

ST. STEPHEN'S PARISH



JANUARY 4-9, 2021

PRAYER AND FASTING

MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

Beloved church of God, a happy new year to you all!

If we look back on all the things that have happened the past year, it certainly was a time unlike any other we have experienced before, hasn't it? We have been beset by devastation upon devastation; but still, here we are! We are standing, we are healing, we are pressing on. It fills my heart with great hope and comfort to know that just like in the words of 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, "we are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." This is all glory to God – who enables us to live and prosper through the toughest times because of the power of Jesus' death and resurrection in us.

We praise the Lord for preserving us and helping us survive. But one thing we must not forget is that we still need to thrive. Remember, there are still victories to be won. There are still many hearts that need to be lifted up to the Lord; many lives that can be offered to Him. It is this mission that needs to fuel us even in moments when we don't feel like rising up and going on. That is why we call on this time to fast and pray; so that we can all gather ourselves, prepare our hearts and minds, and together, rise strong.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what makes you strong? We have chosen the Book of Daniel as a fitting passage for us to study and meditate on. Written during a time of uncertainty and chaos, of a whirlwind change in the power structures of the world, of the people of God being uprooted from their land, culture and religion, we read about a man and his friends who somehow, were able to rise strong. Where did their strength come from? How did they remain rooted and still flourished in a land not their own? These are the questions we hope you can answer after our prayer and fasting week is done.

As we seek God this week, may He take His seat in the throne of our hearts. May each one of us be filled with visions of the Ancient of Days which alone can grant true peace and strength in our hearts through uncertain times. Rise strong, o church of Christ!



REV. JUSTIN FUNG

ABOUT PRAYER AND FASTING

It is safe to say that, sadly, fasting is one of the most neglected spiritual disciplines of the Christian life and that is probably because it is also one of the most misunderstood. Many of us here may be new to the practice of prayer and fasting and so there are some things we need to understand better that would help us commit to the discipline with the right motivation and the right purpose.

WHAT IS A FAST?

Fasting is voluntarily abstaining from eating/drinking for a period of time for the sake of some spiritual purpose; that is, to spend our time in prayer and fellowship with God. To put it simply, we fast because there are things more important in life than food such as to seek the kingdom of God (Matthew 6). This is why prayer must not be missing from our fasting experience – the two have to go hand in hand.

THREE COMPONENTS OF A FAST

1

have focus

Stay committed to your goal to be sensitive to God's word and God's work. Your greatest enemy during a fast is to constantly think about food or the things you are doing without. But as you continue to fast and keep your focus, you will realize that you don't experience hunger pains as often as you thought you would, if you turn your preoccupation with food with your preoccupation with the Word of God. Keep your eyes fixed on the goal: to hear God speak and obey what you hear.

2

pray without ceasing

The idea of a fast is being so focused on praying that you don't have time or appetite to eat. This happens when you channel your energies on your intercession. Intercede for your family, church, country, ministries, and any specific thing you want to seek God for. Join a prayer meeting or meet up for prayer with an accountability partner or group.

3

replenish

Whatever you miss out on, replace with something else. When you skip on mealtimes, replace with reading the Bible or prayer. When you skip on food, replace with water and rest. When you skip on entertainment, replace with solitude and meditation.

ABOUT PRAYER AND FASTING

WHY DO WE FAST?

Fasting is a widely-practiced discipline in the whole of the scriptures. We find many occasions for fasting from the Old Testament to the New.

People fasted...

- in times of war (Judges 20:26)
- in times of grief (Nehemiah 1:4, 2 Samuel 1:12, Samuel 31:13)
- in times of mourning (Daniel 10:1-3)

in seeking...

- special revelation (Exodus 34:27-28)
- spiritual renewal (1 Kings 19:1-9)
- spiritual power (Mark 9:29)
- courage and wisdom (Esther 4:3, 16)

This is also practiced for special purposes such as...

- repentance (Jonah 3:5, Daniel 6:18)
- ministry preparation (Matthew 4:2)
- ministry commissioning (Acts 14:23).

And more commonly, fasting is a spiritual discipline for the pursuit of holiness (1 Corinthians 7:5).

If these reasons are not enough for you, here is one major premise of why we fast: **JESUS FASTED** (Matthew 4:1-2).

Jesus fasted before He began His ministry because He knew He was going to need spiritual strength to finish His mission. This act was a sign of His completely dedication to the Father's will and His dependence on the Holy Spirit for the power needed to do God's work.

We fast because it is ultimately good for us. It nourishes our spiritual life. And it builds us up so that we can be a step closer to Christlikeness and in this way, **RISE STRONG!**

ABOUT PRAYER AND FASTING

HOW DO WE FAST?

PREPARE YOUR HEART

The most wonderful part of prayer and fasting is being able to commune with God and experiencing the transformation He will cause in our hearts. This, of course, involves willingness from us. Be willing to hear what God says you need to change and be willing to change. Hate the sin inside your heart. On this page, write down a prayer of commitment to pray and read God's word. Tell God that you surrender your heart to Him and that you want to experience more of Him and learn more of His ways.



