



# PORTICO

C H U R C H

**LENT 2024**

PURSuing GOD THROUGH PRAYER & FASTING

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**Finding Home in the Hope of the Gospel**

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# Introduction

Dear Friends,

Seasons never last—they aren't meant to. Each season in life provides a unique opportunity to embrace something new as we leave something else behind. Portico Church is well into a season of growing deep roots that will provide strength for generations of growth and fruitfulness. The key to growing deep roots is access. Roots need access to the water below the surface so the tree above can endure the elements of changing seasons. Without deep roots, the spring winds will topple even an established tree. Without deep roots, the summer sun will scorch a proud oak until it withers.

*He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:3)*

This season of revitalization and renewal is a unique gift to Portico Church. It's an opportunity to sink our roots deep into the Living Water that God provides through fellowship with His Son. This season is about embracing God's abundant provision and pursuing the Spirit. This season is about slowing down to seek God with one unified voice. This season is about prayer.

For nearly two millennia, the church has set aside Lent as a season of prayer, fasting, and reflection in preparation to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Lent allows us to slow down and pursue God together.

Portico Church is embracing the season of Lent to pursue God through prayer and fasting. Let's teach our hearts to engage God through unified prayer. Let's humble ourselves under God's mighty hand so that He might lift us up in His way, by His power, and to His ends. May our roots go deep!

Yours in Christ,

Jason Conner  
Lead Pastor



# Overview

## An overview of how to participate in Lent

Portico Church will provide several ways for you to worship with us during Lent:

1. **Ash Wednesday Prayer and Worship Service.** (February 14, 2024, 6:30 - 7:30pm)
2. **Weekly Theme.** Each week of Lent will have a specific theme to focus on. You can find the weekly themes in this guide and through weekly videos. Themes will begin on Wednesdays.
3. **Fasting.** We will fast on Thursdays for our weekly theme. If you would like greater clarity on what this fasting will look like, you can find out more about fasting in the [Appendix](#).
4. **Prayer and Worship Nights.** We will be meeting for prayer and worship from 6:30 - 7:30pm on the following dates: Tuesday, February 20th (Faith); Thursday, February 29th (Unity); Monday, March 4th (Gratitude); Wednesday, March 13th (Hospitality); and Tuesday, March 19th (Salvation).
5. **Corporate Prayer.** The Prayer Team will lead us in prayer during each Sunday service and be available during and after service to pray for you.

## Using This Guide

Throughout this guide, you will find sections devoted to the seven weeks leading up to Easter Sunday. The seventh “week” will begin the Wednesday before Easter and take you up to the day before Easter. The final section is a special devotion for Easter Sunday. Each week, the guide will take you through three movements:

- **Read:** There are passages to anchor you in Scripture as you consider the themes for each week. You are encouraged to read, re-read, meditate on, or memorize these passages.
- **Reflection:** Each week, there is a reflection section connecting the passage of Scripture to the theme for the week. This section also is meant to supplement your own reflection on the text.
- **Response:** We want you to take the time to reflect on these themes, see them in the Scriptures, and begin to work them out in your daily life. The response section of each guide is meant to help guide your praying for each week. There will be suggestions of what you can pray for or even practical actions you can take.

The guide is not meant to be something you complete in one sitting. The pages are designed for you to take it slow. Re-visit and pray through them throughout the week and expect God to work.



# Week 1 || Repentance

February 14-20

## READ: Nehemiah 1:1-11

<sup>1</sup> The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, <sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” <sup>4</sup> As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ <sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” Now I was cupbearer to the king.

## REFLECTION

Nehemiah had done well in exile. He had taken the prophet Jeremiah’s words to heart, “*But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*” Even though he hadn’t returned to Jerusalem with the three previous waves of returning exiles, he served in the inner court of the Persian King Artaxerxes. But when he heard the report of Jerusalem’s disrepair, he was cut to the heart. Nehemiah rejected any temptation to blame shift. He took personal ownership of Israel’s failure to restore worship and community in Jerusalem. Nehemiah repented personally and corporately as a member of Israel and then took action.

Repentance happens as we come to the end of ourselves. When we are ready to see the damage of our sin and willing to walk away from our sin—the power of heaven is unleashed. Repentance isn’t built on white-knuckle willpower but on surrender. Sin grieves God and pulls us away from Him. Repentance abandons sin and moves towards the grace available through faith in Jesus Christ. Only there (at the foot of the cross) do we find the power needed to change.



