

DANIEL FAST MEDITATIONS

**WED. FEBRUARY 17 to
SAT. APRIL 3, 2021**

Join us as the church engages the Daniel Fast, which started on Wednesday February 17, 2021 and will end on Maundy Thursday April 1, 2021. The Daniel Fast is based on Daniel Chapter 1, where the prophet ate only vegetables and drank only water and chapter 10, where the Daniel ate no meat nor any breads for 21 days. A fast is designed to be a powerful experience to help followers of Jesus Christ develop a more intimate relationship with their Lord and Savior Jesus.

During this fasting period, set aside special time for prayer and for scripture reading. Journal your experience as you go through the fast.

Scriptures for Study & Reflection:

February 22 - 28: Theme: *A Pardoned People*. Romans 4:1-5; 13-17 by Rev. Carolyn Baskin-Bell, First AME Church – Santa Monica, CA

Romans 4:1-5; 13-17

⁴ Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? ² If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. ³ For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."

⁴ When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. ⁵ But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.

¹³ Clearly, God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was based not on his obedience to God's law, but on a right relationship with God that comes by faith. ¹⁴ If God's promise is only for those who obey the law, then faith is not necessary and the promise is pointless. ¹⁵ For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)

¹⁶ So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. ¹⁷ That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations." This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.

Questions to Ponder:

1. Why is faith a significant part of the justification process?
2. Imagine a courtroom scene with God as judge and the world or even specifically the church on trial. Summarize the charges and the verdict.
3. During this Lenten Season, what are some personal goals to implement in our lives as God extends pardon to us?
4. What activities/associations will assist in accomplishing an individual's personal goals to live a Christ-like life?

March 1 – March 7: Theme: *A Spiritual Makeover* (Lent). John 3:1-17 by Rev. Carolyn Baskin-Bell, First AME Church, Santa Monica, CA

3 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ² After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

³ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

⁴ "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

⁵ Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. ⁷ So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? ¹¹ I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. ¹² But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

Questions to Ponder:

1. What inspires an individual to acquire new things?
2. How are the symbols of light, water and fire related to “Spiritual Makeover” (rebirth)? What do they mean to you?
3. How does this study speak to your personal walk with Christ?

March 8 – March 14: Theme: *We’re Not Done Yet.*, Rev. Carey G. Anderson, D.Min. Pastor, First AMEC (Seattle, WA)

Prayer

God of love and Lord of Mercy, breathe on us and call to our remembrance how Great you are and how evident you become when we find ourselves pressed and in trouble. Remind us that we have no need to fear when you live inside of us, your creation.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:8-12

8 We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.

9 We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

11 Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies.

12 So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.

NLT

Contemporary Context:

There are times when even our best is not good enough and our strength is not strong enough. No matter how hard we may try, each of us, at one time or another, may feel that we are hanging on by threads alone.

For the believer, there should be a threshold that keeps us from our tipping point where everything is about to boil over. We do not contend that we do not have trials, nor do we maintain that we do not have problems. But the truth is that there is something on the inside working through us on the outside, encouraging us to fight on.

Exegesis:

The Apostle Paul claimed in Romans 1:16, that he was not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone believing, both to Jewish first, and to Greek (NASB).

Even though Paul was not ashamed of the gospel, his labors were filled with peril and pitfalls. Paul had hardships of ill health, bereavement, apostasy, and unemployment. He had troubles such as comrades deserting him, being beaten, being thrown in prison, and surviving a shipwreck. In all of these things he was not shaken and was able in 2 Corinthians 4:8-12, to share

his testimony, that through all of his hardships, he was still not done yet because as believers share in the sufferings of Christ, we also share in his resurrection!

Conversation:

What would our churches look like if we spoke of our hardships but continued our story to share with others that in spite of the problems we have had, we are still here? We are still standing. We still have a testimony. We still have a praise. We still have a witness and we still have the attitude that we're not done yet! There are those who focus on highlighting their heartache and pain. Perhaps this is how they feel they can gain attention, comfort and compassion from others.