ABOUT PRAYER AND FASTING

PREPARE YOUR MOTIVES

Ephesians 1:3 says that there are many spiritual blessings that God has prepared for us. We can never exhaust them! Who knows what God wants to give you or show you? Maybe He wants to bestow gifts that would help you grow even more in your ministry such as wisdom, mercy, teaching, exhortation, and others more. When you eliminate things that are keeping you from focusing on God, He is able to show you things about your life that you never knew.

A word of caution, though. Fasting is never about getting what you want. We do not abstain from eating so that we have some kind of bargaining chip with God. We are not using hunger to manipulate God's will or to make God submit to our demands. Rather, we fast as a sign of our submission to God's commands; humbly seeking His perfect will in our lives. But this does not mean that we cannot petition for ourselves and for others. In this page, write down the things you want to commit to God.

IN 2021, I COMMIT TO GOD

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path." Proverbs 3:5

Personal Faith Goals

Spiritual Revival □ Breaking a sinful habit □ Character transformation □ Special Requests

My Family

Restoration of Relationships □ Household Salvation □ Provisions

My Education/Career

Excellence in performance □ Good Testimony □ Leading

My Ministry

Small Group Growth □ Salvation of Colleagues and Classmates □ Growth of Spiritual Gifts

My Church

Church Leadership □ Direction □ Discipleship Ministry □ Worship Services □ Missions Work

My Community

Campuses □ Spiritual and Moral Issues □ Outreach Opportunities □ Sicknesses

My Country

Government Officials □ Peace and Order □ Protection from Calamities

ABOUT PRAYER AND FASTING

I AM COMMITTING TO PRAY FOR

Name	Requests

PREPARE YOUR SCHEDULE

Come up with a plan on how you will organize your day: where you will meet with God, what and when you will eat, and how you will spend your time differently. There are many kinds of fast and here are some of the more common ones you can try.

1

complete fast

No food during the fast. Water is allowed and necessary, of course. Extreme care should be taken with long fasts (exceeding this week), especially if the person has underlying medical conditions. It is wise to consult your physician if you are planning on embarking on a long fast.

2

selective fast

Fast only certain foods
e.g. Daniel fast, water and vegetables only
e.g. Juice fast, restrict intake to juices only

3

partial fast

Fast during specific times of the day
e.g. 6AM-3PM

4

soul fast

Fast from something other than food
e.g. Social media fast, internet fast

ABOUT PRAYER AND FASTING

USE THIS CHART TO PLAN YOUR FASTING COMMITMENTS

DAY 1
Fasting Options

- ☐ Water only
- ☐ Liquid only
- ☐ One meal only
- ☐ Other _ _ _ _ _

DAY2
Fasting Options

- ☐ Water only
- ☐ Liquid only
- ☐ One meal only
- ☐ Other _ _ _ _ _

DAY 3
Fasting Options

- ☐ Water only
- ☐ Liquid only
- ☐ One meal only
- ☐ Other _ _ _ _ _

DAY4
Fasting Options

- ☐ Water only
- ☐ Liquid only
- ☐ One meal only
- ☐ Other _ _ _ _ _

DAY 5
Fasting Options

- ☐ Water only
- ☐ Liquid only
- ☐ One meal only
- ☐ Other _ _ _ _ _

DAY6
Fasting Options

- ☐ Water only
- ☐ Liquid only
- ☐ One meal only
- ☐ Other _ _ _ _ _

PRECAUTIONS!

While there are benefits in fasting, some even physical, there are certain people who should not fast without professional medical supervisions. For example, persons who are physically too thin, persons who are prone to eating disorders, those who suffer from weakness or anemia, persons who have been diagnosed with certain ailments that require continuous nutrition, pregnant and nursing women, people taking prescription medication.

Consult your doctor before you begin your fast.

DAY 1 - STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

WORSHIP

“Who am I?” Do you sometimes ask this question? I know that a lot of people, Christians not excluded, have gone through periods of identity crisis, quarter life crisis, midlife crisis, or even later-life crisis; moments when they simply do not know what they really want in life, what their calling is, what direction they need to take, and it is probably causing them to suffer from a low self-esteem or frustration about not knowing where to go. If this describes you, the song “Who Am I?” offers a simple answer that can wash away all that insecurity you are feeling. That answer is “I am Yours.”

Quoting Tim Tebow, “When who you are is grounded in whose you are, you realize it doesn’t matter what life throws your way.” I hope you can grasp the strength that comes from understanding that truth. You don’t belong to this world. You are not your job. You are not even your relationships. Your identity is not tied to your highs and lows. You belong to God. You are eternally secure. You are absolutely loved. Brothers and sisters in Christ, know who you are based on whose you are; and rise strong.

WHO AM I?

Who am I,
that the lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt?
Who am I, that the bright
and morning star
Would choose to light the way
For my ever wandering heart?

Not because of who I am
But because of what you've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who you are

I am a flower quickly fading
Here today and gone tomorrow
A wave tossed in the ocean
A vapor in the wind
Still you hear me when I'm calling
Lord, you catch me when I'm falling
And you've told me who I am
I am yours

Who am I,
that the eyes that see my sin
Would look on me with love
And watch me rise again?
Who am I, that the voice
that calmed the sea
Would call out through the rain
And calm the storm in me?

I am yours, I am yours
Whom shall I fear,
whom shall I fear?
Cause I am yours,
I am yours.