Like Nehemiah, we are in exile—waiting for the New Jerusalem, our heavenly homeland. And like Nehemiah, repentance starts in God’s house. Church hurt doesn’t just happen to us—but through us. Let’s consider how God would have us rebuild on the solid foundation of repentance.

## RESPONSE

- Pray (Psalm 139:23-24). “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” Abandon any sin the Holy Spirit reveals and embrace the grace Jesus offers you through faith.
- Consider how your attitudes, actions, and/or posture might have caused misunderstanding or hurt in someone.
- Reach out to someone who hasn’t been to church in awhile and invite them join you for a worship service.



# Week 2 || Faith

February 21-27

## READ: Luke 21:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, <sup>2</sup> and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. <sup>3</sup> And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. <sup>4</sup> For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

## REFLECTION

The system was corrupt. Jesus, of course, knew this. He had just indicted the religious leaders for their hypocrisy—exalting themselves in public displays of piety while they “devour widows’ houses”—assuring His disciples that this kind of behavior from the believing would result in greater condemnation (Luke 20:47). Then Jesus turns His attention, and that of His disciples, to someone else in the temple that day; one of the poor widows going uncared for because of the leaders’ self-serving corruption. She stood in stark contrast to the rich who were showing off their surplus with what they dropped in the offering box. Jesus praises her reliance on God for blessing and provision, as evidenced by her small offering. Her offering, Jesus notes, came out of her poverty, or subsistence. And, in giving God what she needed to live, she showed everyone she was, in faith, relying on God for her very life.

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.” So we know faith assures and convicts us in our belief. We also know that faith is how we navigate this life (“for we walk by faith, not sight,” 2 Corinthians 5:7). But, what does a person who has faith look like? What do they do? Might we look, with Jesus and His disciples, to this widow as an example? She certainly evidenced a life focused on trust in God that cost her something. After all, she gave “all she had to live on.”

This kind of giving—out of subsistence not surplus—is a practical illustration of faith. For, if we only offer God those portions of our time, talent, and treasure we find it easy to part with, the cross we carry as we daily follow Jesus (Luke 9:23) becomes a prop not substantial enough for sacrifice. Faith relies on God for identity, instruction, and direction. By necessity, then, it must be an important thing requiring sacrifice that willingly cedes self in all the places where self doesn’t look like Jesus. If it isn’t meaningful, it isn’t truly part of who we are or what’s important to us. Rather, it becomes something we adorn ourselves with when we want to dress up and feel good about ourselves. Yet faith depends upon belief and trust in a God who sent His only Son to suffer an excruciating and humiliating death on a cross to save us. It cannot be a spare change, meaningless kind of thing. It’s a life and death proposition.

## RESPONSE



- Honestly assess what you give God in terms of time, talent, and treasure. Would you say that you give out of your surplus, or your subsistence?
- Search your heart for how you treat your faith. How important is it to you? Would others who observe the way you live say your life is based on faith in Jesus?
- Does your faith require sacrifice?





# Week 3 || Unity

February 28-March 5

## READ: John 17:9-11, 20-21

<sup>9</sup> I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

<sup>20</sup> “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

## REFLECTION

We can see clearly in John 17 that Jesus has a deep desire for unity to be visible among his disciples. This desire of Jesus also extends to his church today. When Jesus is speaking about oneness he is not talking about sameness or uniformity. He is speaking about a unity of purpose. The Father, Son, and Spirit are three distinct persons and each are unique in personhood but one in essence. Furthermore, all are unified in their purpose when it comes to the redemption of mankind.

Likewise the church, as beautiful and diverse as she is, is not called to operate in sameness. The church is called to operate in oneness of purpose. Oneness means that we work together in harmony towards a common goal. And that goal for the church is to live in harmony together while bringing glory to Christ. Jesus' ultimate request to the Father was that he would establish the church by making her one. Our unity within the church must reflect the unity displayed by the Father, Son, and Spirit. If we all have been united to Christ in faith, then we have also been united to one another in Christ. Although we haven't perfectly exercised oneness as the church, we must intentionally preserve what God has established for his church.

## RESPONSE

- Take time this week and pray for the followers of Christ in your community and the world that make up the church.



