

THE
STRETCH

ANNUAL CHURCH FAST

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



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DEAR BEULAH FAMILY

As we enter a new year, I am inviting every member of our church into a season of consecration and spiritual stretching. From January 2 to January 31, we will join together in The Stretch, a 30 day corporate fast to prepare our hearts and faith for what God desires to do in 2026.

I believe 2026 is a year of **REACH**, and **REACH** is the assignment that will shape our priorities, discipleship, stewardship, and witness. **REACH** is our compass, The Stretch is our vehicle for preparation. To support this fast, we have prepared a 30-day devotional journal featuring reflections from various voices across our church. This is Beulah speaking to Beulah, testimonies, poems, wisdom, and Scripture to help us seek God together in unity.

God is calling us to Make Room for what He intends to birth through this church. Isaiah 54:2 says, “Enlarge the place of your tent... stretch your tent curtains wide... do not hold back.” God instructed His people to prepare for growth before they could see it. That is where Beulah stands. We stretch because God is enlarging capacity, increasing influence, and preparing our future.

REACH means moving beyond comfort or maintenance into a new dimension of ministry.

We will **REACH UP** through deeper worship, prayer, and devotion.

We will **REACH OUT** through community engagement and bold evangelism.

We will **REACH IN** by strengthening discipleship and authentic fellowship.

We will **REACH FORWARD** with vision, preparation & purposeful investment in our future.

As we move in these directions, we are seeking God for four corporate breakthroughs: **(1)** a Spirit of Excellence in service to God, **(2)** outreach beyond our walls, **(3)** unity within the body, and **(4)** a focused pursuit of debt elimination so future ministry is unhindered. These are spiritual assignments requiring faith, sacrifice, and alignment.

Over the past two years, we used the Daniel Fast to begin our year in discipline, but God is calling us deeper. The Stretch is our annual posture of fasting, praying, listening, and preparing. Just as athletes stretch before they run and soldiers prepare before they deploy, we stretch so we are ready when God calls us forward. Stretching may be uncomfortable, but it creates capacity, requires discipline, and positions us for movement. As we fast corporately, bring personal expectations before the Lord, areas where you seek clarity, healing, discipline, or breakthrough.

I believe God is making room in our worship, unity, outreach, and stewardship, and as we stretch together, He will expand our capacity and impact. We refuse to shrink, settle, or stay the same. We will stretch, we will expand, we will **REACH**.

With expectation for what God will do,



Pastor Felix L. Cole, Sr. Pastor/Teacher
Beulah First Baptist Church



THE STRETCH

WHAT IS FASTING?

As we prepare to enter this season of fasting, it's important to understand that Scripture does not command Christians to fast. Yet throughout the Bible, fasting consistently appears at pivotal moments in the lives of God's people. When clarity was needed, when hearts needed realignment, or when God's direction was being sought, people chose to fast as a way of humbling themselves before Him.

Throughout the Old Testament, fasting marked moments of urgency and dependence on God. When His people faced uncertainty, danger, or the need for direction, they humbled themselves and sought the Lord through prayer and fasting (Ezra 8:21; 2 Chronicles 20:3). Fasting became a way of declaring, "God, we cannot do this on our own."

In the New Testament, Jesus modeled this same posture. Before He began His public ministry, He withdrew into the wilderness and fasted for forty days (Matthew 4). That season of surrender prepared Him for what was ahead. Later, the early church followed His example, combining prayer and fasting as they sought wisdom, direction, and confirmation from God (Acts 13:2; 14:23).

Fasting is not about what we give up, but what we make room for. It is an intentional act of surrender that quiets distractions and refocuses our hearts on God. While many fast from food, others fast from things that compete for their attention—social media, entertainment, habits, or routines. The purpose is the same: to create space to hear God more clearly and walk more closely with Him.

As we step into this time together, may this fast become a sacred pause—a season of renewal, clarity, and deeper dependence on God. May we quiet the noise around us, turn from distractions, and turn fully toward the One who sustains, leads, and renews us.

WHY WE FAST

Fasting is a weakening of the flesh & a strengthening of the spirit. Fasting is effective because it simultaneously weakens the flesh and strengthens the spirit when done correctly. Many people fail in fasting because they only focus on giving something up, often the wrong thing, thinking it will weaken their flesh. However, they neglect to strengthen their spirit during the fast. As a result, when the fast ends, no progress is made—the flesh remains strong, and the spirit is unchanged.

Fasting should always have a directed goal you are trying to achieve for God. Some reasons to fast: difficult decisions, major life changes, seeking to draw close to God, hear God's voice, and discern God's will for your life, repenting from sin, breaking strongholds, protection of God. Fasting without intent limits its power and just leaves you hungry.

The Stretch embodies our commitment to faith, flexibility, and forward movement. It is more than 30 days of dietary discipline. It is a time of spiritual stretching that reorders our priorities and renews our hearts. So let us stretch our faith through fasting and prayer. Stretch our capacity through obedience and generosity. Stretch our reach through service and witness. Stretch our expectation for what God will do next.

THE STRETCH

HOW TO FAST

As you prepare to begin this fast, take time to ready yourself in mind, body, and spirit. Fasting is not about dieting or self-improvement; it is a spiritual discipline designed to draw us closer to God. If your fast includes changes to your eating habits, use wisdom and consult your primary care physician to ensure that what you're doing is safe and healthy for you.

Intentional preparation will help you get the most out of this season. Planning ahead—especially with meals and daily routines—can free you from unnecessary stress and allow you to focus on the spiritual purpose of the fast. Remember, fasting is not simply about removing something from your life; it is about replacing it with time spent seeking God through prayer, reflection, and Scripture.

Consider how your daily rhythms can be redirected. If mornings are usually spent eating or scrolling, use that time to pray or sit quietly with God. If evenings are filled with television or other distractions, set aside time to read the Word or reflect on what God is revealing to you. The aim is to create intentional space for God to speak and move.

Consistency is important, but grace is essential. If you stumble, miss a day, or fall short of your plan, do not allow discouragement to take over. Simply refocus and continue forward. Fasting is not about doing everything perfectly; it is about allowing God to shape and renew you. Trust His grace to meet you where you are and lead you through this season of growth and renewal.

WHAT IS THE DANIEL FAST?

The Daniel Fast is rooted in two moments from the life of the prophet Daniel that reveal his commitment to honoring God above all else (Daniel 1:15–16; Daniel 10:2–3). In the first account, Daniel and his companions—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—refused the royal food and wine that violated their convictions. Instead, they chose a simple diet of vegetables and water. After ten days, their appearance and health surpassed those who ate from the king's table, demonstrating God's favor on their obedience.

In the second account, Daniel entered a twenty-one-day period of fasting as he sought understanding and clarity regarding a vision he had received. During this time, he abstained from meat, wine, and rich foods, dedicating himself fully to prayer and reflection. At the conclusion of the fast, God sent an angel with insight and understanding, affirming that Daniel's devotion had been heard and honored.

In both moments, Daniel's fasting was rooted in faithfulness and a desire to remain aligned with God's will. The Daniel Fast is not about copying Daniel's exact diet, but about adopting his posture of devotion. By setting aside certain comforts and routines, we create space to draw closer to God and become more attentive to His voice.

Though our modern food choices differ greatly from those of Daniel's time, the heart of the fast remains unchanged. Fasting helps recalibrate our focus, shifting our dependence away from convenience and comfort and back toward God. It invites us to step beyond routine, deepen our spiritual sensitivity, and grow in faith as we seek to honor Him in every area of life.

THE STRETCH

SUGGESTED FOOD GUIDELINES FOR THE DANIEL FAST

WHOLE GRAINS: Brown Rice, Quinoa

LEGUMES: Dried Beans, Lima, Northern, Garbanzo, Pinto, Red, Black, Kidney, Great Northern, Navy, Split Peas, Lentils, Black-eyed Peas

NUTS: Almonds, Peanuts, Pecans, Sunflower Seeds

FRUITS: Apples, Apricots, Avocado, Bananas, Blackberries, Blueberries, Boysenberries, Cantaloupe, Cherries, Cranberries, Dates, Figs, Grapefruit, Grapes, Guava, Honeydew Melon, Nectarines, Kiwi, Lemons, Limes, Mangos, Mandarin Oranges, Papayas, Peaches, Pears, Pineapples, Plums, Prunes, Raisins, Raspberries, Strawberries, Tangerines, Watermelon

VEGETABLES: Artichokes, Asparagus, Beets, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Chili Peppers, Collard Greens, Corn, Cucumbers, Dandelion Greens, eggplant, Endive, Garlic, Green Beans, Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Mixed Vegetables, Mushrooms, Mustard Greens, Okra, Onions, Peas, Potatoes, Pepper, Pumpkin, Radishes, Rutabagas, Scallions, Spinach, Sprouts, Squashes, Sweet Potato, Tomatoes, Turnips, Wax Beans, Yams, Zucchini

LIQUIDS: Spring water, Distilled water, 100% All-natural vegetable juice

OILS: Herbs; Olive Oil; Coconut Oil, Sesame Oil, Salad Dressings: Vinaigrette Homemade using Vinegar, Olive Oil and Herbs

FOODS TO AVOID ON THE DANIEL FAST

ALL MEAT & ANIMAL PRODUCTS: Bacon, beef, buffalo, eggs, fish, lamb, poultry, and pork.