DAY 1 - STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

WORD

As you read and study the book of Daniel, you may initially feel a disconnect about what exactly is going on. It talks about a captivity but the picture doesn't add up. We don't see a massive bloodshed or a genocide of the nobility. Instead, what you will find was a rather friendly scene. Why is that so?

A famous quote of Abraham Lincoln goes like this. "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" In a way, we can look at the Babylonian's strategy in that light. Instead of eradicating Jerusalem's princes and rulers, they assimilated them so that they will become their friendly and loyal subjects. This way, they can prevent uprisings (and also make the best use of the human resources) while at the same time, keep them under their control. They are systematically destroying their enemies by making them their friends. We can look at this as both an opportunity but also as a threat. It is an opportunity in that it will enable the Israelites to lead peaceful and fairly good lives. But how is it a threat? Let's read and understand.

READ DANIEL 1

1. How do we see that this whole situation has been a test of character for the Israelites? (vv.1-7)

- *What similarities can you draw between what happened with the articles from God's temple and what happened with the Israelites from the royal family and nobility?*

- *Take a look at the meanings of the names we come across in vv.6-7*

DANIEL "GOD IS MY JUDGE"

HANANIAH "BELOVED OF THE LORD"

MISHAEL "WHO IS AS GOD"

AZARIAH "THE LORD IS MY HELP"

BELTESHAZZAR "BEL'S PRINCE"

SHADRACH "ILLUMINED BY THE SUN GOD"

MESHACH "WHO IS LIKE VENUS?"

ABEDNEGO "THE SERVANT OF NEGO"

- *How does this shed light on the real damage of what assimilation can do to the identity of the people of God?*

DAY 1 - STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

2. How did Daniel show his strength of character? (v.8)

What did he do that shows his commitment to stay true to who he is?

3. How did God help Daniel rise strong? (vv.9-20)

In what way did God show His favor towards Daniel and his friends?

Sometimes I do wonder whether Daniel was being a little bit too uptight in this whole situation. After all, it was just about food, wasn't it? He and his friends accepted their new names and their new education (which would probably have involved astrology, incantations, and all sorts of divination and magic). Why was the part about the food such a big deal, then?

We are not told explicitly why; and while there are theories we can discuss^[1] there is a simple way to look at it. That is, eating is something he had to do himself. The rest of the world can call him Belteshazzar, but he knows He is Daniel. The rest of the world can teach him their ways, but what he believes in and what he decides to do is up to him. For Daniel, eating the food will defile himself before God so he resolved not to do it. Maybe he perceived that eating it would mean that his allegiance belonged to the king of Babylon. Maybe refusing the food was a way to declare that his strength depended on God's favor alone, and not on the king's superfoods. Maybe doing this served as a daily reminder for him; his way of saying "I belong to God".

[1] Because it is against the Levitical Law, or because the food may have been offered to an idol, or that Daniel took a Nazarite Vow (all of which have merit but doesn't fully satiate the issue). Another stronger view is because Daniel understands that eating the king's food represents accepting the king's patronage; it implies that his loyalty belongs to Babylon.

DAY 1 - STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

WALK

What does it mean to rise strong? The first thing we learn is to have strength of character. We saw from Daniel that a person who knows exactly who he is and acts accordingly is strong.

There is a litmus test you can take to check yourself. That is, do you “fit in” the world too much? Often we complain how hard it is to be a Christian because we are always going against the tide. But guess what? That’s really how it should be. Because we are not citizens of this world but are citizens in heaven. This world should not be a place we will ever feel we truly belong. That is why, Like Daniel, we need a daily reminder of who we are and whose we are. We need to resolve to honor God in every matter; whether big or small. This is how we rise strong.

Do you have strength of character? Here are some questions you may want to ponder on.

1. What are some situations that test your character?

These may be favorable circumstances that cause you to lose sight of your identity as a Christian

2. What are some practical ways we can strengthen our character?

What will help you remind yourself of who you are and whose you are?

3. What are some of the things you should resolve to do and not to do?

What activities, behaviors, and words reflect your desire to honor God or the lack of it?

DAY 1 - STRENGTH OF CHARACTER



A PRAYER

Almighty God, a lot of times we lose sight of who we are. We are easily blinded by all the “favors” of this world and give in to the weakness of our flesh. But we humbly ask that You Help us to discern that when the offers of this world are too good and too easy to be true, that they probably are. Help us to give up rationalizing and justifying things that defile us. We long to have the kind of character that can rise strong to honor You in all we do; be it in great things or small. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

DAY 2 - STRENGTH OF C O U R A G E

WORSHIP

As we worship this morning, I'd like to invite you to do a little visualization exercise. Picture yourself worshipping God right this moment. What do you see? Are you on a mountaintop, jumping in joy with your arms held high? When you search the word "worship" in google, 90% of the images describe this image; a scene of victory, joy and freedom. But I wonder, how many people actually come into worship with this kind of spiritual stance? Or is it more often the case that we see ourselves crouched and shriveled in a dark corner; plagued by tears and fears, too weak to even stand?

If you are the latter, hear these words from Isaiah 35:3-4.

"Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come and save you."