- Ask the Lord to bring revival among his people that would remind us of our oneness and the purpose for our oneness. When praying for revival, consider praying for the following things<sup>1</sup>:
  - **Increased awareness of God's holiness**
  - **Increased awareness of the depths of our sin**
  - **Increased awareness of the depths of God's love and grace**
  - As awareness in these areas increases, pray that it overflows in the following ways:
    - **Mission:** A renewing burden to follow Christ into the world and proclaim the good news.
    - **Prayer:** A corporate cry of dependence on the power of God's Spirit.
    - **Community:** A longing for deeper community life in the church.
    - **Theological Renewal:** A greater conformity to the mind of Christ in our thinking and perspective of what is true.
- Pray for Portico Church– specifically asking the Holy Spirit to align our hearts with Jesus as we advance the gospel in Charlottesville.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1979), 75.



# Week 4 || Gratitude

March 6-12

## READ: Psalm 30:1-12

A Psalm of David. A Song at the Dedication of the Temple.

<sup>1</sup> I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me. <sup>2</sup> O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. <sup>3</sup> O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit. <sup>4</sup> Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. <sup>5</sup> For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. <sup>6</sup> As for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall never be moved.” <sup>7</sup> By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong; you hid your face; I was dismayed. <sup>8</sup> To you, O Lord, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy: <sup>9</sup> “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?” <sup>10</sup> Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper!” <sup>11</sup> You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, <sup>12</sup> that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

## REFLECTION

Gratitude lies at the very heart of our worship to God. Often, our thankfulness is shaped by things we possess or aspects of our lives that bring quality to our existence on earth—things like health, family, great friendships, a home, or financial provision. These are certainly things that we should be thankful for. However, when looking to the Scriptures one thing becomes abundantly clear: the object of our gratitude does not rest on the quality of the gifts. The object of our gratitude rests upon the quality of the One who gives the gifts. When our gratitude rests on God, our perspective on the gifts he has given begins to shift. As we enjoy the gifts he gives, we are drawn into a posture of worship—recognizing that every gift expresses the Father’s benevolence toward us.

Gratitude is the primary way to respond to God’s past acts of grace in our lives. David illustrates this for us in Psalm 30. His praise to God is the direct result of God’s past deliverance. God has prevented David from becoming the laughingstock of his enemies (Ps. 30:1). He praises God for listening to his cries for help (Ps. 30:2). And he gives us a picture of how God’s redeeming work saves his people from death itself—guarding us from the snares of the wicked whose path takes them straight into the grave (Ps. 30:3). David’s testimony regarding his past rescue and the gratitude flowing from it (Ps. 30:1-4, 11-12) builds around him giving reasons for his praise (Ps. 30:5) and reasons for his own rescue (Ps. 30:9-10). All of this centers on David’s personal need for salvation and his confidence that God is the only one with the ability to help him (Ps. 30:6-8).



Our gratitude for God's past acts of grace strengthens our faith. As our faith grows more potent, we entrust ourselves to God in the present, knowing that his grace will meet us today and follow us into the future. In other words, gratitude for what God did yesterday feeds our faith and enables us to walk in faithful obedience today with confidence that God will continue to give us grace for tomorrow.

## RESPOND

- Spend some time reflecting on God's past acts of grace in your life. If you need to, get out a pen and write. Write down what these aspects of God's work in your life tell you about him.
- Spend time also reflecting on God's past acts of grace in the lives of others. Start with your family and work your way into our church. You are welcome to continue outward in this way:  
Self → Family → Church → Friendships → Vocation → City → Nations
- Join David in "extolling the Lord." Pray to God in a way that exalts and praises him for specific things he has done among you and his people. If you've written anything down, use that to inform your praying.
- Ask God, in light of his past graces, to act in your life and the life of our church over the next year, three years, five years, or beyond. Pray big because God's grace and power to redeem are all-encompassing.
- Find another person at Portico and tell them how you have seen God's grace at work in their life. Explain how this has stirred you to gratitude.



# Week 5 || Hospitality

March 13-19

## READ: Luke 10:25-37

### REFLECTION

Modern definitions of hospitality seem to center around an aesthetically pleasing, calm, and ordered space. Hospitality has a soothing neutral palette, soft lighting, comfortable furniture, and hot beverages. The people involved are almost an afterthought—simply props to fill out the space; proof that it is, in fact, comfortable. If one looked only to the world to define the essence of hospitality, it could be credibly argued that comfort is of primary importance. But look at the exchange between Jesus and the lawyer in Luke 10. There is nothing comfortable about it.

