



NEW YEAR

gracepoint NEW YEAR SERIES 2011

DEVOTIONS

Monday 14 February 2011

Disentangled from the world

Scripture readings:

2 Corinthians 4 vs 18

Hebrews 12 vs 1-2

We live in a strange sort of dualism between the physical world and the spiritual one. While our physical and immediate experience often dominates our thoughts and time, the spiritual realm is very real. Our physical being often demands a great deal of attention, while our spiritual being takes a back seat because it does not cry for our attention as loudly. It is all too easy to become entangled and ensnared in sin and in the things of the world, but God has called those who love Him to set their minds on things above... to live always with a sense of eternity deeply rooted in their hearts and to pay attention to the deep needs of our spirits and our souls.

Fasting is one way that we can purposefully focus on the spiritual as opposed to the physical. When we choose, for a time, to deny ourselves a very real physical necessity or desire like food, we are shifting our focus away from our physical needs and the things of the world and towards the deepest needs of our hearts and the Kingdom of God.

“Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.” – Andrew Murray

Tuesday 15 February 2011

The hunger of our souls

Scripture readings:

Matthew 4 vs 4

Matthew 5 vs 6

Fasting helps increase our appetite for God. Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. He desired that we would hunger for more of God and thereby, become more like Him. It is easy, however, to allow ourselves to be so filled up with worldly things that we do not take notice of the spiritual hunger within us. We need to desire more of God in order to keep seeking Him and growing more like Him. We need to hunger for Him and His righteousness. Fasting, that results in physical hunger, can be a powerful tool to remind us of the far deeper spiritual hunger to which we must attend. Denying ourselves physical food helps us think again about the quality and amount of spiritual food we are taking in and to force us to pause and ask ourselves a very important question: **“Do I truly desire more of God?”**

“Do you have a hunger for God? If we don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because we have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because we have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Our soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. If we are full of what the world offers, then perhaps a fast might express, or even increase, our soul's appetite for God. Between the dangers of self-denial and self-indulgence is the path of pleasant pain called fasting.” - John Piper

Wednesday 16 February 2011

Pressing into God's presence

Scripture readings:

Deuteronomy 4 vs 29

Psalms 34 vs 10

Isaiah 55 vs 6-13

Jeremiah 29 vs 12-13

God reveals Himself to those who truly seek Him. He longs for the seeking heart that is willing to go to any lengths to know Him more and to hear His whisper. He wants us to desire Him, to commit to Him and to be active in our pursuit of Him.

Sometimes we are tempted to become flippant about our prayers. It is easy to fling a quick prayer to heaven and expect God to bring about what we desire, but sometimes He requires more of us. God needs us to be fervent, passionate and dedicated in our seeking His face and His action. He wants us to press into His presence. Fasting can help us to be intentional and active about our prayers... to reveal to ourselves and to God that we are serious and that our commitment to Him and to seeking His will and way is worth our sacrifice. May you be encouraged today to pray... to really pray... and to seek God like never before.

"Bear up the hands that hang down, by faith and prayer; support the tottering knees. Have you any days of fasting and prayer? Storm the throne of grace and persevere therein, and mercy will come down."

– John Wesley

Thursday 17 February 2011

True repentance

Scripture readings:

Ezekiel 14 vs 6-11

Psalms 51

Ephesians 2 vs 4-10

The grace of God is a free and undeserved gift. It is free, but it is not cheap. It cost Jesus everything.

Repentance literally means to turn away from whatever we have done or are doing, and to turn instead, towards God. It is an active act of will that requires us to make a change in our minds, our hearts and our way of living. The fact that God is gracious and forgiving can lead us to fall into the trap of taking His mercy and forgiveness lightly instead of truly allowing our sin to break our hearts and change our ways.

Fasting, as an act of expressing true repentance, can be a powerful reminder that God's grace required a sacrifice greater than we can comprehend, and so, as a response to it, we will sacrifice in return as we set our hearts on doing right and turning from sin. It is an acknowledgement of our understanding of the price Jesus paid for our forgiveness and our gratitude for it.

May you truly know the depth of God's grace and mercy today... and remember never to take it for granted.

Friday 18 February 2011

Cultivating gratitude

Scripture readings:

Psalm 100 vs 4

Psalm 136

James 1 vs 17

“A spiritually awake person would see everything as gift, even suffering. We deserve nothing and yet we so often act as though we deserve everything. Nothing should be taken for granted. We should say thank you every day to God and to each other for all that is provided for us. This is one reason why fasting is such an important spiritual discipline. Not just fasting from food, but also fasting from cars, shopping centres, the news - whatever we have an inordinate attachment to. Fasting can help re-kindle our gratitude for all that we have been given.” - Glen Argan

When we willingly deny ourselves something we need or want, it helps us to remember that all that we have comes from the gracious hand of God... not because we deserve it, but simply because He is good. Fasting helps us to remember that every good and perfect gift comes from above and that we need to continually cultivate gratitude in our hearts for all God has done for us and given us.

As you reflect today on all that you have and all you are so often tempted to take for granted, may you be overwhelmed again by the goodness of God and bring Him the thanks and praise He so richly deserves.

Saturday 19 February 2011

Practising for victory

Scripture readings:

1 Corinthians 10 vs 13

Galatians 5 vs 24-26

James 1 vs 12

When we fast and choose to abstain from something that we desire and crave – whether it be food, electronics, sleep or something else we feel we “need” – we can develop our spiritual muscle in order to be able to withstand temptation better. Fasting is a powerful spiritual discipline that trains us to resist what we desire so that we may draw closer to God. When we see that we are able to withstand our desire for whatever we are fasting, we teach and train ourselves to be able to withstand other temptations that come across our paths. It is a reminder that Christ within us, can help us overcome all things and that we need Him more than the things that seek to draw us away. It prompts us to respond to God again as the One on Whom we are entirely dependent for our victory, our joy and our very life.

“Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in Him a source of sustenance beyond food.” - Dallas Willard