Beloved of God, though the times may be scary, though things may make us weak in the knees, God will come to save. When you feel like everything is falling apart and you want to just shrink back in fear, have courage in this, and rise strong!

HE WILL COME AND SAVE YOU

Say to those who are
fearful-hearted
Do not be afraid
The Lord your God is strong
And with His mighty arms
When you call out His name
He will come and save

He will come and save you
He will come and save you
Say to the weary one
Your God will surely come
He will come and save you

He will come and save you
He will come and save you
Lift up your eyes to Him
You will arise again
He will come and save you

Say to those who are
broken-hearted
Do not lose your faith
The Lord your God is strong
And with his loving arms
When you call on His name
He will come and save

He is our refuge
in the day of trouble
He is our shelter
in the time of storm
He is our tower
in the day of sorrow
Our fortress in the time of war



DAY 2 - STRENGTH OF COURAGE

WORD

The Bible is filled with stories of courageous people; and one of the “rock stars” among them is Daniel. Sometimes when I look at their examples, I feel that they are “larger-than-life”; like they are immune to fear and have “super courage”. But while they are certainly inspiring, sometimes it has a negative effect on me. I start to count their example as something that would be impossible for me to follow because they have a “special faith” that I don’t. I mean, I can’t even properly face my worldly fears like fear of rejection, insecurities and anxieties of the future. How much less would I measure up in the face of the fear of a cruel death?

However, that is not what we see from today’s passage. Daniel’s source of courage was not at all something that only he has special access to. It is available for us as well. We will see how fear was also present in him. But his example reminds us that courage, as we often hear, does not mean we don’t get afraid. It simply means we gather the strength and we do it anyways. What is the source of Daniel’s courage? Let’s read and find out.

READ DANIEL 2

1. What situation served as a test of courage for Daniel?
(vv.1-18)

How can we tell that Daniel was not immune to fear?

2. How did Daniel show his strength of courage?

What were some of the things he did that might have involved risks?

DAY 2 - STRENGTH OF COURAGE

3. How did God help Daniel rise strong?

How did he stand out compared with the other wise men?

What is the difference between courage and recklessness? Both of them involves taking risks, but courage is seen as a virtue and recklessness as lack of it. As I was reading up on this, I came across this article.

“Richard Branson (CEO of Virgin Group) is well-known for his use of saying ‘Screw it, let’s do it.’ It’s even a title of one of his books. But let’s face it, if we adopted this mantra, we could risk losing everything. Having courage takes a strong sense of self-belief, strong foundations and serious back-up. Most of which Richard Branson has in droves.”[1]

What classifies Daniel’s actions as courageous rather than reckless? You see, he didn’t dare to do what he did – speak up concerning the king’s harsh decree, approach him while he was being unreasonable and erratic, and to take on an impossible challenge – without a plan in mind. He knew exactly what he needs to do and who to turn to. He was sure that the risk was worth it and that things will turn out for the glory of God. His courage came from knowing that he has God as His “serious back-up”.

[1] “Reckless or Brave? How to Tell the Difference Before Taking the Plunge” by Jo Cameron and Julian Mellor,
<https://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/business/reckless-brave-redmane-group-blog-13223945>

DAY 2 - STRENGTH OF COURAGE

WALK

What does it mean to rise strong? The second thing we learn is that we need to have strength of courage. God may be calling us to do some things that may feel scary to us this year. He may ask us to go out of our comfort zone. He may ask us to speak up about His truth to a hostile audience. He may lead us to do something or to experience something that makes us the most afraid. But let it be a comfort to us to know that when we are called to trust in God, we are not being called to recklessness but to courage. We don't need a "super faith" to do this. It doesn't mean we need to be immune to fear. But just like Daniel, all we need is to lean on God as our source of courage. He is our strong foundation and our "serious back-up".

Do you have strength of courage? Here are some questions you may want to ponder on.

1. What are some situations that test your courage?

What are some things God may want you to do that you are afraid of?

2. What are some practical ways you can strengthen your courage?

What can you learn from Daniel on the first level of defense you can do when you are faced with a tough situation?

3. Are there people you can reach out to, to pray and intercede with you?

Who do you trust the most to share your prayer goals? Ask them to pray with you and for you.

DAY 2 - STRENGTH OF COURAGE



A PRAYER

O Most High God, nothing and no one is greater than You. When we are facing the giants of our lives, we pray that this truth becomes our source of strength. We want to confidently overcome the fears that grip us by trusting that we have You to back us up. Help us to see how wise it is to courageously follow and obey Your will; that You will not abandon us but uphold us; that the benefits of Your pleasure and favor outweigh all the risks; and that You will never make us lose out especially in eternal riches. All these we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DAY 3 - STRENGTH OF CONVICTIONS

WORSHIP

I read a book sometime in the early 2000s called “Rachel’s Tears: The Spiritual Journey of Columbine Martyr Rachel Scott”. It was about the journal of a 17-year-old girl who died during the Columbine shooting. Reportedly, she was asked at gunpoint whether she believed in God and was shot to her death as a result of her saying “yes”. Although some are criticizing that she didn’t really know she was going to be shot for affirming her faith and that she shouldn’t be celebrated as a “martyr”, this didn’t in any way lessen her impact in my own faith journey. Because with or without that, it was her journals, her prayers and her reflections, that convinced me that she was both ready to die and to live for Jesus.

