

# Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus – together

*They took note that they had been with Jesus. ~ Acts 4:13*

Way before there was a “Transformation Tuesday,” the church had Transformation Sunday. In the traditional church year, the Sunday prior to Ash Wednesday directs our attention to the story of Jesus’ Transfiguration. The three books of Matthew (17:1-9), Mark (9:2-9), and Luke (9:28-36), known as the Synoptic Gospels, record what happens. Peter too reflects on it in one of his letters (2 Peter 1:16-21).



**Transfiguration**  
SUNDAY

This event is not immediately prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection, but does seem to occur within the last year. As we follow the life of Jesus and His disciples, this invitation to Peter, James, and John is a highlight. This week, Immersion blends this story with the spiritual discipline of fasting, something Jesus was known to do and which many Christians choose to do in some capacity during the upcoming Lenten season that kicks off with Ash Wednesday.

## **Mon, Feb 5 Theme: Disciples Value Spiritual Disciplines**

*When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*



~ Jesus, Matthew 6:16-18

Does it sound scandalous to say God will reward one for fasting? While Jesus rebukes people over fasting for ungodly reasons, He also says that the Father rewards those who fast for right reasons. Note that in Matthew 6, Jesus speaks about the spiritual disciplines "when you give," "when you pray" and "when you fast" in direct succession. Most people would readily expect Christians to give and pray, but fasting has been notoriously absent. If Jesus can speak of these three alike, maybe fasting should get more consideration. Martin Luther found his prayer life was quickened when he fasted, which he apparently did often. With Lent on the horizon, we're spending this week looking at the spiritual discipline of fasting.



**Prayer for the week:** Lord Jesus, knowing that you took fasting seriously both personally and for Your disciples, help me to find a place for it in my life as well. As the Spirit led You, I pray that He leads me as well -- that I might be in Your will in every capacity of my world: Body, mind, and spirit. Amen.

### Micro-Meditation: Psalm 130:1-8

*Read vs. 1-8 2x*

*Mark words or phrases that catch your attention.*

*Meditate:* Talk or write with God about those words. Ask Him to impress things on your heart and mind; expect responses.

O LORD, out of the depths I call to you.  
<sup>2</sup> O Lord, hear my voice.  
Let your ears be open to my pleas for mercy.  
<sup>3</sup> O LORD, who would be able to stand  
if you kept a record of sins?  
<sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness  
so that you can be feared.  
<sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and with hope I wait for his word.  
<sup>6</sup> My soul waits for the LORD  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.  
<sup>7</sup> O Israel, put your hope in the LORD,  
because with the LORD there is mercy  
and with him there is unlimited forgiveness.  
<sup>8</sup> He will rescue Israel from all its sins.



**Pondering Point:** There is a sense of anticipation pervading Psalm 130. Though the Psalmist won't claim blessings by merit, he holds out in hope for goodness from the Lord.

*These Words caught my attention:*

Note: Year A of the *Immersion: Pathway to Discipleship* series includes a Psalm section each day. We have included a taste of that series as we prepare to head into Lent next week:

## **Tuesday, Feb 6: God's Mission seen in Matthew 4,17**

*Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

## TRANSFORMATION **TUESDAYS**

Matthew 4:1-2



Matthew 17:1-2a

*After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them.*

Mountains have long held spiritual significance to people, places to ascend and meet with God. In both Matthew 4:1-11 and 17:1-13 we find Jesus on a mountain with company. It's the devil on the Mount of Temptation; it is Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (as well as the MG of Peter, James, and John).

The wilderness is another place of spiritual significance.

One week from today is Shrove Tuesday, known to many as "Fat Tuesday." That means one week from tomorrow is Ash Wednesday, kicking off 40 days of Lent (excluding Sundays). Those 40 days parallel Jesus' time in the desert immediately after His baptism, where He fasted from both food and water. Why? Scripture reveals He was led there by the Holy Spirit prior to beginning His public ministry.



The same Holy Spirit that came upon Jesus in His baptism used this time away from others – and this time of testing – to prepare Him. Fasting was part of that preparation. As a discipleship pastor, I have no doubt that we all play a part in God’s mission, and that the Holy Spirit wants to lead us in that ministry. I wonder how He wants to prepare you. What do you think He is doing to prepare you?



**Prayer Prompt:** Ask the Holy Spirit how He wants to train and prepare you. Who might He use to assist Him in this?

Look at your weekly schedule and ponder it with the Spirit; ask if you’re giving Him ample time, space, and energy to train you?