ALL DAIRY PRODUCTS: Butter, cheese, cream, milk, and yogurt.

ALL SWEETENERS: Agave nectar, artificial sweeteners, brown rice syrup, cane juice, honey, molasses, raw sugar, syrups, and sugar.

ALL LEAVENED BREAD & YEAST: Baked goods and Ezekiel bread (if it contains yeast and honey)

ALL Refined & Processed Food Products: Artificial flavorings, chemicals, food additives, preservatives, white flour, and white rice.

ALL DEEP-FRIED FOODS: Corn chips, French fries, and potato chips.

ALL SOLID FATS: Lard, margarine, and shortening.

BEVERAGES: Alcohol, carbonated drinks, coffee, energy drinks, herbal tea, and tea.

THE STRETCH

SCHEDULE

ENTIRE FAST

Abstain from Non-essential Spending (No Shopping)

During the entire fast, participants are asked to refrain from all non-essential purchases. This means avoiding luxury items, unnecessary shopping, and any discretionary spending. Use this time to refocus on God and practice financial stewardship of your resources.

WEEK 1 - JAN 2-8, 2026

Abstain from All Social Media

During Week One, participants will step away from all social media platforms. This includes scrolling, posting, and consuming content for entertainment. This week is about detoxing from distraction and reclaiming time for prayer, Scripture, and reflection. Social media often fills our minds with noise, comparison, and urgency.

Focus: Reach UP - Stretching Toward God — Before we can reach the world, we must reach for God. This week invites us to quiet the noise and turn our attention upward. The stretch begins vertically in prayer, purity, and priority.

WEEK 2 - JAN 9-15, 2026

Week 1 Restrictions + No Television, Movies, or Streaming

In Week Two, participants continue the social media fast and now remove television, movies, and streaming platforms. This is a week to be intentional with family, neighbors, and those God places in our path.

Focus: Reach OUT - Stretching Toward Others — Faith that reaches up must also reach out. This week focuses on compassion, evangelism, and presence...seeing others the way Christ sees them. God is stretching our hearts to love people beyond comfort and to become living reflections of His kindness in the world.

WEEK 3 - JAN 16-22, 2026

Week 1-2 Restrictions + No Music, Podcasts, or Background Noise

This week deepens the fast by eliminating background noise — including music, podcasts, and non-essential audio. (Worship music may be used intentionally during prayer or devotion.) The goal is stillness.

Focus: Reach IN - Stretching Toward One Another — Healthy reach begins with a healthy core. During this week, we look inward at the relationships that make up the body of Christ. God is calling us to unity, forgiveness, discipleship, and genuine fellowship. This is the week where we listen more than we speak, reflect more than react, and allow God to examine our hearts and relationships.

WEEK 4 - JAN 23-31, 2026

Week 1-3 Restrictions + Silence, Reflection, and Spiritual Focus

The final week is the deepest stretch of the fast. Participants will continue all restrictions from Weeks 1-3 and are encouraged to further reduce outside noise and distractions by limiting phone use, text messaging, and conversations to only what is necessary for work, family, or emergencies. We are creating room to hear God more clearly.

Focus: Reach FORWARD - Stretching Toward the Future — The final stretch calls us to look ahead with faith and courage. This week is about vision, perseverance, and forward movement; trusting that God is doing something new and making room for what He is about to reveal.

Final Three Days (January 29-31)

For those who are physically able and medically cleared, the final three days may be observed as a liquid-only fast (water, broths, smoothies, or juices). This portion of the fast is optional and should be approached prayerfully and wisely.



During the fast, I will specifically pray for:

I will begin my fast on: _____

And I will end my fast on: _____

“So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.” — **Ezra 8:23**

I believe that God is the only answer to my prayers and that fasting will draw me closer to Him. Therefore, with God as my strength and His grace as my foundation, I commit myself to The Stretch 2026 BFB Annual Church Fast.

Signed in Faith,

Name: _____

Date: _____



DAY 1: THE STRETCH OF FAITH

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

ISAIAH 54:2, HEBREWS 11:6 (NIV)

Reflection:

Faith requires a stretch. Before God enlarges our influence, we need to make room for endurance.

Expanded Focus:

One year during track season, I was overly confident. Our team had been winning, and I assumed another victory would be automatic. Feeling sure of myself, I skipped one of the most important parts of preparation, **stretching**. Everything felt fine until moments into the race when a sharp pain ran up the back of my leg. I had pulled a hamstring and found myself sidelined for the rest of the season. This experience taught me something important: if you fail to stretch before the race, you risk not finishing.

Isaiah 54:2 says, *"Enlarge the place of your tent... stretch your tent curtains wide...do not hold back."* This is God's invitation to a spiritual stretch—making room for what He has not revealed. Stretching in faith prepares us for the future, like stretching before a race prepares the body. God says, "Get ready now; what I am about to release cannot fit in a smaller version of you."

When we stretch in faith, we're not merely reaching for what we can see; we're preparing for what God is about to reveal. This spiritual stretch involves intentionally practicing habits like fasting and prayer—activities that expand our capacity to believe when evidence is limited and to trust when clarity is missing. Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that faith pleases God and He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

On this first day, motivation may still be high, but stretching is tested before it is celebrated. It is tested when cravings speak loudly. It is tested when our previous routine fights against a new discipline. But that pressure is meant to develop you. God is building endurance and capacity for what He plans to release in you.

The Stretch is God preparing you for more than you can currently handle. More ministry means more patience. More influence means more maturity. More vision means more surrender. So do not skip your spiritual warm-up. Do not skip prayer. Do not skip silence. Do not skip obedience. What God intends to build through you and through Beulah will first be built within us.

Questions to Consider:

1. What part of your spiritual life needs to stretch so God can increase capacity?
2. Where have you been comfortable instead of prepared?
3. How is God asking you to make room for what you have not seen yet?

DAY 2: STRETCHING TO SEEK FIRST

MINISTER TO Y CHILDREN

MATTHEW 6:33 (NIV): JEREMIAH 29:11-13 (NIV)

Reflection:

Seeking God first isn't just the right priority – it's the key to everything we need.

Expanded Focus:

Growing up, I can remember being told, “*You need to get your priorities in order.*” Now, this was usually said right after I’d done something I wanted to do instead of what I was told to do. But as I’ve grown older, becoming a mother, wife, manager, and minister, getting my priorities in order has taken on an entirely new meaning.

I’ve been reciting Matthew 6:33 since I was a child: “*But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*” Back then, that simply meant, “Put God first.” Now, as an adult, I see why seeking God first matters so deeply. However, there’s one small word in this verse that I overlooked for years: “**But.**” In Matthew 6:25, Jesus tells us not to worry about life, about what to eat, drink, or wear, reminding us that God already knows our needs. Then He says, “*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...*” That “but” is powerful. It’s a call to shift our focus—to seek, not stress. When we intentionally seek God first, He takes care of everything else.

We know God knows the plans He has for us, but we must seek the One who holds the plan. He promises that when we seek Him with all our heart, we will find Him (Jeremiah 29:11-13). Seeking God is deliberate: it takes time, discipline, and putting Him first again and again. So, if you’re worried about how you’re going to make it through *The Stretch*, **but seek God**. Worried about how you’ll get it all done? **But seek God**. Wondering if it’s worth it? **But seek God**. When seeking God is our first priority, everything else begins to fall into place. The peace, direction, and provision we need are found when we choose to make Him our focus—trusting He will handle everything else.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the word “but” in Matthew 6:33 challenge or redirect your usual response to worry, stress, or uncertainty?
2. Think of a time when you sought God first and saw Him take care of your needs. What did that experience teach you about His promise found in Matthew 6:33?
3. Think about how seeking God first can help you navigate The Stretch – spiritually, emotionally, or practically. What practical changes can you make this month to seek Him more consistently?

DAY 3: THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

PSALM 24:3-6 (NIV)

Reflection:

Change starts when we stop avoiding the mirror and let God deal with what we see.