While we are to console one another, our challenge is also to encourage our people to push the envelope a little further to see how God has kept them and sustained them through it all. Paul is correct as he states in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed" (NLT).

My friend, no matter what it is that you may be going through, I want to encourage you because "We're not done yet!"

Questions

1. Name a time when you felt that all hope was gone but God made a way for you.
2. Do you believe that hardships can sometimes be a blessing to believers? Why or why not?
3. Do you think believers should talk about their hardships or only talk about their successes?
4. How do you incorporate suffering as an integral part of being a believer? Are suffering and believing mutually exclusive or do you believe they are events that are related to each other in some way?
5. What would you say to encourage someone who is only focused on their problems and hardships today?

March 15 – March 21: FROM THE 5TH DISTRICT BIBLE STUDY 2021

Theme: *Let God Expand Your Capacity*. Psalms 113 by Pastor Carey G. Anderson, First AME Church – Seattle, WA

PRAYER

Eternal God, let your vision be bigger than my dream. Let your blessing be more expansive than my capacity. Lord, let your plan for me be larger than my imagined destiny.

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 113

- 1 Praise the Lord! Yes, give praise, O servants of the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord!
- 2 Blessed be the name of the Lord now and forever.
- 3 Everywhere—from east to west—praise the name of the Lord.
- 4 For the Lord is high above the nations; his glory is higher than the heavens.
- 5 Who can be compared with the Lord our God, who is enthroned on high?
- 6 He stoops to look down on heaven and on earth.
- 7 He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump.
- 8 He sets them among princes, even the princes of his own people!
- 9 He gives the childless woman a family, making her a happy mother. Praise the Lord!

NLT

EXEGESIS

For the believer, “Praise the Lord” is a phrase that we use in several ways. We use the phrase as a way to thank God for something that perhaps we were expecting or not expecting, we use this phrase in worship to express gratitude, acknowledgement, or commending God as an expression of adoration. It is also frequently used when one receives a blessing of some kind.

Actually, Psalm 113 is often framed as part of The Egyptian Hallel (Groseclose, 2010). These were Psalms depicting the Hebrew children’s Egyptian enslavement and were sung during the Passover and other high holy days and festivals. In other words, this is a Psalm that sings of God’s goodness even in the midst of unbearable and atrocious circumstances. It depicts that praise songs were sung while the Hebrews were still slaves and before they reached the Promised Land.

This Psalm is also interesting because it suggests that there will be a turning of the tables in the human social order. For example, the Psalm suggests that God intimately gets involved in the care of humanity and stoops to the world’s level to be directly involved (vs.6). With the 2020 deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks and countless others, God’s spirit is yet “stooping down” in the countless marches for justice and racial social justice. In verse 7, the author speaks of a day coming where there will be a lifting of the poor from the dust. In other

words, their condition will change for the better and this lifting will extend to uplift those who are in need and have been discarded as trash. A change is definitely coming! Again in verse 8, the psalmist describes how people who have been intentionally overlooked and forgotten will find new places and stature in the community, which means that a power shift will be spiritually enacted by God that will seat the underclass in new places of justice and new seats of honor. In verse 9, the power shift is not just for men but for women as well. A childless woman is mentioned as a metaphor of how God will bring women from a place of infertility (place of shame), to a place of joy and pride that will accentuate her intellect and genius. The Psalm is revolutionary in that it describes how God is expanding the capacity of the outcast, the overlooked, and the outsider.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The year 2020 was certainly a challenging year for the whole world, but especially impacted was the black and brown community due to COVID-19. Yet, in spite of the overrepresentation of African American coronavirus infections, the disproportionality of job losses, black business closures, sickness and death there are still many of us who can still sing, Praise the Lord. Not that you haven't experienced hard times or challenging experiences, but you are at a place where you know that God is one who can expand your capacity. You may not be out of your circumstance yet but you can praise God through it, even if you are still in it!