I remember thinking to myself. I don’t know if I will ever come to the point where I need to die for Jesus; but I hope that I will always be ready to live for Him. I don’t know if there will ever come a time when I have to stick to my convictions in the face of death; but I hope that each day I get a chance to be alive, I can affirm what I believe in by living my life according to it.

As we worship this morning, thoughtfully examine the words of this hymn. Strengthen your convictions, and rise strong!

LIVING FOR JESUS

Living for Jesus
a life that is true,
Striving to please Him
in all that I do;
Yielding allegiance,
glad-hearted and free,
This is the pathway
of blessing for me.

Living for Jesus
who died in my place,
Bearing on Calv’ry
my sin and disgrace;
Such love constrains me
to answer His call,
Follow His leading
and give Him my all.

Living for Jesus
wherever I am,
Doing each duty
in His holy name;
Willing to suffer
affliction and loss,
Deeming each trial
a part of my cross.

Living for Jesus
through earth’s little while,
My dearest treasure,
the light of His smile;
Seeking the lost ones
He died to redeem,
Bringing the weary
to find rest in Him.

O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,
For Thou, in Thy atonement didst give Thyself for me;
I own no other Master, My heart shall be Thy throne,
My life I give, henceforth to live,
O Christ, for Thee alone.



DAY 3 - STRENGTH OF CONVICTIONS

WORD

There used to be a time when having solid convictions are a mark of being a strong Christian. However, lately, does it seem like when you stand up for what you believe in, you are either crazy or intolerant? You are “foolish” when you leave a high-paying job to pursue a ministry-oriented profession. You are “uptight” if you have a high standard for purity and in entering relationships. You are “unloving” when you affirm unpopular Biblical truths. What’s worse is that sometimes, these opinions even come from Christian family members or friends or maybe even pastors!

In this kind of cultural and spiritual climate, how do we encourage the people of God to have a strong sense of conviction? Why is it even important? And does it even make any difference? Let’s read and find out.

READ DANIEL 3

1. What situation served as a test of convictions for Daniel's three friends? (vv.1-15)

How was this situation extra hard even compared with chapter 1?

E.g.

The king issued a _ _ _ _ _ to anyone who would not do it.

Everyone else _ _ _ _ _ the king’s decree.

They were being accused by those who _ _ _ _ _.

2. How did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego show their strength of convictions?

What was their reply to the king when he directly threatened them?

DAY 3 - STRENGTH OF CONVICTIONS

3. How did God make them rise strong?

What amazing thing happened when they were thrown into the blazing furnace?

Let's try a little exercise, shall we? Can you come up with possible arguments why the three friends of Daniel should have just bowed? Something like, "In their hearts they can choose and decide not to really worship anyways." Or "They can just imagine that the gold image is God so inwardly it is Him they are worshipping." Or even, "It is important that they do not anger the king or act rebelliously so that they can win him over."

Sadly, a lot of times, this is how we justify the compromises we make in our faith. Sometimes, we even convince ourselves that this is godly and right. Most of the time, we struggle to discern which matters are subject to interpretation and which ones are matters of conviction.

So how do we know? How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego form such a confidence in their conviction as to be able to boldly tell the king that "we don't need to defend ourselves before you in this matter"? I think the simple explanation is because they had absolute reverence for God's commands and this one is way up there in the Ten Commandments. This matter was a non-negotiable. They don't even make any attempt to squiggle their way out of this sticky situation; because for them, God's commands trump any other command by any other king.

DAY 3 - STRENGTH OF CONVICTIONS

WALK

Listen again to what conviction sounds like “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, our God is able to deliver us from it, and from your majesty’s hand.” “BUT EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, we will still not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” Convictions are not preferences. Convictions are not there to serve us. Convictions are what we hold to be true even if we have to suffer for it. Isn’t that such a game-changer? It reminds us that we became Christians not because it would make life easier for us. We become Christians because we believe in God, in what He says, and whatever He chooses to do.

Dear friends in the Lord, we need to rise strong. The odds may not be in our favor. Our culture may pull us away to abandon our post. We may be tempted to make compromises and rationalize them. But if we are convinced that God is the King of all kings and Lord of all Lords, we need to stand firm in His decrees. We need to have absolute reverence for them.

Do you have strength of conviction? Here are some questions you may want to ponder on.

1. What are some situations that test your convictions?
What makes it especially hard for you to be a Christian?

2. What are some practical ways you can strengthen your convictions?
What is the obvious way you can become more confident in knowing what God wants?

DAY 3 - STRENGTH OF CONVICTIONS

3. Sound off your convictions below.

Personalize this principle. What are some things you want to decide in your heart never to compromise?

Even if God doesn't

-----,

I will still

Even if God doesn't

-----,

I will still

Even if God doesn't

-----,

I will still

-----.