Expanded Focus:

Michael Jackson might be the greatest entertainer ever. I'll admit, a few of his songs are on my workout playlist—don't judge me. One of them is "*Man in the Mirror*." It's not just about the beat; it preaches to me. Michael sings, "*I am starting with the man in the mirror*." That's Bible language all day. Why? Because nothing around us changes until something inside us does. Psalm 24 asks, "*Who may stand in His holy place?*" and answers, "*The one with clean hands and a pure heart.*" In other words, before we go to God, we need to look in the mirror.

Clean hands deal with conduct; how we treat people, handle resources, speak, respond when we are hurt, and steward our influence. Pure hearts, on the other hand, deal with character; what we hide, secretly resent, refuse to surrender, and protect even though it is poisoning us. God is not asking for performance. God wants our honesty.

This is only Day Three of The Stretch, but God is already starting to work on the inside. You cannot carry Kingdom purpose with contaminated hands. You cannot ascend spiritual mountains while holding unforgiveness, pride, jealousy, or secret habits. God loves you too much to let you climb while weighed down.

But look at the promise: the one who pursues clean hands and pure hearts "*will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God.*" What if I told you, "blessing" does not begin with what we grab. I believe this text shows us that "blessing" begins with what we release.

Beulah, if we are going to REACH UP in 2026, we cannot play spiritual hide-and-seek. We cannot try to seek His face while covering what we do not want Him to touch. Let God search what you have tried to manage. Let God heal what you have tried to ignore. Let God clean what you have tried to justify. The mountain is high, but grace reaches higher.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways have I tried to look, act, or live like someone else instead of embracing who God designed me to be?
2. What unique gifts, strengths, or experiences has God given me that I have overlooked or undervalued?
3. Who in my life challenges, stretches, or inspires me because of their God-given uniqueness?

DAY 4: THE EARLY STRETCH

SIS. TERRI RESHARD

PSALM 63:1 (NIV)

Reflection:

What to do when you feel alone and are facing change and uncertainty.

Expanded Focus:

Have you ever wanted to eat your favorite dessert only to find out you have to buy all the ingredients and labor to make it yourself? Then, you sit down and enjoy the first bite. Oh, how wonderful it tastes! That is how I feel when God answers at the right time and confirms his love toward us.

My Uncle James was a pillar in our family, showing kindness to people and serving as a long-time preacher. When he passed away, it left a void in my heart, and I felt no one could replace him; we needed another preacher in the family. You see, not everyone in my family has accepted the gift of salvation. This led me to pray and seek an answer from God about my family's future. Who will be the next preacher, teacher, and spiritual leader in my family? Waiting for an answer was hard, but I knew God would answer. At times, I told myself that God had already answered; I just was not listening. Knowing in my heart God said to wait, I kept reminding myself of His faithfulness.

Just as David sought God earnestly in the desert in Psalm 63, I had to seek God in my grief and uncertainty. I wanted to stretch my faith and let God know I was serious. I sang songs, studied bible verses, worshipped, and prayed. God is faithful. He answered this specific prayer within nine months! Today, my new son-in-law is a minister and teacher. All the Glory goes to God; He was with me during the waiting and answered with love. Hallelujah!!

We all face seasons where a "pillar" in our lives falls—whether it's the loss of a mentor, the end of a job, or the fading of a dream. You may feel like the spiritual well has run dry, wondering who will step up to lead or how you will survive the change. Your "dry land" isn't a sign of God's absence; it is the environment where a deeper thirst for Him is born. Just as I looked for the next preacher in my family, you may be looking for a sign of hope in yours. Remember: the labor of seeking is never in vain.

Don't let the silence of God lead to your own silence. This week, identify one "dry area" in your life where you have been waiting for an answer. Commit to an intentional stretch: if you usually pray for five minutes, give Him ten; if you haven't opened your Bible, find one verse to meditate on daily. Show God you are serious by preparing the "ingredients" of your faith through worship and study. Act as if the answer is already on the way, and watch how He transforms your period of waiting into a season of wonder.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. The Petition:** What personal or private prayer are you holding? Trust that God hears the heart's cry.
- 2. The Action:** How will you "stretch" this week to show God you are serious about your prayer?
- 3. The Timeline:** Can you trust God enough to tell Him your heart's desire and then rest in His perfect timing?

Reflection:

Worshipping God with our whole heart honors and glorifies Him. It also strengthens our relationship with Him. He will take what we give him and use it to transform our hearts and our lives.

Expanded Focus:

A few years ago, something happened that had me questioning God. I was confused and I was hurt. I had a hard time praying and all I could do was worship. I worshiped God with my tears. I worshiped Him in my heartache. I worshiped Him in my pain. I worshiped Him in my confusion. I worshiped Him in my disappointment and frustration. I worshiped Him with everything in me because that's all I could do. And then I talked with Him and I leaned on His Word. I grew closer to Him and worked on rebuilding my relationship with Him. I worshiped Him with praise and thankfulness. And as I worshiped him, I healed. I started to hear Him once again and more often. He gave me His peace. He gave me clarity. He gave me revelation and understanding. I was able to see where I stepped wrong and repented. I had been joyless for so long without even realizing it. The joy that I had slowly let slip away began returning. I am so thankful that the Holy Spirit lives in me. At a time that I could've so easily turned my back on God, the Holy Spirit in me led me to worship Him and turn my focus back on Him instead. I thank Him often for never leaving me and always walking with me. If it wasn't for His love, grace and mercy, I really don't know where I would be.

I share all this to say that even when we don't know what to do, the Holy Spirit that lives in each one of us does. Lean into Him. We all worship differently. There is no set way to worship. When you do worship, worship Him with your whole heart, freely and without restrictions. God will meet you right where you are and lead you to the place He's destined you to be.

Questions to Consider:

1. How often do you take time out to just focus on God and worship him?
2. How has worship affected your walk with God?
3. Set aside some extra time during this fast to intentionally focus on God and worship Him. At the end of the fast take some time to reflect. What did you experience?

DAY 6: FASTING THAT FREES

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

ISAIAH 58:6-12 (NIV)

Reflection:

True fasting doesn't just change habits, it breaks spiritual chains.

Expanded Focus:

I was watching a show on HGTV one evening. Please don't ask me the name, but it was the kind where a couple buys an older house with "good bones" and assumes a little paint and polish will fix everything. Sure enough, when the cameras panned through, everything looked impressive on the surface: new flooring, fresh cabinets, staged furniture. But once the contractors started tearing into walls and peeling back layers, they found mold behind the drywall, rotten boards beneath the floor, and long-term leaks that had quietly damaged the foundation. What looked "move-in ready" actually needed deeper repairs. This wasn't going to be a cosmetic fix. This house needed structural surgery.

Sometimes our spiritual lives look the same way. We learn how to decorate our dysfunction. We cover emotional damage with busy schedules. We hide wear and rot beneath religious activity. But fasting is where God tears into the walls we've painted over and says, "We're going deeper this time."

In Isaiah 58, God redefines what holy fasting really looks like. He says the fast He chooses is the one that **loosens chains, unties burdens, sets the oppressed free, and breaks every yoke**. That means real fasting doesn't just affect what's on our plate. It should affect what's on our hearts. It confronts what we've learned to manage instead of surrender.

Hear me clearly: there are some chains you can't outwork. Some cycles you can't out-plan. Some habits you can't self-improve away. They only break through **spiritual alignment and divine intervention**. And that's what this fast invites us into. It's not a religious food restriction. We are doing the work of spiritual release.

Reaching Up means we stop pretending that discipline alone will save us and we allow God to do the deeper work. When freedom comes, God promises clarity, healing, restoration, and answered prayer. **Your chains will fall, and your purpose will rise.**

Questions to Consider:

1. What internal chains might God be trying to break in your life during this fast?
2. Have you been managing something God wants to deliver you from?
3. What would real freedom look like for you in this season?

DAY 7: THE PRESENCE THAT TRANSFORMS

SIS. SHIRLEY S. HAMMONDS

EXODUS 33:12-23; JOHN 20:24-27

Reflection:

God's willingness to be in the presence of His people highlights His grace and commitment to guidance and rest for those who have a desperate desire for divine companionship.

Expanded Focus:

Oftentimes, when we really want to know the truth about someone or something, we allow them into our space. We seek ways to be in their presence to verify or prove that they are who they say they are. I think that can be defined as doubt. Remember the person they call Doubting Thomas, who needed proof that the disciples had seen the Lord (John 20:25-27)? Thomas' transformation occurred when he was in the presence of the Lord, who directly addressed him and allowed him to examine Jesus' body.

Let's not forget Moses (Exodus 33:12-22), who was the opposite of Thomas. He was tasked by God to take the people to the Promised Land. Moses knew that God's presence would set them apart from others. Therefore, Moses asked God to show him His glorious presence (v18). When you honestly and wholeheartedly seek to be in the presence of God, He will show up, as He did with Moses (v18-23).