*The best time, space and energy in my schedule for training are:*

### Micro-Meditation: Psalm 130:1-8

Ps 130:1-2 O LORD, out of the depths I call to you.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be open to my pleas for mercy.

**Teaching or Command of God:** Luke 6:36

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.



**THE PROMISE**

Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

*Matthew 5:7*



**Pondering Point:** Would you say that your desire to receive mercy from God is paralleled with a heart that desires to show mercy toward others?

## Micro-Group Connections: A Disciple's Lifestyle



**Micro-Group Moment (MGM):**  
Considering the life of Jesus as a  
case for participating in Micro-Groups:

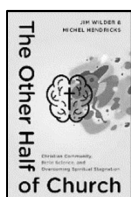


With micro-groups (MGs) defined chiefly as 3-4 people, an obvious MG in the life of Jesus is the trio of Peter, James and John. We mentioned previously that He did activities with them that His Small Group (SG), known as the Twelve, missed out on. Last week's story of healing of Jairus' daughter was one of them (Mark 5:37-43). And this week's story is another one: Jesus' transfiguration and meeting with Elijah and Moses (Mark 9:2-4).

*He did not let anyone  
follow him except  
Peter, James and John  
the brother of James.  
~ Jesus, Mark 5:37*

But there's more than one MG in the life of Jesus. He enjoyed a close relationship with the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10, John 11). He could be found at their house on multiple occasions and spent substantial time there. Lazarus is even described as Jesus' beloved. They were like a second family to Him.

Who "adopted" you into their lives allowing you to be part of a second family of sorts?



"Jim [Wilder] used the Hebrew word *hesed* to describe what neuroscientists call attachment. I had never heard *hesed* described as relational attachment. Over and over, he emphasized the importance of our attachments to each other. Attachment is an essential soil nutrient for forming our character..." 79, WH, *O½ of Church*

## Wednesday, February 7: Your Identity in Christ

- In Christ, we are children of God secure in the truth that nothing can separate us from the love of God, regardless of what occurs in life around us.

During Jesus' temptation in the desert, the devil twice tried to use His identity against Him while in a weakened state: "If you are the Son of God..." It failed because Jesus was secure in His identity. It's a good model for us: Know who we are and know whose we are.

Weakened state or not, one of the hardest things about any fast is denying ourselves something that our body or mind or emotions crave. Our desires are powerful. But isn't that the point of the fast: to "crucify the flesh" with its desires (Galatians 5:24)? As a child of God, we have an obligation to the Spirit, and are trying to keep the body from being in control (see Romans 8:12).



**Prayer:** Oh Jesus, my flesh desires many things, but my spirit desires to let You be Lord in my life – to let You rule on the throne of my heart. Help me live out my identity as Your child, under the leadership and influence of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Micro-Meditation: Psalm 130:1-8

Ps. 130:3-4 O LORD, who would be able to stand if you kept a record of sins? But with you there is forgiveness so that you can be feared.

#### **Teaching or Command of God:**

For this reason [Jesus] had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.



Heb. 2:17

#### **THE PROMISE**

Luke 6:37

Do not judge, and you will not be judged.  
Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.



**Pondering Point:** Ask yourself, *am I keeping a list of wrongs against myself?* If so, ask God (who is not keeping a record of your sins) about the validity and health of such practices.

**Thursday, February 8**

**Re-Center around God**

Drawing from Jesus' Sermon: *When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* Matthew 6:17-18



**Pondering Point:** Martin Luther, in speaking about there being no requirement to fast said, "Care must be taken, lest out of this freedom [from fasting and abstinence] there grows a lazy indifference about killing the wantonness of the flesh; for the roguish [son of] Adam is exceedingly tricky in looking for permission for himself, and in pleading the ruin of the body or of the mind; so some men jump right in and say it is neither necessary nor commanded to fast or to mortify the flesh, and are ready to eat this and that without fear, just as if they had for a long time had much experience of fasting, although they have never tried it." (*Treatise on Good Works XXI*)

In light of Luther's contention about the devious aspects of our sinful flesh, let's recenter around God once again.



**Review for the week:** Have I given my "flesh" permission to indulge? Have I been justifying behavior that God would prefer to be out of my life?



**Repent if necessary:** Have my indulgences led to compromises and ungodly sacrifices or to habits and patterns that can be defined as sinful or unhealthy? If so, repent of them and then...



**Return as necessary:** Accept forgiveness, strength and guidance to glorify Him. Reconsecrate your life to God in all parts: Heart and soul, body and mind, imagination and will.

## Micro-Meditation: Psalm 130:1-8

Ps 130:5-6 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and with hope I wait for his word. My soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

### Teaching or Command of God:

As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.