A PRAYER

O King Eternal, we believe in Your words that if we have died with You, we will also live with You; if we endure, we will also reign with You. May it never be, that we shall ever deny you; but always proclaim You – in our words, thoughts, and deeds. We ask for Your mercy that we grow strong in our convictions; according to Your faithfulness, through Christ our Lord. Amen.
(2 Tim. 2:11-13)

DAY 4 - STRENGTH OF COMMITMENT

WORSHIP

Losing heart has got to be one of the most tragic things a Christian can experience. It is similar to the idea of “falling out of love” with someone; when the strength of your commitment to the person begins to wane. But many things in life may cause us to lose heart. When we see “unfair things” happening, when we are beset with trials upon trials, when we feel like we have given up so much for the sake of our faith yet those who disregard God seem to be much happier than we are, the fire and passion we feel for God can get snuffed out at times.

This is the very thing Asaph, the songwriter, describes in Psalm 73. Seeing the wicked prosper (vv.4-12) while his own commitment to be righteous is seemingly unrewarded (vv.13-16), he said that he “almost slipped; nearly lost his foothold” (v.2). He almost wanted to abandon his trust in God. But then towards the end of the Psalm we see a great revival happening in his heart, leading him to pen these beautiful words “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (v.26) What inspired this change of mind, heart, and spirit in him?

It was worship. In v.17, Asaph pinned down his epiphany to this one event. “Till I entered your sanctuary.” He didn’t say much of anything else. All he knew was that one moment he was wallowing in self-pity and acting like a beast before God; but when he entered God’s presence, his heart was revived. He saw things not for how they appeared to be but how they truly are. He saw eternal realities and fixed his hope in the eternal God. He saw that he can lose everything else but he will still have more than he can ask for because God Himself is his portion.

As we worship today, may you also behold God and be revived in His presence. Strengthen your commitment to Him, and rise strong!

GOD IS THE STRENGTH OF MY HEART

Whom have I in heaven but you?
There is nothing on earth I desire besides You
My heart and my strength, many times they fail
But there is one truth that always will prevail
God is the strength of my heart
God is the strength of my heart
God is the strength of my heart and my portion
forever.

DAY 4 - STRENGTH OF COMMITMENT

WORD

In our passage today, we make a huge time jump. In Chapter 1, Daniel would have been just about 15 years old. In Chapter 6, he would have been around 80 years old already; having outlived King Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar, surviving the fall of Babylon, and now serving in the Persian empire under King Darius. Throughout that course of time, the changes in the world, falling in and out of favor in the eyes of rulers and kings, has Daniel's character, courage, and convictions changed in any way? Let's read and find out.

READ DANIEL 6

1. What situation served as a test of Daniel's commitment to God? (vv.1-9)

If you were in his position, what were some of the things that happened that would make you lose heart?

2. How did Daniel show the strength of his commitment to God? (v.10)

Think of a word that describes how he responded to the situation.

3. How did God make Daniel rise strong? (vv.11-28)

How did God show His strength of commitment to Daniel as well?



DAY 4 - STRENGTH OF COMMITMENT

Something about that scene in verse 10 – when Daniel learned about the decree NOT TO PRAY and all the consequences it involved but decided TO PRAY anyways, showing how natural it was for him, and when he opened the windows, exposing himself for everyone to see – makes me think of one of those videos of old couples holding each other up while walking or giving the best part of the chicken to their spouse.

That scene is the perfect picture of what we mean when we say “Love is Commitment”; that love is in the little things: in the every day faithfulness, in the perfect knowledge of what your beloved wants, and doing that day in and day out.

At about 80 years old, Daniel showed his love and commitment to God by doing exactly what he has been doing his whole life. No, time and all the hardships have not tainted his character, courage, and convictions one bit. Quite the contrary, time has strengthened them. In how Daniel carried himself, it is evident that he does not fear losing anything – not his high position, not his high connections, not even his life – because God is everything to him.

Did you notice that Daniel barely spoke at all? All throughout the chapter, it was other people that did all the speaking for him. He didn’t need to say anything because the evidence of his love for God was undeniable – his enemies knew it, King Darius knew it, and God certainly knew it; and He exchanged Daniel’s commitment with His steadfast love and faithfulness. What a way to rise strong!

DAY 4 - STRENGTH OF COMMITMENT

WALK

Friends, let us rise strong in this way. Let us love God in every day and in every little faithfulness, such that our commitment to Him gets stronger as the days and years go by. Let us worship God, pray, know His heart, so that we may never lose heart no matter what discouragements or threats may come. Let this be our goal; for our commitment to God to be so evident that we don't even need to speak about it – because it overflows from our life, from our attitudes, from our inner peace, that God is everything to us.

Do you have strength of commitment? Remember, our commitment to God is not defined by a one-time experience of spiritual high. It is poured out in our daily resolve to choose God.

Here are some questions you may want to ponder on.

1. What are some situations that test your commitment to God?

What are the things that cause you to lose heart?