I was Doubting Thomas and Moses. As a "babe" in Christ, I too doubted who God was. I wanted to know that who I accepted and believed in was true and real. One Thanksgiving night, after family and friends had gone home. I remember opening my heart through prayer and praise, petitioning God to reveal Himself to me. I believed and, at the same time, had doubts, but only the presence of God could erase that doubt.

Through praising, thanking God for my salvation, and praying that God made Himself real to me, like Moses, I experienced the presence of God through the Holy Spirit in the form of unstoppable laughing, crying, praising, and worshipping. That very night, the presence of the Lord transformed me. I must say, I was never the same.

You can also have a life-changing encounter with the Lord. While we don't have the same physical manifestation as Moses, the Holy Spirit is God's presence with us today. I encourage you to seek His presence and watch how your life transforms.

Questions to Consider:

1. What does the presence of God in this "passage" mean to you? How is it distinct from God being omnipresent?
2. How can "you" apply the principle of seeking God's presence through "your" prayers and daily activities?
3. As it relates to the text and story, what does it mean to "you" to be transformed by glimpsing God's glory?

DAY 8: BEING VISIBLE FOR GOD

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

MATTHEW 5:14-16 (NIV)

Reflection:

Light doesn't compete with darkness, it simply exposes it.

Expanded Focus:

Some of the most powerful moments of ministry I've witnessed never happened in a pulpit. They happened in hospital waiting rooms, grocery store aisles, school hallways, and parking lots. They happened when BFB members sat in the bleachers at a Fort Walton Beach or Choctaw basketball game, not because their child was playing, but because they wanted a player in our church to feel seen. They happened when people from Beulah quietly slipped into recitals, graduations, or award ceremonies, not to be recognized, but to make sure somebody knew, *"You're not walking through life alone."* That's light... Ordinary settings but Extraordinary presence.

Jesus says we are the light of the world, not someday, not when we feel spiritually impressive, but right now. ***Light does not need permission to shine; it only needs presence.*** When we live with integrity, compassion, and courage, people notice, even if nobody says a word. And more often than we realize, God is using our consistency as someone else's lifeline.

Reaching Out means we stop hiding our faith behind comfort and convenience. It means letting people see God through how we forgive, how we speak, how we serve, and how we show up. The goal is not attention. We give God the glory, and we take none of the credit. Jesus said people should see our good works and glorify our Father, not us.

During this fast, God may guide you to ordinary places for strategic reasons. Wherever you are - a sideline, checkout lane, workplace, or bleachers - your light matters. Let your presence make a difference.

Questions to Consider:

1. Where has God placed you to shine right now, and are you shining?
2. Is your faith visible or private by default?
3. What does God want to illuminate through your life?

DAY 9: WON'T YOU BE
MY NEIGHBOR

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

LUKE 10:25-37 (NIV)

Reflection:

Light doesn't compete with darkness, it simply exposes it.

Expanded Focus:

I grew up watching Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. Every episode began the same: Fred Rogers would walk in, change his shoes, put on a sweater, and sing, "Won't you be my neighbor?" As a child, it seemed like a simple song. As an adult, I realized he was planting something deeper. He slowed life enough to make kindness normal. He taught us to notice others, care, listen, and believe our presence could lift someone's day.

Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, that simple invitation grew complicated. We became busy. We grew guarded. We became careful with our time. Many of us love the idea of loving our neighbor more than we love the real love's interruptions.

That tension is exactly where Jesus places this parable. A religious expert asks a religious question, "*Who is my neighbor?*" Jesus does not respond with a definition; He responds with a story. A man is beaten, stripped, and left half dead. A priest sees him and moves to the other side. A Levite sees him and does the same. Both are religious, both are knowledgeable, both are busy, but neither becomes a neighbor.

Then comes the Samaritan, the one least expected to be the hero. He sees the man, he feels compassion, and then he moves toward him. He treats wounds, uses his own supplies, places the man on his own animal, and promises ongoing care. The Samaritan does not ask, "**What will happen to me if I stop?**" He lives with the burden-filled question, "**What will happen to him if I don't?**"

Loving your neighbor will not always fit neatly into your day. It may disrupt your plans, alter your schedule, redirect your spending, or strain your emotions. But this is where fasting becomes more than a dietary discipline. This is where it becomes discipleship. The question isn't "**Who is my neighbor?**" but "**Will I be a neighbor when God places need before me?**"

Questions to Consider:

1. Where is God inviting you to slow down so you can actually see the people around you?
2. What makes it challenging for you to offer compassion when it is not convenient?
3. How is God stretching your definition of who counts as a neighbor?

DAY 10: THE HEART OF YOUR SERVICE

SIS. DARNESHIA PARISH

MARK 10:45

Reflection:

Humble service honors God.

Expanded Focus:

A few of you may know, but for those who do not, I am the daughter of a bishop. My dad has a little chant that he says at his church almost every Sunday. He shouts, “ATTITUDE CHECK!” and the congregation says back, “IT’S ALL ABOUT HIM!” It helps remind us all of the true reason we serve: to give glory to God.

It is so easy to get caught up in the hype of ministry. Being the go-to person for the pastor, helping lead praise and worship, or even being appointed the head or lead of a department can have us feeling ourselves a little bit. It can even reach the point where we start to feel others are supposed to serve us or praise us. But in Mark 10, it states, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,” so if Jesus came to serve, what makes us any different? As Christians, we really have to check our heart posture in our service. We must get to the point where we are more focused on pleasing God than getting recognition.

When someone asks my title in the church, I often say, “I frolic for The Lord.” It’s my light-hearted way of saying I am wherever God needs me. Being available to help where He sees fit is what I am called to do. Once I realized it was about God and not about me, the way I served changed. It didn’t matter who received recognition or if others didn’t like seeing me serve. All that mattered was doing the work of the Lord and knowing that He was pleased. When you take “self” out of your service, you allow God to do great things.

Questions to Consider:

1. Has there been a time when you did not have the right heart while serving? What could you do differently?
2. How have you used the gifts that God has given you to serve others in your community?
3. What is one way you would like to serve in the church and the community?

DAY 11: CROSSING BOUNDARIES

ANDRE P. HARRELL II (L.A.)

JOHN 4:7-30 (NLT)

Reflection:

Reaching out requires going first; it means crossing boundaries even when you would rather stay comfortably in place.

Expanded Focus:

The first time I heard that my family was moving from innercity Detroit to the Sunshine State, as you can imagine, my initial thought was Disney, beaches, and water parks. When we arrived, I quickly realized the Gulf Coast had much more to offer than beaches and the infamous Destin Big Kahunas. Moving from one state to another felt like crossing boundaries, and that crossing made me see Florida differently. This crossing also evolved my former relationship with where I had come from.

In Detroit, I spent time with people who looked like me. My schools, church, and inner circle all reflected my own preferences, and I was comfortable. But God wanted to give me a new perspective. As the hands and feet of Jesus, our faith journey leads us to reach beyond familiar places and accept those we once overlooked.

In John 4:7-30, we see Jesus look past the Samaritan woman's faults and reveal who He is to her. Culturally, a Jewish man would have nothing to do with a Samaritan woman, yet the love of Jesus crossed that boundary. If we are going to be a church that reaches out, we must be willing to be like Jesus and go forth, seeing others as God sees them.

To *reach out*, we must guard our hearts against offense and focus on unity. People may have hurt you, said hateful things, or have opposing political or social views—but go anyway. Go because God asks you to. Sometimes God sends us first to challenge false narratives, like they are too far gone. Some people may ignore our invitations and flyers, but will respond to our love. From afar, they may see the church as a place of judgment or shame; we must offer a new narrative. We must show God's love. Let's move beyond our comfort and reach out, letting the “other” know God loves unconditionally.

Questions to Consider:

1. Who are the "Samaritans" in your life that you instinctively avoid, and how can you reach out to them this week?
2. What are some things you can change to ensure your life reflects a message of welcome instead of judgment to those who are different from you?
3. Where is God asking you to stop waiting for an invitation and instead be the one to "go first" in showing love?

DAY 12: PRAYING FOR THE LOST: BURDEN FOR SOULS

SIS. SHIRLEY S. HAMMONDS

ROMANS 10:1-4; 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4

Reflection:

God desires that “all” be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. Therefore, our desires should be that of Christ’s and become Fishers of Men.