It begins with a challenge from someone eager to put Jesus to the test; a lawyer attempting to justify himself to Jesus with his knowledge of the Law. Further, his aim is not only to justify himself with his knowledge, but prove a point about who deserves love and consideration. Jesus responds with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. If those observing the challenge weren't uncomfortable already, this story won't help. It begins with a man attacked by robbers, left half dead. A priest, someone who could be assumed to be an expert on the Law, sees the man and, instead of rendering aid, crosses the road to avoid him. He isn't the only one to do this. A Levite, also one assumed to be well-versed in the Law, crosses the road to avoid the man as well.

In a shocking twist, we are told that the next person who happens upon the man is a Samaritan. Now, Samaritans were abhorrent to the Jews. No Jew would ascribe any good qualities to a Samaritan. Yet, in the parable, it is the Samaritan who detours from his route not to avoid the man, but to help him. He binds up the man's wounds, puts him on the Samaritan's own animal and takes him to an inn where he pays the innkeeper to continue caring for the man.

Then, at the close of the parable, Jesus asks an uncomfortable question of the lawyer. "Which of these three proved to be a neighbor of the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer cannot even bring himself to say the word "Samaritan," opting in favor of a generalized description: "the one who showed him mercy." Jesus, not letting the lawyer off his uncomfortable hook, tells him to "go and do likewise."

Perhaps the lawyer was hoping to be given an easier assignment, an instruction to love those he found it comfortable to love. If we are honest, wouldn't that be our wish as well? But throughout Scripture, God commands us to love the alien (Leviticus 19:33-34), the stranger (Hebrews 13:2), and the needy (Proverbs 14:31; 19:17). Jesus emphasizes the importance of this uncomfortable hospitality by explaining that those who will inherit the kingdom are the same ones



who love the least of these—the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the needy, the sick, the prisoner (Matthew 25:31-46). The one who shows hospitality in the way Jesus defines it, is the one who humbles himself to see and serve those who would challenge anyone’s comfort.

Isn’t that how we seek to not only emulate Christ, but acknowledge that we are the sinful equivalent of those hardest to love? John 3:16 tells us that God loved us so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus, so that any who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. Even though as sinners, we deserve condemnation, not love, Jesus came to die for us (Romans 5:8). The example has been set, and, despite how much it humbles or disturbs us, we can do no less than extend the love of Jesus—this “Gospel hospitality”—to everyone. The world may see hospitality as an opportunity to show off our space; but the Christian should rightly see it as the opportunity to show off our Savior.

## RESPONSE

- Do you find yourself equating hospitality with comfortable space rather than uncomfortable service?
- How are you using your spiritual gifts to extend Gospel hospitality to your neighbors? Are you making it a practice to show mercy?
- Ask God to give you opportunities to welcome and love people like Jesus would— at home, at Portico Church, and beyond.



# Week 6 || Salvation

March 20-26

## READ: Acts 4:7-13

<sup>7</sup> And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” <sup>13</sup> Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

## REFLECTION

There are many verses in the Bible we love to frame and hang up on our walls at home. Acts 4:12 is a verse that’s worth hanging on our souls. It’s one of the most straightforward verses in the New Testament that reminds us why a relationship with Jesus is so vital and may also be one of the most controversial verses today. The reason this verse is so controversial lies within the verse’s exclusivity; that Jesus alone is the pathway to salvation. If you agree with Peter’s statement, you may find yourself being labeled narrow-minded, judgmental, and unloving. But be encouraged. Your convictions are in alignment not only with the early church but many believers today.

When Peter made this statement, not only was he evangelizing, but he was also making his case before the Jewish officials for healing a crippled man at the temple in the name of Jesus. This was the same court that condemned Jesus to death, only about a couple of months before this. Peter and John’s kindness to one man led to many having the opportunity to hear about Jesus and come to faith.