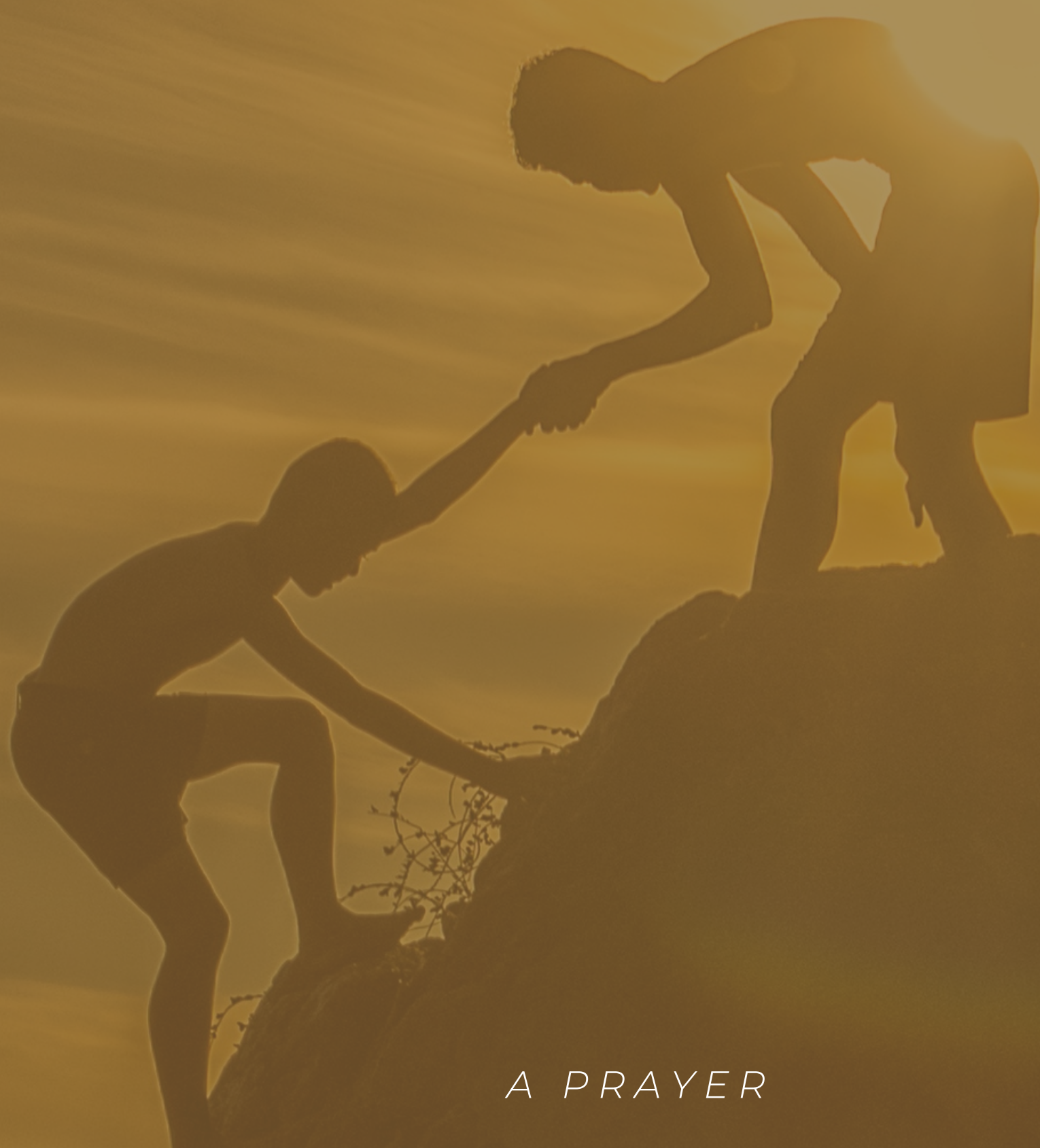
2. What are some practical ways you can strengthen your commitment to God?

What are the things you can do that makes Him happy? How can you more consistently do them?

3. What should be your motivation to daily choose God?

In what way can you say that God is the strength of your heart your portion?

DAY 4 - STRENGTH OF COMMITMENT



A PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You are the source of everything good and lasting in my life. I know that I sometimes take for granted that what I have in You is so much more than what the world abounds in. I confess that I am sometimes envious of the way others prosper in the world, and lose heart over it. I do not want to remain blind this way. I humbly ask that You help me to see You, hear You, be near You, so that I can love and obey You. My simple prayer is that I can be found faithful in the little things; showing my love for you steadfastly, day by day, till you become big in my life. There is no greater honor and blessing than this. I long for Your mercy and grace. Through Christ Your Son. Amen.

DAY 5 - STRENGTH OF CONFIDENCE

WORSHIP

The year 2020 has left people feeling beaten to the core. If predictions for 2020 were of prosperity and good fortune, predictions for 2021 is grim at worst (some sites are actually predicting a zombie apocalypse!) and is bleak at best (we all know that things won't suddenly go back to normal just because the year changed). And as we are still dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic and the damages it has left on our livelihood, our physical, relational, and mental health, it is needless to say that our confidence for 2021 is probably at an all time low.

But you know what? The book of Daniel offers us a message that seeks to boost our confidence. We will look into this more closely later but for now, let me share what that message is. "God is forever seated on the throne."

As we worship this morning, sit on that thought. Allow the power of that message to sink in and lift you up. Times and seasons will change. But God is seated on the throne. Good times and bad times will come. But God is seated on the throne. Riches we will gain and lose. But God is seated on the throne. Worldly powers will come and go. But God is seated on the throne. The outlook for the future is scary and unknown. But God is forever seated on the throne. Place your confidence on this truth, and rise strong!