Expanded Focus:

I will never forget that time, as a babe in Christ and freshly out of an abusive marriage, I began to pray for my ex-husband. My prayers had nothing to do with his salvation; instead, they consisted of the bitterness that I had against him. But as I grew in the knowledge of Christ, I realized that my ex could not be convicted in his heart of his abusive ways without knowing Christ. Therefore, I shifted the bitterness I was holding and turned it into forgiveness, and a burning desire in my heart for him to be saved (**Romans 10:1**), which became the focus of my prayers for him. I also realized, prior to my salvation, I was a sinner in need of a savior as he was (**Romans 3:23**). I cannot confirm if my ex-husband received salvation based on “his decision” to believe in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, but what I can say is God answers prayers that are prayed according to His Word (**John 14:14**). God desires that no one should perish (**John 3:16**).

I also have that same desire and burning in my heart for the lost souls in my family and friends' circle. I pray for God to release them from their spiritual blindness (**2 Corinthians 4:4**), that they get right with God (**Romans 10:3**). My prayer is that they realize self-righteousness or simply being a good person won't make them right with God. It is the righteousness of God through faith in Christ that one receives salvation (**Romans 10:4**). My prayer is that God open their eyes and hearts so they can repent of their sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord (**Romans 10:9-10**).

We all have people in our lives who feel unreachable, whether they are “enemies” or loved ones. Spiritual maturity calls us to look past hurt and intercede for their souls. When we shift from seeking only our own vindication to praying for the salvation of others, we reflect the heart of the Great Commission. While we pray for others, we remember the grace that once found us in our darkest moments.

During this fasting season, choose one person who has hurt you or is far from God, and pray for their salvation instead of holding on to resentment. By having a 'Burden for Souls,' you both release bitterness and join in God's redemptive work.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can you recall your own "dry" state before Christ saved you? How does that memory help you have compassion for the lost?
2. Who is the "hardest" person in your life to pray for? Will you commit to praying for their salvation every day this week?
3. Reflect on God's love and grace, His love is for all, and He rejoices when the lost are found. What can you do better to show you are a "Fisher of Men"?

DAY 13: THE STRETCH OF COMPASSION

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

MATTHEW 9:35-38 (NIV)

Reflection:

Compassion stretches us beyond sympathy and into responsibility.

Expanded Focus:

After 24 years of preaching and now three years of pastoring, I have discovered that there are moments in ministry when I do not just see people, I feel them. Their pain sits heavily on my heart long after the conversation has ended. Their struggles stay with me when the meeting is over. Their needs follow me into prayer. Some would call that emotional weakness. I would argue that it is God stretching me. It is compassion doing its work within me.

Matthew says that when Jesus saw the crowds, He was moved. Not annoyed. Not overwhelmed. Not detached. He was moved. These people were worn down, scattered, confused, and leaderless. Instead of criticizing them, Jesus carried them in His heart. He turned to His disciples and did something powerful. He did not just tell them to help; He told them to pray for laborers. Real compassion always leads to responsibility.

Reaching Out is not God asking us to save the world; it is God asking us to stop walking past it. Compassion stretches us—emotionally, spiritually, and practically. It pulls us beyond what is comfortable. It draws us toward what is necessary. It calls us to care when scrolling is easier. It asks us to stay present when distancing feels safer. It urges us to speak when silence would be more convenient.

We have reached the thirteenth day of The Stretch, and God may be bringing some things to the surface. He may uncover feelings you usually push aside, grief you have learned to function around, concerns you have quietly minimized, and even people you have tried not to think about. That is not emotional weakness. That is God enlarging your heart.

Jesus is still moved when He sees the crowds. The question now is whether we will allow ourselves to be moved with Him.

Questions to Consider:

1. Whose pain has God recently placed on your heart, and how have you responded?
2. What makes it difficult for compassion to move you toward action?
3. If God made you part of the answer to your own prayers for the harvest, what would your next step be?

DAY 14: WITNESS THAT SHINES

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-16 (NIV)

Reflection:

How you live will always speak louder than anything you say.

Expanded Focus:

There is something powerful about a believer who shines without announcing it. *I have learned that people will forgive imperfect preaching faster than they will forgive inconsistent living.* In other words, people pay attention to how we live more than what we say. They are not expecting Christians to be flawless, but they do hope to see sincerity. When our attitudes and actions line up with our faith, it gives weight to our words. When they do not, it creates confusion.

Paul tells the Philippian church that our witness is shaped in the details. It shows up in our tone, our attitude, our patience, and our restraint. He does not say shine by being impressive. He says shine by living without constant complaining or arguing. In other words, **character becomes visibility.**

That is a stretch, especially in a culture that normalizes negativity. But when we live steadily, when we refuse to murmur, when we practice contentment, people notice. Not because we are performing, but because we are reflecting something they do not see every day.

I have watched people handle unfair treatment with grace, receive difficult news with peace, choose gentleness when frustration felt justified, hold their peace when anger seemed easier, and stay steady through delay and disappointment. Nobody was holding a microphone, yet something about that stability spoke volumes. That kind of witness does not need attention. It simply needs consistency, and it consistently shines.

During **The Stretch**, God may be refining how you respond to discomfort. He may put His finger on your temperament. He may challenge the way you talk about situations that frustrates you. That is not punishment. That is preparation. He is polishing your witness so that you shine among people who are still trying to find their way.

Questions to Consider:

1. Where is God inviting you to adjust your attitude so your witness can shine more clearly?
2. What part of your daily life is God using as a silent sermon to someone who is watching you?
3. What is your first reaction when life frustrates you, and how is God reshaping that response?

DAY 15: WE OVER ME

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

ACTS 2:44-47 (NIV)

Reflection:

Community is where God grows us the most and stretches us the hardest.

Expanded Focus:

Church would be easy if all we needed to do was sit near each other. But biblical community is more than proximity; it is participation. The believers in Acts 2 did not just attend together; they lived together. They shared meals, faith, resources, and responsibilities. Their unity was not abstract; it was embodied.

If we are honest, “we” is almost always harder than “me.” “Me” protects comfort. “Me” avoids hard conversations. “Me” chooses isolation when relationships get messy. But life was never designed to be a private project. God formed us into a body so we could grow through connection, correction, compassion, and community.

Community will stretch your patience, preferences, and even your pride. It takes humility to listen, grace to forgive, and courage to stay when walking away would be easier. Yet Acts 2 shows that when believers lean into one another, God entrusts them with more. Scripture says, “And the Lord added to their number daily.” Growth followed unity. Mission followed mutuality.

During *The Stretch*, God may be drawing you back toward connection. You may find that you have been present in worship but not truly involved, or that protecting yourself has felt safer than letting people in. You may have carried life alone and labeled it strength, when really it was self-preservation. Isolation does not empower us; it depletes us.

“We over me” does not erase individuality. It simply reminds us that God does His best work through people who choose one another with glad and sincere hearts.

Questions to Consider:

1. Where has isolation replaced connection in your life?
2. What part of community is God stretching you to lean into rather than avoid?
3. How is the Holy Spirit inviting you to move from attendance to engagement?

DAY 16: GOD'S BLESSING IN HARMONY

SIS. DOROTHY B. ROBINSON

PSALM 133

As I glanced at our theme for the following year, I smiled with excitement, I wanted to shed a tear, what a brilliant idea I said with a tiny cheer, we will enjoy this fast I know, this coming year.

For they call it the **Stretch**, well we all should know what this means, especially after the holidays when we barely can get into those jeans! But our Pastor, Rev. Felix Cole and Sister Darneshia Parish were not thinking about what we wear. They were only thinking about God and the Good News He gave them, that they couldn't wait to **share**!

They knew from the Word that when God finished creating Heaven and Earth, He then created man who was also in His master plan. He formed many of the precious things we see and hold so dear. He also gave us many instructions, to lead and guide us year after year.

I do remember the success we had doing the Daniel Fast. At first, we thought this task was too hard for us to do. Oh God we said, how will we last? But look at us now. By **Reaching Up**, God helped us to excel, and we know now if we **Reach Out to Others**, they too will do very well.

For this is the plan God has for us, as He said in the first verse of Psalm 133, "How good and pleasant it would be, for all God's children to dwell together in unity!" Peace and Happiness should be our goal, to let our love **Reach Out** to every soul. This verse is a call to action, to make sure that unity continues to stand. How can we **Stretch Forward** in **Faith** and **Hope** if we do not follow God's command?

Though God has given us many Gifts, and diverse as some of us may be, don't forget together we are strong, and His Love alone will continue to set us free! Just as the precious oil was running down from Aaron's head, God commanded a Blessing for us, and this is what He said. You will have Life and Life evermore, and oh what a pleasant experience this will Be. If we all learn how to live in harmony!

As we step into the New Year, try to view each day as an adventure that was carefully planned out by our Guide. It tells us to **Reach Up, Reach Out, Reach In, and Reach Forward**, for God is still on our side. In this world we will have trials and distress, but when we trust in the Lord, He promised to give us Peace, Love and Happiness!

