' I have no choice but to believe him. What else can I do? I simply choose to have faith!"

This story illustrates a simple, yet often forgotten principle; faith is a choice! At some point in your life, you'll encounter a flood of sorts. Disaster is inevitable. However, God (who is the ultimate adjuster) says everything is handled. So, you're left with a choice – choose to stress and cry over something you can't change or choose to have faith in the moment? I suggest choosing faith every time...and get some sleep!

READ

February 14 – Mark 11: 22-25
February 15 – Isaiah 40: 28-31

February 16 – Hebrews 11: 1-6
February 17 – Numbers 14: 11

PRAY

Lord, today I pray that the choice to have faith is made clear for me in all my endeavors. Whatever difficulties that I encounter today, I pray that you give me the vision to see YOU in it, instead of what the enemy is trying to show me through it. Whenever I'm tempted to choose fear in my situation, give me the strength to choose faith. In the name of Jesus, I pray, Amen.

GROW

Daily Growth: The situations that we encounter in life are full of unknown variables. Often times, because we don't know the outcome of our situations our minds tend to drift in the worst possible scenarios instinctually. However, the only power available to counteract that "fear of the worst" is faith. Faith must be actively chosen, not passively activated. As people of faith, let's be mindful of the choice of faith that we must constantly make.

Week 2: Feb 19-Feb 24 "Finding Focus"

Yogi Berra was a well-known baseball catcher for the New York Yankees. Not only was he a great catcher, but he was also a great trash talker. He was known for saying virtually anything to distract the opposing batter from focusing on the ensuing pitch.

During one particular game, "Hammering" Hank Aaron stepped up to the plate, and Berra went to work on him. He tried to get Hank to look down at his bat. Repeatedly, Yogi would say, "Hank check your bat, the words are facing the wrong place! Move your bat, Hank! Hey Aaron, check your bat!" Just then the pitch came across the plate and Hank connected – it flew out of the park. After Aaron rounded the bases and scored a home run, he said to Yogi, "I didn't come here to read." Hank was focused

Every day that God gives us can be looked at as an opportunity to step up to the plate. It's also an opportunity for the enemy to distract us. In case you haven't learned, the enemy is very good at his job. We have the power to connect and hit God's assignments out of the park, but the power is found in our ability to focus on God. We have to commit daily to ignore the superficial stuff that tries to distract us. During this week's lesson, let's grow in our ability to focus on God.

READ

February 19 – Colossians 3:2
February 20 – Proverbs 4:25
February 21 – Matthew 6:33

February 22 – Romans 8:5
February 23 – Isaiah 41:10
February 24 – Proverbs 16:3

PRAY

Lord, I pray for the power to find you in all things. Help me to see you in every situation. When the enemy shows up during my walk with you, give me the boldness to declare, "get behind me, Satan!" I desire to serve you and focus only on you. Detour and derail every distraction that comes my way. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

GROW

Daily Growth: There are moments in our lives where we willingly surrender our attention to the wrong things. These are covert attacks of the enemy where the devil doesn't have to stop you but slow you down with distractions. We can fight back by just learning to focus better.

Week 3: Feb 26-Mar 2 "You're Doing Too Much"

Former President Barack Obama had a special security detail during his presidency that included a never-before-seen car. President Obama's motorcade included Cadillac One, also known as, "The Beast." This car was a tank on wheels. It weighed 8 tons, outfitted with a military-grade body that resembled a Boeing 757 jet. The windows were able to withstand armor-piercing magnum rounds. It was further equipped with run-flat tires made of Kevlar, night-vision cameras, shotguns in each door, oxygen tanks, and a bomb-proof chassis. With all these specs, you'd think that this car is unstoppable, right? Wrong! Back in April of 2013, reports circled the globe of how "The Beast" broke down.

During one of Obama's visits to Israel the beast broke down leaving the President and Secret Service momentarily stranded. The reason? It was overheated. The limo was doing what it was built to do but didn't account for the extreme Israeli heat. In short, it broke down trying to do too much under extreme conditions.

Consider how we can suffer the same fate as Cadillac One if we're not careful. We were created by the finest engineer in the cosmos; built to handle incredible work and tasks. However, when we overdo things, we will break down too! Some of us are on the verge of breaking down because we've taken on too much and working too hard under extreme conditions. God is not calling us to *overdo* things – God desires that we do things well. God calls us to operate in order and with balance. Learn how to pace yourself. Learn when you're "running hot" and how to slow down so that you won't ultimately break down.