Please don’t underestimate how an act of kindness on your part can lead to an opportunity of sharing the message of salvation with others. Many in our family and community need to hear that “there is salvation in no one else” but Jesus. And taking a lesson from Peter and John’s handbook to start with an act of kindness may be a helpful starting point. Last but not least, it’s essential to note that it was the Holy Spirit that enabled Peter to make such a statement. Acts 4:8 shows us that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, which led him to declare the Gospel explicitly and boldly to many officials that sentenced Jesus to die. If sharing the message of salvation is vital to us, it’s important to ask the Spirit to give us the words to speak. If he gave the words to Peter, we can trust that he will give the words to us.



Peter's message was rejected by many of the Jewish authorities. The measure of success in Peter's proclaiming was not defined by the response others had to the message. The success of Peter's proclaiming was defined by the act of the proclamation itself. In other words, it is a win for the Kingdom of God when Christ is proclaimed, whether the message is accepted or rejected.

## RESPONSE

- Consider your own habits when it comes to telling others about Jesus (evangelism). Spend some time confessing your own fears and reluctance. Ask for the Spirit's power to overcome those fears.
- Pray for those you know who need to hear the message of salvation and ask the Holy Spirit to soften their hearts to hear and receive it.
- Ask the Spirit to give you the boldness to proclaim the Gospel in love.
- Identify one person in your life that is not a Christian. Pray for them to receive Christ. Commit to not only praying for them. Ask God to give you an opportunity to share Christ with them. And ask for the courage to respond obediently when God gives you the opportunity.





# Week 7 || Suffering

March 27-30

## READ: Isaiah 53:2-6

<sup>2</sup> For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

## REFLECTION

This passage of scripture is an excerpt from Isaiah 53. It describes the coming Messiah as a Suffering Servant. The passage gives a picture of the Christ who would suffer tremendously as a substitute in the place of his people. A casual reading of this passage seems to suggest that the Servant gets the shorter end of the stick while his recipients get the greater end—peace and healing. Isaiah tells us that the Servant was pierced, crushed, and ultimately chastised for our transgressions and iniquities. God's people have abandoned God and Christ was condemned for *our rebellion*. There are many who look at this text and put God on trial because they believe this Servant was treated unjustly. The innocent were condemned and the guilty were cleansed. But a closer look at the whole of Scripture shows us something astonishing: the Servant Jesus willingly laid his life down in a sacrifice of love for his people. Jesus did not lay down his life reluctantly. He did not lay it down under compulsion. He laid it down willingly, for the joy set before him (Heb. 13:1-3).

Jesus is the suffering servant who was willing to take the penalty for our sins so that we may experience peace with God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 gives us a summary of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul writes, *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* God put our sin on Christ and in doing so, he punished Christ for our sins while maintaining his justice. The forgiveness that we walk in came at a cost. God treats Jesus as if he lived our life, and now he treats us as if we lived Jesus' life. We are a part of the greatest exchange the world will ever know.



## RESPONSE

- Take some time to consider the magnitude of grace and mercy extended to you in Christ. As you consider the breadth of Christ's work, go to God in prayer—praising him for all he has done.
- Scripture tells us repeatedly that part of our lives will be marked with notable suffering and that we are to walk into this suffering as imitators of Christ. In light of Christ's example, ask God to give you the grace to persevere through the darkness.
- Consider someone in our church or in your life that you know is suffering. Reach out to them and encourage them. Tell them how you see the work of the Suffering Servant in their life.
- Write out a prayer to God praising him for how you hope to see the Gospel shape your heart and the heart of Portico over the next two years.



# Easter Sunday || Victory

March 31

## READ: John 16:32–33

<sup>32</sup> Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. <sup>33</sup> I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

## REFLECTION

We find Jesus on the night before his crucifixion, having a conversation with his disciples and encouraging them hours before his arrest. Jesus’ encouragement to his disciples is to fix their eyes upon his triumph rather than obsessing over their trials. If we look at the cross through natural eyes, it appears that Jesus lost the battle. However, when we look a bit closer, Scripture helps us see what really happened on the cross. Paul states in Colossians that God, through Jesus’ death on the cross, disarmed and publicly disgraced the demonic rulers and authorities (Col. 2:15). He rendered them powerless as God nailed any accusation the Accuser could throw at his people to the cross. At the cross God put the enemy to open shame and in the resurrection he crushed the head of the Serpent—conquering death itself.

Jesus’ idea of victory is much different than ours. We think in order to be a victor one must be able to overcome trials and tribulations by their own power. Jesus however, viewed being a victor as submitting to his Father and relying on his Father’s power. Jesus’ triumph over sin and death allows us now to look at our worldly trials as momentary afflictions. Like the disciples, Jesus is calling us to view our trials in light of his triumph.