DAY 17: CHOOSING GRACE

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 (NIV)

Reflection:

Forgiveness is not agreement with the offense. It is alignment with God's grace.

Expanded Focus:

Forgiveness is one of the greatest stretches of community. We do not talk enough about how heavy it can feel. It touches places in us that offense tries to harden. Sometimes the hardest battles are not external. They are internal. They live in our memories. We replay conversations. We analyze silence. We justify resentment. We call it protection, but deep down, it is a prison.

Paul writes to believers who know what it means to be offended. His instruction is intentional. He tells them to put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, as if these qualities are garments we choose daily. Forgiveness is our spiritual wardrobe. It refuses to let bitterness clothe our hearts.

To forgive does not mean the wound was insignificant, that trust instantly returns, or that accountability disappears. Forgiveness simply means I refuse to let injury shape my identity. It means I will not allow offense to own my emotional space. Paul raises the standard when he says, Forgive as the Lord forgave you. He does not tie forgiveness to apology or closure. He ties it to memory. We forgive because we remember what God released in us.

Forgiveness is not weakness. It is maturity and spiritual courage. It takes strength to release what you could weaponize. It takes humility to bless someone you could blame. It takes discernment to hand justice back to God without demanding emotional payment from someone who cannot repay you.

Today, God may be resurfacing frustrations or unfinished conversations. He may bring names to mind that you have avoided in prayer. Additionally, he may expose the resentment that has been quietly living in the corners of your spirit. That is not punishment. It is an invitation. It is God guiding you toward emotional freedom. He may be reminding you that forgiveness is not a favor to the offender. It is freedom for the believer.

Questions to Consider:

1. What memory still carries more emotional weight than God's grace in your life?
2. Where might resentment be acting like protection in your heart?
3. What step toward forgiveness could move you closer to freedom this week?

DAY 18: CARRYING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

SIS. DARNESHIA PARISH

GALATIANS 6:1-5

Reflection:

There is great responsibility and great blessing in carrying and being carried.

Expanded Focus:

Galatians 6, Paul calls believers to a community marked by humility, compassion, and responsibility. To me, that means when someone stumbles, the response should be gentle restoration, not judgment or distance. Carrying one another's burdens means entering each other's struggles with grace. Listening, praying, encouraging, or simply walking alongside someone in weakness is enough. But remember, bearing burdens requires humility. Paul reminds us to watch ourselves, or pride and comparison take root. It's easy to feel superior when helping, but true love knows we all depend on God's grace. Today you may carry someone's load; tomorrow, you may need support.

At the same time, Paul speaks of personal responsibility. While we are supposed to help one another with heavy burdens, each person is still accountable for their own walk with God. A healthy Christian community holds both truths. We do not walk alone, and we do not avoid responsibility for our own choices. To truly have a village, you must fully participate as a villager—contributing, engaging, and supporting others within the community.

When we carry one another's burdens, we reflect the heart of Christ, who carried the greatest burden of all for us.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is there someone in your life right now whose burden God may be calling you to help carry?
2. How can you offer support with gentleness and humility rather than judgment or pride?
3. In what areas do you need to take personal responsibility in your walk with God while still allowing others to support you?

DAY 19: ENCOURAGE DAILY

SIS. TERRI RESHARD

HEBREWS 10:23-25 (NIV)

Reflection:

This walk with God has precious moments that are designed with you in mind. Embrace each person you meet, each project you take on, and each place you visit.

Expanded Focus:

About two years ago, I was praying for God to show me another assignment, one that would complement my retirement and give Him honor. Several things began to happen, challenges and blessings that are still vibrant in my life today.

Shortly after, I completed a detailed study of my family history. This exploration led me to meet new people from another country who were serving God with vibrant passion. I then visited their country, witnessed my daughter marry, and enjoyed my time with the children there.

Following this, I purchased a new Bible, one that differed from the King James Version and offered a fresh perspective on today's applications. Reading the Bible in a year revealed how deeply God loves us and is on our side. I wanted to tell the world about God!

In addition to these spiritual developments, I got active with a community organization. Joining allowed me to fellowship and encourage ladies from various churches. When believers from diverse backgrounds get together and let God guide their actions, it produces remarkable success.

Through each of these steps, God already knew where I would be at this stage of my life. He made the process bearable and purposeful, answering my prayers then and promising to answer in the future. I give HIM the highest praise for everything – Hallelujah!

Transitions—whether retirement, a career change, or an empty nest—can feel uncertain. You may be asking, "What's next, Lord?" My journey shows God doesn't want us to settle, but to actively pursue His purposes. Your next assignment might begin with a family project or a new reading plan. God uses our small steps for greater impact, so trust that He has already prepared what's next for you

Questions to Consider:

1. So, what concerns you about the future? Talk with God about them.
2. Are you waiting for God to answer you? Prepare for your answer.
3. Stretch your faith today by finding someone to encourage. You will be blessed.

DAY 20: DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

MINISTER SAM BROWN

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-27

Reflection:

Unity does not erase difference; it celebrates God-given identity so every gift can strengthen the body.

Expanded Focus:

One of the most powerful truths I learned later in life was this: we were never meant to look, sound, think, or operate the same. One of the biggest mistakes I made was trying to be like others and abandoning who God uniquely designed me to be. As a millennial leader, I want to encourage today's reader to be who God created you to be. The church, the community, and the world need you to show up in your fullness. I grew up in a traditional Baptist church setting where it sometimes felt like being different was dangerous or even demonic. But now I see clearly, difference is not a threat; it is divine.

Diversity in unity is God's design. God never intended for His people to be carbon copies; He intended us to be a living tapestry of gifts, backgrounds, and personalities that reveal His glory in unique ways. Our diversity is not a problem; it's Heaven's strategy. It is diversity that God uses to reach people right where they are and lead them to where He wants them to be. When we look throughout scripture, we see a pattern: God consistently uses people who are different. Individuals like John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, and Paul were seen as unusual, unworthy, or even unholy, yet God used their stories for His will. Their lives remind us that our differences never disqualify us.

The Apostle Paul tells us in our key passage that although we all belong to one body, we each have different gifts, different functions, and different strengths. The eye is not the ear. The hand is not the foot. And yet, every part is needed. Every part is valuable. Every part was crafted with purpose. Unity does not require sameness; it requires surrender. It requires each of us to bring our differences to the table so the whole body can function.

The moment you embrace who you truly are, you step into freedom.

From as far back as I can remember, I became overly enamored with a certain person. I wanted to be just like them. But one day, a seasoned veteran in life told me, "The moment you find your purpose, you'll finally see the people you're called to help." Now that I understand my gift and who I am, I am unstoppable.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways have you tried to look, act, or live like someone else instead of embracing who God designed you to be?
2. What unique gifts, strengths, or experiences has God given me that I have overlooked or undervalued?
3. Who in my life challenges me, stretches me, or inspires me because of their God-given uniqueness?

DAY 21: GUARD THE FELLOWSHIP - PROTECT THIS HOUSE

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

EPHESIANS 4:1-6 (NIV)

Reflection:

Fellowship is sacred, and it is fragile, and it must be guarded with intention.

Expanded Focus:

I was cleaning out my closet the other day and noticed I had quite a few pairs of Under Armour shoes. As I was deciding which ones to give away, I started thinking about their famous ad campaign, **“Protect This House.”** If you are not into sports, you might miss it, but that slogan became a rallying cry in locker rooms everywhere. It was a mindset that said what happens in the house matters. You guard it. You take responsibility for it. You protect it. And in that same spirit, fellowship matters. Fellowship, at its best, is not simply being surrounded by people. It is being supported by love and sustained by God’s grace.

Paul writes to the church in Ephesus with urgency when he says, *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* That phrase “make every effort” comes from the Greek word *spoudazō*, which means to be eager, diligent or zealous. Unity does not survive on intention alone. It survives when we take pains to guard it with humility, patience, restraint, forgiveness, and spiritual maturity. Fellowship is a gift from God, but peace is a responsibility we share.

What usually threatens fellowship is not doctrine. It is offense, miscommunication, assumptions, and hurt left unaddressed. When peace is not guarded, distance quietly grows where unity once lived. The enemy does not always have to destroy a church. Sometimes division is enough.

That is why protecting this house is spiritual work. It means we refuse to let ego set the tone and we do not let gossip carry the conversation. It means we handle conflict with maturity, tell the truth with love, and listen with humility. It means we value unity more than we value being right. We are one body, not competing parts. God has called for us to REACH IN this season. Peace is not passive and unity is not automatic. It is something we guard on purpose through the bond of peace.

Questions to Consider:

1. Where do you sense unity being tested in your relationships right now?
2. What is one step you can take to protect peace instead of protecting pride?
3. What conversation, apology, or act of humility might God be nudging you toward?