READ

February 26 – Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

February 27 – Genesis 2:2-3

February 28 – Matthew 6:33-34

February 29 – Philippians 4:11

March 1 – Isaiah 28:24

March 2 – Psalm 90:12

PRAY

Lord, I pray to be wise in my approach to work. Help me to exercise wisdom in handling my affairs. Fill my spirit with discernment for strategy. Give me the power to tackle what I can, and be content when I can't. Give me the strength to say, "No" when needed and not feel the need to be busy all the time. You are a God of order and I desire to serve you in order. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

GROW

Daily Growth: The need to "do too much" will lead to getting nothing done at all. Just because you find yourself busy doesn't mean you're being productive. Resist the urge to take on extra tasks for the sake of having something to do. Spreading yourself thin will result in being susceptible to breaking. Leverage balance in life. Trust God to empower you to do what you can and trust God to handle what you can't.

Week 4: Mar 4-Mar 9 "Finish Anyhow"

An older gentleman decided to run a 5K race so he could scratch this item from his bucket list. Even as a senior he was more than capable of running the race competitively. However, halfway through the race he stepped on a small rock and rolled his ankle. The pain was severe but bearable. His stride was noticeably shorter and slower to the point of placing him behind all the other runners. Despite the unfortunate obstacle, he decided to finish the race in last place.

During the post-race awards presentation, the race organizers gave out recognitions for special finishes. To this man's surprise his name was called and he was recognized as a "2nd Place Finisher." As he went to retrieve his award, he asked the organizer how did he finish 2nd when he crossed the finish line behind everyone else. The organizer told him that he was one of two racers from the senior category. He may have finished last, but his finish was noteworthy.

This illustration gives credence to the power of persistence. Sometimes we allow the small obstacles (or small rocks) that inconvenience our race be used as major excuses to not continue forward. We let the small stuff get in our way. However, God has given us the capacity to power through temporary inconveniences. We have more than enough in us to finish what God has started in us. Moreover, we have no idea what our finish will ultimately look like. By grace, our finish will be better than what we've ever expected. No matter how you finish, finish anyhow.

READ

March 4 – Matthew 16:24

March 5 – James 4:7

March 6 – Matthew 7:21

March 7 – Matthew 16:25

March 8 – 2 Corinthians 5:10

March 9 – Acts 2:38

PRAY

Lord, I pray that you will empower me to submit to your will and push! Help me to trust your path and plan for my life. Whenever I am faced with a difficult decision, show me your will, and give me the strength to follow. I desire to pray the words Jesus prayed, "Not my will but YOUR will be done." Today, help me to submit to you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

GROW

Daily Growth: We all have moments in life where we willingly surrender our thoughts, words, and actions to the wrong things. This is an attack of the enemy. The devil looks for opportunities to have you believe submit to everything outside of God's will. Remember, God has your best interests in mind. Trust and surrender to Him. Follow God's path and finish! Even a last-place finish, is better than a non-finish. God has your finish in mind.

Week 5: Mar 11-Mar 16 "Always Fly High"

A preacher tells the story about how he found himself rewarded through his consistency with an airline. Early in his life he had a great experience flying with American Airlines and as his preaching schedule picked up, he committed to flying only American when possible. As a result, American Airlines rewarded him with "Platinum" status. This means they bump him to first class when he didn't pay for it. Fees are waived for him. They send gifts to his house to show their appreciation for his loyalty. Platinum status has its perks! And it's all made possible because he chose to consistently fly with them, and not the other airlines.

Consistency is clothing that we should put on everyday as it relates to God. God is looking for us to remain consistent in "flying" with him opposed to any other gods in our lives. Flying with the others can take us to places that are farther away than where we wanted to go, cost us more than we planned to spend, and make us stay longer than we planned to stay.

We do many things consistently, however, following God's will consistently is difficult at times. Again, you must treat it as a garment that you'll never leave home without. If it helps, please know that consistent communion with God has its perks! God rewards consistency with "Sanctified" status. God will elevate you, waive off obstacles, and send blessings to your house. During this Lenten season, challenge yourself in consistency.