Because of the resurrection, you can take Christ at his word when he promises you victory. In our groaning, we are reminded that he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion (Php. 1:6). In our discouragement, we remind ourselves that we are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). In our weariness, we are reminded that Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith blazed the trail before us—enabling us to run the difficult race set before us by faith, holding on to our Savior with confidence (Heb. 12:1-3). And when we want to give up, we are reminded that Christ never gave up. He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and he is seated at the right hand of God while all his enemies are put under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 8:1).

As the Apostle Paul writes:

<sup>32</sup> *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

<sup>33</sup> *Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.* <sup>34</sup> *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* <sup>35</sup> *Who shall*



*separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?<sup>36</sup> As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:32-39)*

Consider him who endured much so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. It is finished. Christ is risen. Indeed, he is risen.

## RESPONSE

- As we close out Lent, ask the Father to open our eyes to see Jesus’ triumph over the world as motivation to endure trials in the world.
- Pray for our church to embody the peace that we now have with God and with one another.
- Ask God for the boldness to live as if Christ really stepped out of the tomb.
- Consider what God has taught you through your time of prayer and fasting during this season of Lent. Ask the Lord to help you persevere in your devotion to Christ and continually strengthen your prayer life.



# Appendix

## How to Fast

Training ourselves to hunger for God.

The biblical discipline of fasting is one of the most counter-cultural and misunderstood spiritual practices in the Bible. We swim in the waters of a society shaped by self-indulgence, gluttony, individual fulfillment, and consumerism. The absence of fasting from our regular habits illustrates that we are more shaped by this culture than we would like to admit. Yet when you look at Scripture, it becomes challenging to ignore the presence of fasting and its place in the lives of God's people.

### WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is deliberately and temporarily abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. In the Bible, fasting is total abstinence, and it should be distinguished from permanent food restrictions, like those against unclean animals, and also from occasional abstinence from certain foods, like meat on Fridays, a practice adopted by the later Christian Church.<sup>2</sup> The word itself appears about 60 times throughout the Bible. If fasting is that common in the Bible, it should be familiar to us.

### Fasting is Flexible

While all fasting in the Bible consists of abstaining from food, there are various kinds of fasting. Fasts can be regular, happening on specific dates (Lev. 16:29-31; Lk. 18:12), or occasional, happening as the need or desire arises (Joel 2:15; Mt. 4:2). Fasting can be something done privately on your own (Ez. 10:6) or together with a group of worshippers (Neh. 9:1; Jonah 3:7).

It is important to distinguish between biblical fasting and intentionally abstaining from activities (social media, television, etc.). Abstaining from these activities temporarily for the sake of pursuing God certainly can be valuable for a person. However, the spiritual value of abstaining from activities should not push us to call it fasting. Additionally, there are times in Scripture when you see righteous men holding to a strict diet for a specific purpose. Examples are (1) Daniel and his friends eating only vegetables and drinking water in Babylon, and (2) John the Baptist eating locusts and wild honey. While this may *feel* like a fast to the reader, it is crucial to notice that Scripture itself never refers to these diets as fasting.

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<sup>2</sup> John Muddiman, "Fast, Fasting," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 773.



## Fasting is Expected

It can be tempting, in surveying the Scriptures regarding this practice, to see fasting as something only practiced by saints in the Old Testament. The New Testament itself never provides any commands against fasting, and a careful look at the New Testament shows that fasting among the church was expected.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, began teaching on fasting by saying, “...and when you fast...” (Mt. 16-18). This teaching runs grammatically parallel with two teachings on generosity and prayer (Mt. 6:1-8)—two practices that Christians eagerly connect to life in Christ as we live between Jesus’ resurrection and return. Fasting is also present in the Book of Acts. The ordination and sending of Paul and Barnabas to begin their evangelistic mission to the Gentiles happened as the leaders of the Church at Antioch prayed and fasted (Ac. 13:2-3). Luke also summarizes their work as they continued preaching by saying, “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with *prayer and fasting* they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Ac. 14:23 *emphasis mine*).