DAY 22: LETTING GO OF THE PAST

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

ISAIAH 43:18-19 (NIV)

Reflection:

Letting go is a spiritual discipline. You cannot walk into a new season while staring at an old one.

Expanded Focus:

Israel carried memories, both good and painful. They remembered Egypt and Babylon, failure and miracles. But memory becomes a prison when it prevents you from seeing God's work in the present. God speaks through Isaiah, *"Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past."* He is not erasing history. He is breaking chains for your future. Some of us are stuck, not because God is not moving, but because we keep replaying hurt, disappointment, or even the glory days.

One of my mentors, **General Jim Slife, USAF (Ret)**, once told me, *"You may not be culpable, but you are always accountable."* Coming from a leader who shaped airmen for decades, that stayed with me. I now see it from a spiritual perspective. You may not be to blame for what happened, but you are responsible for how you respond to God's next move. Israel could not change Babylon, but they could decide whether to stay prisoners to memory or step into deliverance. Letting go does not erase pain. It releases its power over you.

Beulah, can I share something with you? Dwelling is not the same as remembering. **Remembering informs you. Dwelling limits you.** When you dwell on wounds, you rehearse pain instead of receiving promise. When you dwell on old victories, you look for what God did instead of what God is doing.

God shifts the conversation in verse 19: *"See, I am doing a new thing."* New begins quietly, like a seed that is easy to overlook. God asks, *"Do you not perceive it?"* Can you see Me even where nothing looks promising yet? Where you see no road, God is cutting one. Where you see no life, God is pouring water.

Letting go of the former things is not pretending yesterday did not happen. It is refusing to let yesterday define tomorrow. You are not what you lost. You are not what they said. You are who God is leading you to become. God is making room for something new.

Questions to Consider:

1. What past moment, mistake, or memory is God asking you to release so you can move forward in faith?
2. Where have you been dwelling instead of perceiving what God is birthing in this season?
3. What step can you take to trust God with your future instead of rehearsing your past?

DAY 23: PRESSING ON

SIS. SHELIA MARIE

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14; 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

Reflection:

Every season may not be good, but God is good in every season. Press into Him, look forward and lay hold of every single thing He has for you.

Expanded Focus:

What I've learned over time is that we go through life in seasons. I went through a very hard season not too long ago. A season where I had to re-evaluate almost every area of my life, from the people I spent time with to the dreams and desires that I believed God placed in me. It was like a snowball rolling through my life and picking up everything that didn't align with God. And then my brother-in-law died. He was only a few years older than me, and his death hit me hard. It made me see how short life really is, and I had to ask myself what I really wanted. And my answer was, I want what God wants for me. As I look back, I see God's hands in it all. He carried me through it all while loving me and teaching me so I would continue learning, growing, and transforming. I see that without that hard season and the season that followed, I would not be standing in the season that I am in now. And I am excited to see how God continues to unfold my life as I continue to walk with Him.

This I know for sure: not all seasons are good, but God is good in every season. Sometimes we must let go of past seasons so we can move forward and step into what God has called us to. God doesn't just want us to live; He wants us to thrive. And as we walk with Him, abide in Him, and are obedient to Him, we are prayerfully becoming more like Him. Keep trusting Him, keep praying, keep worshiping, keep meditating on His word, and keep pressing into Him. Even when it's hard, be obedient to God and the things He is calling you to. He will open the doors He wants you to walk through as you pursue Him. God is so faithful and so good. He will finish what He started in you and fulfill what He's promised you. Be excited for what God has in store for you! Stay faithful, remain hopeful, and look ahead with joyful expectation. And when we fulfill God's purpose for us here, we will lay hold of the ultimate prize, spending eternity in Heaven with God.

Questions to Consider:

1. Look back over your past seasons. What has God done in your past seasons to get you to where you are now?
2. Look at the current season you are in. What is God doing in this season, and how is He showing you His faithfulness?
3. What has God done and is currently doing that encourages you to keep moving forward?

DAY 24: YOU CAN COME BACK FROM THIS!

MINISTER SAM BROWN

NEHEMIAH 2:17-20

Reflection:

No matter what has been broken in your life, God is calling you to reach inward, rise up, and rebuild with faith and courage.

Expanded Focus:

Family, I want to pause today and encourage you: **you can come back from whatever you are going through or facing.** Every test that arises in your life has an expiration date, and by faith, I declare that day is today. Rebuilding takes faith and an unrelenting attitude that pushes you to rise to an occasion when everything in you wants you to surrender to circumstances. I know what it feels like to lose everything I held of value and have to rebuild. In July 2015, I was involved in an unforeseen accident with fireworks. I was surrounded by my family and friends, whom I had grown up with, and at that moment, I thought my life was absolutely over. I watched my life flash before my eyes as I lay there helpless, waiting for emergency services, hearing the panic and concern in my family's voices.

As I was being transported to the hospital, thoughts raced through my mind—losing my life, losing my career in law enforcement, and the faces of the people I loved most were all that I could envision at the time. Fear tried to take the place of my faith. But in the midst of that chaos, I heard the voice of the Lord speak to me clearly:

“You can come back from this.”

That moment changed everything for me. God wasn't just preserving my life. He was reminding me that every setback is a setup for a comeback and that all things are meant to work for my good. Just like Nehemiah, God was calling me to rise, to trust Him, and to strengthen my hands for the work ahead.

Questions to Consider:

1. What areas of your life feel broken right now, and what steps can you take to begin rebuilding for a better tomorrow?
2. What words has God spoken to you in a difficult season, and how did they give you strength or direction?
3. Where is God strengthening your hands to rebuild: whether in your life, your church, or your community?

DAY 25: A VISION THAT SEES BEYOND NOW**SIS. DARNESHIA PARISH**
HABAKKUK 2:1-3**Reflection:**

When was the last time you updated your spiritual vision prescription? Oftentimes, we miss what God has for us because we get stuck in what we see now and not what He is trying to show us.

Expanded Focus:

There are seasons when God feels silent. Times when your prayers seem to echo without an answer. Habakkuk knew that feeling well. In Habakkuk 2, he chooses to wait, not passively, but attentively. He stations himself on the watchtower, expecting God to speak. He waited even when the present circumstances made no sense. God's response is striking: "Write the vision; make it plain." The vision wasn't meant just for the moment Habakkuk was in, but for the future. God acknowledged the delay, but promised the fulfillment: "Though it tarries, wait for it." That tells me something: that delay is not denial, and silence is not absence.

God's vision often asks us to see beyond what's happening right now. It stretches our faith beyond frustration, beyond fear, beyond what we can control. Waiting becomes an act of trust. We hold onto what God has spoken, even when the timeline feels uncomfortable. We must believe that His timing is always intentional.

When life feels uncertain, this passage reminds me that God's vision is still moving forward. It may not unfold the way I expect, but it will arrive right on time. My role is to stay positioned, to watch, to listen, and to trust that what God has promised will surely come to pass.

Questions to Consider:

1. Where in your life do you feel God asking you to wait rather than rush?
2. What vision or promise from God do you need to "write down" and hold onto in this season?
3. How can waiting become an active expression of trust for you today?

DAY 26: THE RECIPE FOR HOPE FOR THE GENERATION THAT FOLLOWS

DR. DUSTIN A. THOMAS

PSALM 78:1-7 (NLT)

Reflection:

Faith is not a secret we keep, but a legacy we share. Your story provides the essential ingredients of hope for those coming after you. Don't hide the recipe of God's faithfulness—share it so the next generation learns to trust Him.

Expanded Focus:

This past holiday season, I made a few tasty treats, but three stood out: my pound cake, red velvet cake, and sweet potato pie.

I did not find these recipes through random Google searches; generations passed them down. My mother and aunts received them, learned from their mistakes, made adjustments, and shared what they learned so I wouldn't face the same challenges. Someone took the time to share the goodness of baking with the next generation, which blesses my family and friends today. The authors of the recipes might be gone, but they are still impacting lives.

This experience mirrors Psalm 78:1-7. The Psalmist calls us not to "hide these truths" but to teach the next generation about the Lord's power. Just as we preserve a family recipe to guarantee a sweet result, God commands us to recount His miracles, ensuring that future generations know Him, learn from past mistakes, and place their hope in God.

We can all reflect on "If it had not been for the Lord on my side..." moments in our lives. We must share these reflections with those following us. Tell them how God is a waymaker and a promise-keeper. Show them how He mends broken hearts and brings joy in the midst of sorrow. Share how God loves the imperfect and the impure. Through our faith journeys—whether good, bad, or ugly—we can empower the next generation to run on and see what the end will be. We must not remain silent; instead, we need to share our faith and tell our story. Let someone know there is hope, and that hope is in Jesus.