YOU ARE GOD ALONE

You are not a god created by human hands
You are not a god dependent on any mortal man
You are not a god in need of anything we can give
By Your plan, that's just the way it is

You are God alone from before time began
You were on Your throne, You are God alone
And right now, in the good times and bad
You are on Your throne and you are God alone

You're the only God whose power none can contend
You're the only God whose name and praise will never end
You're the only God who's worthy of everything we can give
You are God and that's just the way it is

Unchangeable, unshakable, unstoppable
That's what You are

DAY 5 - STRENGTH OF CONFIDENCE

WORD

For the past four days, most of what we have been reading and studying are narrative passages; stories about Daniel's life and the life of the Jews in captivity. Today, we will enter the 2nd half of Daniel: the prophetic passages. Chapters 7-12 are records of Daniel's visions. If you have the time to read through them, so much the better. But for our study, we will only be reading chapter 7, which contains the central theme of these visions.

However, since we will be encountering what is called "apocalyptic literature", it may be quite a challenge to understand these passages at first; when you are suddenly bombarded with so much symbols, numbers, images, and you may get distracted by the urge to "decode" them. If you are interested, you can read this simple article to help you to understand apocalyptic literature better (link in the footnotes) [1]. If you don't have the luxury of time to read this, there is one simple trick that can help you get to the message more clearly. That is, bear in mind that apocalyptic literature, or writings about the things that will happen at the end of the world, serve a very distinct purpose, that is, to encourage its readers to persevere and be confident in the Lord.

How so? Isn't it that when we read about "the end", the more natural effect is that we get scared? How can these visions of "the end" produce strength of confidence in our hearts? Let's read and find out

READ DANIEL 7

1. What happened that tested Daniel's confidence?

What did Daniel see in his visions (v.3) and what were those visions about (vv.15-17)?

Which part of his visions troubled him the most? (vv.19-21)

What was so terrifying about the fourth beast? (vv.22-25)

[1] "5 Tips for Reading Apocalyptic Literature in the Bible"
<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/apocalyptic-literature>

DAY 5 - STRENGTH OF CONFIDENCE

2. What revelations served to boost Daniel's confidence?

What happened at the end of these visions? (vv.9-14)

(v.9) THE _____ TOOK HIS SEAT ON THE THRONE.

(v.11-12) THE _____ WAS SLAIN.

(v.13-14) THE _____ REIGNED.

What did these visions mean?

3. How did God make Daniel rise strong?

What does it say about Daniel that God would give him these visions and interpret them for him?

When you read the end of the chapter where Daniel was “deeply disturbed” and “his face turned pale”, it certainly doesn't seem like the visions boosted his confidence but rather made it wane – but that is only because we haven't finished reading the whole of the visions yet. It might help to understand that these visions were given to him during Belshazzar's reign (around the time of Chapter 5) and it happened before the “Lion's Den”. How does this clarify the situation?

Daniel, who was probably (1) indignant that such a beast would dare stand against the Most High God and speak against him, and (2) concerned for God's people who will have to endure such trials, was naturally disturbed by all that was going to happen. However, we see him recover from that. We see from chapter 7 that Daniel's confidence was fully mature. And no doubt, this was because of his visions of the God on the throne. No doubt, this was because at “the end”, God wins. Yes, trying times will come; but God's people will prevail because Jesus reigns.

DAY 5 - STRENGTH OF CONFIDENCE

WALK

What does it mean to rise strong? At first, I didn’t want to end the last day of prayer and fasting with this image of Daniel “disturbed” and “pale”. It certainly is not a picture of someone who rises strong. But as I reflected on this more, it is good to keep this image in mind. It will remind us that we do not need and should not cling to false confidences. We do not need to put up a strong front. We can be weak and vulnerable before God, because that is when we are fully aware that we can have no true confidence apart from Him.

You see, we are not strong because we have it all figured out. We are not strong when we are always right. We are not strong because we are better than others. We are only truly strong when we are completely dependent on God; when we know we can’t have wisdom and righteousness without Him. May He be our only confidence, our only source of strength. Do you have strength of confidence? Here are some questions you may want to ponder on.

1. What are some situations that test your confidence?
What are some of the things that seem out of your control?

2. What are some practical ways you can strengthen your confidence in God?
Make a STOP and START list.

	STOP	START
E.G.	WORRYING ENDLESSLY	GIVING THANKS ALWAYS
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DAY 5 - STRENGTH OF CONFIDENCE



A PRAYER

Use the space above to write your own prayer to God. What vision have you seen today? How does that vision help you to see Him, this world, and yourself more clearly? In what way do you desire to be more confident in Him from this day on?

“O DANIEL,

(YOUR NAME)

MAN GREATLY LOVED

understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.”

And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, “FEAR NOT, DANIEL, FOR FROM THE FIRST DAY THAT YOU SET YOUR HEART TO UNDERSTAND AND HUMBLING YOURSELF BEFORE YOUR GOD, YOUR WORDS HAVE BEEN HEARD, and I have come because of your words.

And he said, “O MAN GREATLY LOVED, FEAR NOT, PEACE BE WITH YOU; BE STRONG AND OF GOOD COURAGE.”

And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “LET MY LORD SPEAK, FOR YOU HAVE STRENGTHENED ME.”

Daniel 10:11-12, 19