READ

March 11 – 1 Corinthians 15:58
March 12 – Luke 16:13
March 13 – Matthew 5:37

March 14 – Ephesians 4:1
March 15 – Hebrews 13:8
March 16 – John 8:31

PRAY

Lord, I pray to follow you and fly only with you. Reveal yourself to me in all situations. Remind me of your will and your ways whenever I am lost. Keep me from landing in the wrong destination by always drawing me closer to you. Today, give me what I need to remain consistent to you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

GROW

Daily Growth: We are used to having options with products we buy. Typically, if you have a good experience with one brand, you leave the rest on the shelf. The enemy is trying to throw other "options" your way, but if you've had a good experience with God, there is no need to try anything else. Trust God. Try God. Be consistent with God.

Week 6: Mar 18-Mar 23

"Do You Give or Take?"

Parasites have a bad reputation for a good reason. All they do is take. By definition, a parasite is a creature that latches onto a host and sucks a quantity of blood or nutrients at the expense of the host. It contributes nothing in the process. However, we can only be so upset with what a parasite does because it is only doing what it was meant to do naturally. Parasites were created to take away and never to give anything back.

Since we've engaged this brief biology lesson, ask yourself this question, "Are you a parasite?" When you evaluate your engagement with your family, friends, church, and community, are you always taking or do you ever contribute? Think about the last conversation you've had with a loved one, did you dominate the conversation? We hate to hold a magnifying glass over our actions, but it is needed at times. For this lesson, let's evaluate if we act like the world revolves around us or are we giving to the world around us.

It is not our nature to be parasites. God is not upset at the parasite's behavior, but God can be upset with us when we go against our nature. We are created to give, sacrifice, and contribute. Every blessing recorded in the Bible involves a sacrifice of some sort. The ultimate sacrifice happened with Jesus giving his life for us. During this Lenten season, challenge yourself to follow our nature and the example of Christ to be a giver and not a taker. Don't be a parasite.

READ

March 18 – 2 Corinthians 9:7

March 19 – Acts 20:35

March 20 – Luke 6:38

March 21 – Mark 12:41-44

March 22 – Proverbs 3:27

March 23 – Proverbs 19:17

PRAY

Lord, gift me with a heart to give. Grant me your perspective on how to treat others. As I live my life to do what's best for me, don't let me forget that my life impacts others. I want to make a great impact. I want to be the blessing you created me to be. Today, give me what I need to give the same way Jesus gave. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

GROW

We are in OUR skin everyday of OUR lives. Therefore, it's easy to focus solely on OURselves. While it is in our best interests to look out for ourselves, that doesn't mean we can't look out for others. By nature, we are called to be a blessing to others. A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle. Be a giver.

Week 7: Mar 25-Mar 30 "Practice Perfectly"

Professional Olympians have some of the strictest training regimens of all professional athletes. They train for four years for an event that will be over in a matter of seconds. For instance, an Olympic sprinter will assemble a team of coaches, cameramen, nutritionists, doctors, and other specialists to ensure that their practice is impeccable. This team will drill their stride, foot placement, movement, breathing, and diet over the course of years until the competition begins. If something within the practice is off, they'll correct it and get it right by any means. So, why do they practice so intently? Because the team believes that perfect practices will develop perfect performances. The habits that the athlete regularly practices will become their future norms. It is advantageous that remain in great habits to keep a competitive edge when it really matters.

Our faith should follow a similar routine. We should be mindful of measuring our faith during our "practice" seasons. Practice seasons are the moments in life when things are actually working out. We should measure our speech, thoughts, and actions when matters aren't pressing. In other words, we should practice good faith at all times, and when our execution is short, we need to correct it and get it right by any means. And if you're wondering, "why should we be so concerned about our example during the practice seasons?" It's because a day will come where your faith performance will really matter. A situation will affect you, and your response will likely be a reflection of your practiced habits. Let's be intentional in having God keep us in alignment with Him, so that we don't fall out of alignment when it matters most!

READ

March 25 – Hebrews 12:11

March 26 – Proverbs 12:1

March 27 – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

March 28 – Proverbs 29:15

March 29 – James 5:19-20

March 30 – Proverbs 13:18

PRAY

Lord, I pray that you keep working on me. Use the same hands that carry me, and comfort me, to correct me. When I am doing right, draw me close. When I am doing wrong, draw me even closer. Whatever you do, don't take your hand away from me. Hold my hand and help me always walk in alignment with you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

GROW

Daily Growth: There are areas of our lives where we go in the wrong direction. We either do wrong, think wrong, go wrong or are wrong. We all have them. During our wrong moments, we look for God to make us open to His correction, and not stubborn in following the wrong direction.