Questions to Consider:

1. What specific moment of God's faithfulness can you recall today?
2. Who in your life needs to hear your story this week?
3. What hard-earned lesson can you share to help someone else avoid the same mistake?

DAY 27: COURAGE FOR NEW GROUND

MINISTER TOY CHILDRES

JOSHUA 1:9 (NIV)

Reflection:

Strength and courage for new ground comes from relying on the unfailing presence of God – who is empowering us to step boldly into what's next.

Expanded Focus:

Change. Change is inevitable. Change is constant. Change can be hard—and sometimes even scary. So how do we handle change in a way that stretches us and allows us to reach forward into where God is leading? Let's listen in as the Lord speaks to Joshua.

Joshua was stepping into a new season as the leader of Israel, charged with leading God's people into the Promised Land. Moses was gone, and now Joshua was responsible for carrying out God's promise. I can only imagine the thoughts that ran through his mind. Yet before Joshua could move forward, God met him with encouragement.

In just nine verses, God tells Joshua three times to *"be strong and courageous."* Not once, not twice—three times. Because courage isn't the absence of fear; it's the presence of God. When God moves us into new spaces, His presence is what empowers us to walk in His purpose.

Joshua's strength and courage were rooted in God's promise. The same is true for us. Our confidence doesn't come from what we can do, but from what God has already said He will do. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us—including stepping through the new doors and opportunities God is opening.

God also instructed Joshua on how to be strong and very courageous. God instructed him to stay grounded in His Word—to meditate on it day and night and live by it. When we consistently feed on God's Word, it becomes our first response rather than our last resort. His Word strengthens us when the unfamiliar feels overwhelming. God's word gives us courage when we begin to doubt because we've lost focus on the God who has brought us to it.

Lastly, we can be strong and courageous because God commands it—and because *He is with us wherever we go.* The same God who was with us in the familiar will meet us in the new. God is calling us to cross over boldly. He is not just the God of what was—He is the God of *now* and the God of *what's to come.* So, take courage. Step forward. God is doing a new thing, and He wants you to be part of it.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what areas of your life do you need to be encouraged to "be strong and courageous" today?
2. What "new ground" is God calling you to step into, and how can you lean into His strength and presence to move with courage?
3. How can you keep God's Word at the center of your heart so that it becomes your first response when God is moving you into new spaces?

DAY 28: FINISH STRONG - "COMPLETING THE ASSIGNMENT"

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8 (NIV)

Reflection:

Finishing strong is not about speed. It is about endurance, focus, and faith.

Expanded Focus:

A few years ago, I ran the DC Rock and Roll Marathon in weather I would not recommend to anyone. It was cold, wet, and miserable. And for those who do not know, a marathon is 26.2 miles. *Twenty-six point two*. Whoever added that .2 clearly did not love God's people.

Somewhere on the course, I reached a fork in the road. One direction lets runners finish the half-marathon. The other demanded every painful mile of the full race. For a moment, I thought, "Jesus would still love me if I turned left." Thirteen point one miles and a warm shower sounded good. But my brother and friend, Myron Chivis, looked at me and said, "*You did not train for halfway.*" He was right. I came to finish. So I kept running... slowly, prayerfully, questioning my life choices... but I kept running.

That race taught me something spiritual. **Finishing strong is a decision before it becomes a testimony.** Paul writes his final words to Timothy from a Roman prison. His body is tired, and his circumstances are harsh. Yet he says with confidence, "*I have fought, I have finished, I have kept the faith.*"

Paul does not celebrate speed. He celebrates the refusal to quit. Finishing strong is not perfection. It is perseverance when you want to give up. It means choosing obedience when convenience is easier and trusting God when the outcome is unclear. It means finishing well in life by staying faithful to God's assignments, honoring your commitments, sowing into your family, showing up in ministry without applause, and choosing growth over survival. God is building endurance in you. He is teaching you how to finish what He started.

Some of us began with momentum, but now the rain has set in, and the wind has picked up. Life is offering a half-marathon exit. BFB, please hear my heart. Do not settle for halfway. Do Not Quit! Finish what God started in you. God is not asking you to finish pretty. God just wants you to finish faithfully.

Questions to Consider:

1. Where have you been tempted to quit or settle for halfway in this season of your life?
2. What discipline or commitment needs renewed focus in this final stretch?
3. What one step can you take today that moves you closer to finishing The Stretch strong?

DAY 29: RUN WITH ENDURANCE

DEACONESS BOBBIE PONDER

HEBREWS 12:1-2 (NIV)

Reflection:

“Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.” – C.T. Studd

Expanded Focus:

As I reviewed our theme’s anchor verse, Isaiah 54:2, and connected it to the 2026 vision—*the year of reach*—my heart was deeply moved. From growing inward to reaching outward, spiritually, relationally, and missionally, God is calling us to expand our faith in every direction. I couldn’t help but reflect on how, over the past two years, our mission has stretched us forward and outward. We have reached up, out, in, and now God is calling us to reach forward.

At 89 years old, the Lord has been so good to me. My meditation carried me back to an old song: *“Take me back, Dear Lord, to the place where I first received You; take me back to where I first believed.”* It reminded me of the commitment I made on that day and how easy it is to drift from it. I often wish I could move faster than I can now, but I’ve learned the key is patience. Even when I can’t see how I will finish the course ahead of me, I’ve learned to take one step at a time, to run with endurance, and not give up.

Hebrews 12:1-2 teaches us that the Christian life is not a sprint—it is a marathon that you run for a lifetime. What matters most is not speed but endurance. And if I make the conscious decision to pace myself and run with patience, I may move slower, but I will finish the race God has set before me. There are no shortcuts on this journey. We can’t microwave our faith or our church’s growth. God does not bow to our microwave mentality. And we cannot run anyone else’s race. Each of us has a race designed for us specifically by God. The only thing we share is that we are following the same God.

So don’t look at the person running beside you. When you do, you tend to drift toward whatever you focus on. The good thing about it is you won’t be judged for not running someone else’s race, but whether you ran the one God set before you.

This 30-day fast has given us the chance to ***empty ourselves through prayer, perseverance, and letting go of what holds us back***. As Hebrews reminds us, we must embrace these truths and run with endurance, keeping our eyes on Jesus—not on our limitations. God is faithful. He will never leave us nor forsake us, and we can do all things through Christ.

As we push ***forward*** beyond this fast, let us continue in unity—***reaching down*** through praise and worship, ***reaching in*** through love, growth in faith, and stewardship; and ***lifting up*** through service and fellowship. Let’s run this race with love, patience, and endurance. AMEN!

Questions to Consider:

1. Where have you seen God stretching you, and how have you responded to that stretch?
2. What “race” has God set before you in this season, and what obstacles or distractions do you need to lay aside to run it with endurance?
3. How can you continue moving forward after this 30-day fast, keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus rather than comparing your pace to others?

DAY 30: OUR NEXT STRETCH - COMMISSIONED TO CONTINUE

PASTOR FELIX L. COLE

MATTHEW 28:18-20 (NIV)

Reflection:

This is the last day of The Stretch but not the last stretch God will call you to make.

Expanded Focus:

I was watching **Black Panther** again (yeah, go figure...you all knew that I had to use at least one movie illustration), and the ending struck me. After all the internal battles and family tension, T'Challa stands before the United Nations. Wakanda had enough resources to stay hidden and comfortable. They could have kept everything inside and simply enjoyed what they built. But T'Challa chooses something different. He declares that Wakanda will no longer watch the world from the shadows. They will engage, invest, and help. What they built was never meant to stay within Wakanda.

That is what Jesus does in Matthew 28. The disciples walked with Him, sacrificed with Him, saw the cross, and celebrated the resurrection. If there was ever a time to rest, it was after the empty tomb. But Jesus does not tell them to settle into what happened. He sends them to reach. He says, Go and make disciples.

The resurrection was not a finish line. It was the launching point where Jesus gave the disciples, and by extension us, authority to go, an assignment to fulfill, and assurance that He would be with them. Authority means you are not relying on your own strength. An assignment means purpose is ahead. Assurance means you are never sent alone.

BFB, this is the last day of The Stretch, but not the last stretch God will call you to make. We've made it. We did it! This fast was God working in us so ministry could work through us. The prayers we prayed were never meant to stay in our journals. The clarity we received was never meant to sit in our minds. The discipline we built was never meant to stop at day thirty.

We stretched so God could help us REACH. You may be tempted to ask, "What did I gain during this fast?" I argue the more important question is, "**Where is God calling me to REACH?**"

I love you and there ain't nothing you can do about it.

Questions to Consider:

1. Where is God calling you to step beyond comfort in this next season?
2. What clarity did God give you during The Stretch that you now need to act on?
3. What does REACH mean to you, and where can God use you as we carry out His mission?