*James 5:11*

## THE PROMISE

*Isaiah 30:18*

The Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!



**Pondering Point:** Ask yourself: When do I wait on the Lord? Where and how do I wait on the Lord? And then answer!

## Friday, Feb 9: Discipleship Point from Matthew 6:16-18

*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

*~Luke, Acts 13:2*

Jesus' words "*when you fast...*" clearly anticipate that His disciples will fast (see Matthew 6:16 and 9:15). We also see in Acts 13:2 that while God's people were worshipping and fasting, they got a directive from the Spirit about ministry to be done. Whether you're in the middle of "ministry" life, near the end, or just beginning, this is a good time as we head into Lent

**When You  
Fast...**

**Matthew 6:16**



to consider asking the Holy Spirit to give you guidance about fasting from certain foods, TV or social media. It is not so much about showing that you can give these things up – though there is great value in that. It is rather to connect with the life and sacrifice of Jesus and let the Spirit have more time to work on you as you carve out devoted time for God.

*Potential areas of fasting through the upcoming Lenten period:*



**Discipleship Prayer:** Father God, if (or when) I choose to fast, may it be to seek Your will in my life. Help me see this kind of commitment as a privilege to give up “pleasant food” (Daniel 10:3) for Your glory. Give me strong inner and outer discipline to keep this vow to You while I seek You.

### Micro-Meditation: Psalm 130:1-8

Ps 130: 7-8 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, because with the LORD there is mercy and with him there is unlimited forgiveness.  
He will rescue Israel from all its sins.

#### **Teaching or Command of God:**

Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God.



*Psalm 42:5*

### THE PROMISE

*Isaiah 40:31*

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



**Pondering Point:** How is your gas tank level when it comes to hope? How do you fill up with hope? How can God help?

## Saturday, February 10: Scripture's Story for the Week

### Daniel and His 'Fast Friends' Daniel 1:1-21



In the story of Daniel and his friends, we find that their fast is not really about depriving themselves of food they particularly enjoyed, but rather about honoring God and giving Him His rightful place. The four of them (among others) were being put under a specific eating regimen to make them fit for serving the Babylonian king. Since this would put them in violation of Jewish dietary laws, they asked for an exception with their supervisor. Read the story and learn how the supervisor and king respond. Daniel fasts again for other reasons later (you can read about that in Daniel Chapter 10).



**Prayer prompt:** Ask God to give you Daniel-like faith and courage to stand up for your convictions regarding your God and beliefs. Consider which friends of yours are likely to stand with you amid faith challenges and say a prayer for them. Sometimes they are going through trials and could use a “fast friend” also.

Invest in your walk with Jesus by taking in this podcast from Bible Project, Feasting and Fasting: <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/practicing-faith-part-2-feasting-fasting/> (43 minute long)



BP describes the “ancient practice of fasting, withholding food from yourself for a symbolic and intentional reason. This practice marked the lives of many ancient Israelites, of Jesus himself, and it was a habit that was carried on in the early Jesus-movement as well. However, this practice was also accompanied by regular periods of feasting to celebrate God's generosity and grace. What are these habits? How do they balance with each other? Why is it important to have both? We explore these questions in this episode.”

**Sunday, Feb 11: Call to worship God, to gather together**

## Keep on loving one another

*Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.*

~ Hebrews 13:1



**Pondering Point:** When we as Christians put on the armor of God in Ephesians six, God calls us to *pray in the spirit on all occasions* for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters in the Christian faith. This is one way for us to keep on loving our brothers and sisters, by praying for them in the spirit on all occasions.

Jesus invites His disciples into prayer at both Micro and Small group levels. Luke tells us that Jesus and His MG spent the entire night on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:37). I wouldn't say they spent the entire night praying, seeing as Luke also describes the sleepiness of the disciples. Nonetheless, they engaged in praying with Jesus. It would seem that such occasions were foundational for them in their life with Jesus. Does your love for others inspire you to pray with them (as the disciples were doing) or to invite them into a time of prayer (like we see Jesus doing)? No time like the present; you can take advantage of one of those occasions now.



**Prayer prompt for the day:** Call upon the Holy Spirit to lead you in prayer for your Christian brothers and sisters. Don't hurry. Let Him bring people to mind: family, friends, business co-workers, ministry co-laborers, small group participants and neighbors. Be ready to respond with actions that align with loving them by words, ministry presence, or other kindnesses. Add a prayer request for the Holy Spirit to nudge you toward those who would be open to a MG life with you to grow spiritually. Write down some potential if you don't currently participate in a MG.