## FASTING ON PURPOSE

Going back to Jesus’ teaching on fasting in Matthew 6, He provides the church with some helpful direction. He tells his disciples not to make themselves look somber when they fast. He commands this while simultaneously calling out the religious leaders who go out of their way to make it publicly known to others they are fasting. This isn’t a command against telling someone you are fasting. It is a command against a kind of telling that promotes your own righteousness before others. Our fasting should not be something we go out of our way to make known to others. We do not fast for others to take notice. We fast so that God might see us and respond to our longings for him to act.

It is crucial for the Christian to not aimlessly fast. It is not a practice to be taken carelessly. We fast on purpose, and the Scriptures provide various reasons that could drive God’s people to fast. Don Whitney, in his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, provides a great survey of reasons for God’s people to fast:

- Strengthen your prayer (Ezra 8:23; Neh. 1:4)
- Seek God’s guidance: (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23)
- Express grief (2 Sam. 1:11-12)
- Seek deliverance and protection (Est. 4:16; Matt. 4:1-11)
- Express repentance and return to God (Joel 2:12)
- To humble yourself (1 Kgs. 21:27-29)
- Express concern for God’s work (Neh. 1:3-4)
- To minister to the needs of others (Isa. 58:3-7)
- To overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God (Matt. 4:1-11)



- Express your own love and devotion to God (Lk. 2:37)

## FASTING DURING LENT

We step into the season of Lent to pursue God, as one Body, through corporate prayer and fasting. We want this to be a time for our church where we come together, united around the Christ who saved us, crying out for His continued work among us. As we pray and fast together, we want this to be a shared time of confession, repentance, and worship for our church. We want to fight for one another's holiness in prayer, cry out to God to save our neighbors, and fervently seek Him to help us continue overcoming the temptations that nag us.

*If you are unable to fast for medical reasons, we invite you to join us in prayer.* If you can fast with us, we want to provide you with some direction for how we will be fasting together.

- We will set aside the Thursdays of Lent for fasting. You can fast in one of three ways:
  - **One meal:** You can fast for one of your meals on Thursdays.
  - **Breakfast + Lunch:** You will begin your fast after dinner the night before and commit to fasting during breakfast and lunch on Thursday. You will break your fast at dinner on Thursday evening.
  - **24 Hours:** You might begin your fast at 6p on Wednesday evenings and break your fast at 6p on Thursday evenings.

As you prepare to fast during Lent, we want to encourage you in a few areas:<sup>3</sup>

- **Plan what you will do instead of eating:** The Christian fasts with a purpose in mind. We set aside the time we would typically eat and pursue God through practical means like prayer and Scripture reading. Whatever you decide to do, resolve to plan beforehand. You don't want to spend your entire lunch hour thinking of what you could pray for or read—you want to spend it praying and reading.
- **Consider how it will affect others:** Fasting will not only affect you. As Christians, we want all that we do to be done in love (1 Cor. 16:14; Col. 3:23)—love for God and our neighbor. We cannot glorify God in our fasting if we are not considering our neighbors. Be mindful of any standing gatherings with others that involve eating. Consider how your fasting would affect them and whether or not it is appropriate for you to proactively cancel or move these times to work around the fast. If fasting at home, use this as an opportunity to teach your children about fasting. Invite them into your time with the Lord and use those meal times as opportunities to worship as a family.
- **Don't dwell too much on eating:** Going any length of time without food creates pain. When the hunger pangs begin to surface, try not to set your mind toward the fact that you are not eating. Instead, use your body's

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these have been adapted from David Mathis, "Fasting for Beginners". Desiring God. August 26, 2015.  
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/fasting-for-beginners>



constant reminders of a desire for food to cause your thoughts to go toward the Lord. Set your mind on Jesus, not when your fast breaks. Obsessing over the fact that you are not eating says more about your love for food than it does your love for Christ.

- **Don't break your fast with excess:** It can be tempting to want to break your fast by eating a hefty meal. Fasting is a time of self-denial. As we deny our bodies of food, we are reminded of how Christ denied Himself to lift us up. As we say no to our hunger for food, we remind ourselves that our life is found in the Bread of Life, not simply in physical nourishment. Do not allow the temptation for self-indulgence to put you in a position where you demolish a whole pizza after fasting. Your body will thank you for it.

We pray this time of fasting will encourage you in the faith and assure you that Christ is with you. As we turn our eyes toward Christ, remember that you are not fasting alone. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are with you. May we together look to the Son and long for His return.