CONVERSATION

One of the most praise worthy elements about this Psalm is that it shows God's consistency. Psalms 113 ends the way it begins, "Praise the Lord." This is known as a chiasmic structure, which is a literary technique in narrative motifs where a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a "mirror" effect as the ideas are "reflected" back in a passage (Breck, 2008). The ending of the Psalm, then, mirrors the beginning of the Psalm, but more importantly, one can surmise from this that God's promises are consistent! There is no wavering with God. With this in mind, encourage yourself to see beyond your limitations and see what God sees in you. See yourself reaching a little higher and stretching a little further knowing that God is able to expand your capacity. See yourself challenging your insecurities and speaking life into your dreams. Praise God for who God is and rest in God's ability to expand your capacity!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has God expanded your capacity in times past?
2. What have been barriers in your ability to think big in the past?
3. In what ways do you see God expanding your capacity in 2021?

References

Groseclose, Win. (2010). *The Egyptian Hallel Psalms: Reflections on Psalms 113-118*. Lulu.com
Dorsey, David A. (2004). *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*. Baker Publishing Group

March 22 – March 28: Theme: *Unexpected Praise From Unexpected People.*
Rev. Carey G. Anderson, D. Min., First AME Church, Seattle, WA

Prayer

God of grace and God of glory on thy people pour thy power. Grant us wisdom and grant us power to make the spirit of Pentecost be evident in real time for this generation.

Scripture

Luke 17:11-19 NLT

¹¹ As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria.

¹² As he entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance,

¹³ crying out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

¹⁴ He looked at them and said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, “Praise God!”

¹⁶ He fell to the ground at Jesus’ feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, “Didn’t I heal ten men? Where are the other nine?”

¹⁸ Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?”

¹⁹ And Jesus said to the man, “Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you.”

Contemporary Context

Sometimes we can obtain spiritual nuggets from persons we deem to be an outcast, or one to be overlooked, or even those we consider to be an unbeliever. At first glance, I believe that some believers have developed a sense of entitlement and that blessings exclusively “belong” to us as believers; and, as a result, we take God’s blessings upon us for granted. For those who sense that God does not owe them anything more than what they already have, when God blesses them they feel an overwhelming desire to stop and give God a special praise for what God has done for them.

Exegesis

The story of the ten lepers is a very familiar story for students of the Bible. Here, we learn that ten men, because of their disease, was excluded from their respective community because they were considered contagious and would subject others to their physical ailment and infirmity. With no one else to call, they turn to call on the name of Jesus as he passes by who directs them to “go show yourselves to the priests.” This is a phrase that must be repeated in our contemporary church in a post-modern world as Jesus is still passing by and walking with us through the dark places and in the rough ravines of life. Taking into consideration the economic disparities between African Americans and whites and the inequities in criminal sentencing and the incarceration rates among the rich and the poor, the church still must proclaim “Jesus is still passing by” and is still directing us to go present ourselves to the Priests, which is what I call a metaphor for come back to God’s House and give me the honor that I deserve.

Interestingly enough, nine of the Lepers were supposedly Jews who went to the Priests in times past as part of their tradition and religious ceremony and did not consider turning around to go back to Jesus to say “thank you.” The scripture, however is clear that the one who was always on the outside, the Samaritan, the one you would least expect, was the one who did turn around and gave thanks to Jesus for the healing he had received. For him, going to the Priests was more than a religious ceremony and giving thanks to Jesus was his highest priority as Jesus not only changed his condition but changed his life! As believers, let us be one of those to give praise to God for the things God does in our lives; but more importantly, let us be welcoming to others in our faith community whom society has labeled the outcast because they too have a praise.

Conversation

I sometimes wonder if our church really gives God an authentic praise through our liturgy and worship experience or do we just go through religious ceremony? Could it be that real authentic praise comes from those who come from places on the outside and from the margins of our society? The Leper that returned to Jesus represented one-tenth, which equals the tithe. This tithe, however, came from a religious outsider and not one from the faith community. Could this biblical implication mean that those who represent the one-tenth or the covenant community may be those whom we as the church have written off? Or maybe the biblical narrative is challenging the reader from the faith community to make room for those different from us as real change can come from many different places. The important key for us to think about is that when God blesses us in our walk (whatever it is), we must not take it for granted but stop and give our gratitude and praise to God. Their testimony can inspire those who have been in church for many years but have suffered in silence. Let our church be a place that welcomes unexpected praise from unexpected people!

Questions

1. How would you define the church as being a welcoming community?
2. What does it mean to you to welcome others that are different from you?
3. What steps are needed in your faith community to welcome strangers? Keep in mind the Charleston Nine massacre at Mother [Emanuel](#) AME Church.
4. What are the issues you feel the church must address in being a welcoming community of faith?
5. What are you doing to remember how God is blessing you?

March 29 – April 3: Theme: *Reflections on Psalms 119*. Rev. Francine Brookins, J.D., M.Div.
Pastor, Bethel (Fontana, CA)

Writing Reflections

For this lesson, please have each student take the time to handwrite each of the verses before the class begins. After each verse they should write their own reflections. This hour together will be spent sharing reflections and discussing what has come up for each person as they spent time with the Word.

Psalm 119:97-104

97 Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long.

Reflection:

When was the last time I meditated on God's law all day long? As I watch what is wrong in the world, I only know that it is wrong because of the Word that dwells within me. In that way, I suppose there is at least some thought of God's law all day long.

98 Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me.

Reflection:

If I spent more time in daily meditation on the Word then it would spring up more easily in times of trouble. When I'm searching for answers and the Word is fresh in me, it shows me the right way to move. Wisdom is alive and unique and right on time.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation.

Reflection:

We presume that the teacher has the answer. Teachers often have information. If we don't know what to do with the information we've been given, then it is meaningless. The Word shows us how to understand information and how it applies to our situations. People can give us their opinions and even instructions, but God's Word helps us put it all together.

100 I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. Length of years on the planet does not make us wise.

Reflection:

Some people grow old but never learn anything, never mature in wisdom. They have grown bodies and baby minds, hearts, spirits and understandings. One way to ensure constant growth as we live is to study the Word and follow its instructions (keep the precepts).

101 I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.

Reflection:

When we know better, we do better. Hearing is not the same as doing. Once we start listening and heeding God's Word and doing what it says, we discover its benefits. If we never try it for ourselves, we won't know for ourselves. When was the first time I resisted participating in evil ways and what benefits did I receive from obedience to God's law? What impact did it have on my future decisions?

102 I do not turn away from your ordinances, for you have taught me.

Reflection:

When we trust the teacher, we are less inclined to turn away and do things 'our way.' When we trust God as our teacher we tend to look to God for instructions. When we don't trust God, we look elsewhere for guidance – what does my friend say, what is the politically correct thing to do, what would please my family members, what do I feel like doing --- all of those become options when we don't trust the teacher. God wants us to trust God as our teacher.

103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Reflection:

The idea that we can taste the Word of God is exciting. I only eat raw honey when I'm terribly ill with a sore throat. Honey is a soothing agent for the throat and the stomach. When the Word of God is in us because of our daily meditation it is also a soothing agent. It leaves a pleasant taste in the mouth.

104 Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

Reflection:

Once we've experienced the benefits of doing things God's way and being in a community that shares common reverence for the Word of God, we see the damage caused by false guidance. Loving our neighbors means ensuring they have access to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is not the same as using others as objects for self-gratification. I hate the lies that the enemy has told by distorting the Word of God. The more we study for ourselves, the more easily we can recognize the lies.

Discussion Questions Each person should share their reflections on each verse if they have not yet done that in the class.

1. Do you think your life would be better if you spent more time reading, studying and meditating on the Word of God? What will you do differently now?
2. God's Word is not hidden. Every believer has access to the written Word. Why don't you spend more time meditating on it?
3. Lack of education creates great disparities in society. The Psalmist indicates the Word can level the playing field through the gift of heavenly wisdom. I knew a lady who learned to read by studying the Bible with the Holy Spirit as her teacher.

On the other hand, people who think they already know everything have a more difficult time. Read these scriptures and discuss how the Word can be a teacher:

Luke 10:21; 1 Cor. 2:8; 1 Cor. 1:18ff; Acts 6:10; 1 John 2:27; Hebrews 5:11-14; 1 Corinthians 14:20.