

Day 1 – April 24, 2018

40 Days.

40 days. What can happen in 40 days?

Here in Montreal, seasons can change rapidly. 40 days ago many of us were on a church retreat tubing down a snow hill. This week people are cleaning their lawns!

In just 40 days, Moses climbed Mount Sinai, discovered God's glory, and returned with the 10 commandments. While God was revealing His glory to Moses, those same 40 days was also just enough time for Israel to turn to an idol as they abandoned the God who had just miraculously freed them from 430 years of slavery.

It took just 40 days for the twelve Israelite spies to investigate the Promised Land and discover a land flowing with milk and honey. And just 40 days for two of the twelve spies to decide that the land was "exceedingly good" and that they should "go take possession of it". They even warned, "do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them." Unfortunately, it also took just 40 days for ten of the spies to conclude that those who lived there were more powerful than God's promise and out of fear, advised Israel not to enter into God's Promised Land.

Often when God brings us opportunity we can respond with fear or faith. Will we shrink back and let the next generation step out in faith, or will we step forward in trustful obedience to what we have sensed God calling us to do.

Prayer focus: Ask God to position our hearts so that we can walk in faith. Ask Him for courage to follow Him into the 'land' and seasons He has prepared for Westside.

Day 2 - April 25, 2018

Jesus prayed.

Does that surprise you? Why would Jesus need to pray? Wasn't He God already? Who would He pray to? About what?

Philippians 2:5-7 says that "Christ Jesus, being in very nature God...made Himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." This means Jesus was made human in the same way that you and I are human. Humanly speaking, He had no extra benefits that you and I don't have. As Hebrews 2:17 says, Jesus was "made like his brothers, fully human in every way".

Hebrews 4:15 says "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." So, let us imagine Jesus living among us. Same pressures of life - relationships, responsibilities, temptations - to lie, hate, steal, be self-sufficient, control, manipulate. Yet not once giving into temptation. How did He do that? In John 5:19 Jesus explains that, "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise." So, though He was fully human, he always knew what the Father was doing. How? He spent lots of time, alone, with His Father, in prayer.

We see excellent examples in Mark and Luke of this. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (Mark 1:35). Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray (Mark 6:45-46). Before choosing the 12 disciples, He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12). When they came to a place called Gethsemane; He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." And He took with Him Peter and James and John and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground, and began praying. (Mark 14:32-34) Luke sums it up this way, "He would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." (Luke 5:16)

If Jesus needed to get away and spend time with His Father, how much more do we!?!?

Prayer focus: Thank Jesus for leaving Heaven to become fully human. Pray He helps you abide in Him as you practice constant communication with your heavenly Father. Ask God to help us be a church strengthened by constant prayer. Now, go and abide!



Day 3 - April 26, 2018

Don't Let the Fire Go Out!

“For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you . . .”
(2 Timothy 1:6)

When the Olympics comes to a country, a huge part of the experience is to witness the Olympic flame. For each Olympic Games, a flame is lit from the eternal Olympic flame in Greece and then carried to wherever the Olympic Games are being held. The flame makes its way to the host city for the opening ceremonies by traveling all over the country first.

In order to do so, volunteers and heroes from all over country carry torches that hold the flame from place to place. One time, in the United States, the flame was passing through Tacoma, Washington, Harley Sheffield had the honor of carrying it on his bicycle. As he was crossing the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, the expansion grates on the bridge blew a tire out on his bike. The torch popped out of its holder, fell onto the bridge, and broke into pieces. The Olympic flame was extinguished.

Sheffield was horrified. Now they would have to go all the way back to Greece and start over again and he would be fated to go down in history as the man who allowed the flame to go out! Fortunately, his panic was unnecessary, because a “mother flame” was present in a trailing van as well as a replacement torch. Thus, he could resume his duty, and the Olympic flame continued its travels.

This story provides a great illustration of our walk with God. Often, we find ourselves in the same situation as Sheffield. A moment of weakness that has led to the extinguishing of our flame. Oh, the guilt and shame we can feel, often not realizing that, just like Sheffield had a “mother flame” ready to restore the flame to his torch, we have a “Father flame” eagerly and lovingly waiting to restore the flame to our torch. And not only that, He will sustain it.

Prayer Focus: Pray for a light that will not go out as we lean on the unending oil of the Holy Spirit. Pray that Westside will act as an unhidden city on a hill. A beacon of light. Ask God to boost your faith as your light burns brighter. Ask Him how He can enable you to restore, rekindle, or resume something that will give Him glory and strengthen the church.



Day 4 - April 27, 2018

Can You Trust God?

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

There are two ways people live their lives as they pass through this world – either remembering or forgetting God. They either acknowledge His presence and therefore live their lives in dependence on Him, or they pay no attention to their all-knowing Father and then live a life based on their own understanding and abilities. It’s such a tragedy to be a person who weakly proclaims, “I trust God,” but whose calendar and chequebook show no difference between them and the person who does not even know God. The question we must ask ourselves today is, “Do we/I trust God?”

The very nature of the question “do we/I trust God?”, produces two possible meanings: First – “Can you ‘trust’ God?” Meaning, do I truly find Him to be trustworthy and believe that He can handle the decisions and the problems in my life? Secondly – “Can ‘you’ trust God?” Meaning, do you have the ability to trust (rely on the integrity, strength, and ability of) Him?

Proverbs 3:5-6 reveals some important things about trusting God:

- The matter of trust is either all or nothing. Notice how many times the word “all” is used.
- The command to trust precedes the promise. Blessing comes after trust is decided.
- The promise is conditional. Unlike many of the unconditional promises in the Bible, this promise of direction is given only to those who exercise trust in God.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Westside’s faith will be expanded. Pray that we will recognize that God is in control and trustingly depend on Him as we desire for His will alone to be done. Pray that as we root ourselves in Him, that the fruits of our deepened trust will guide us. Ask God to identify an area of your life where you are not fully rooted in Him. Ask Him to soften your heart as you let go and trust.



Day 5 - April 28, 2018

A God You Can Trust

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

God expects His people to trust Him, as He is a trustworthy God! We were created to live our lives in dependence upon Him. Our knowledge is incomplete, our wisdom is inadequate, and our power is ineffective; thus, we need our Creator. Sin in its very essence is failing to trust God. So, with that aim in mind, let's take hold of these verses in Proverbs as they teach us how to trust in Him.

We are to trust Him entirely. God wants us to trust Him “with all of our heart” (v. 5). That means everything from our salvation to physical, mental and social needs. This includes trusting Him with our families, marriages, jobs, relationships, finances, abilities, weaknesses, health, accomplishments and failures.

We are to trust Him exclusively. God commands us to not depend on our own understanding (v. 5). Why? Because it is fundamentally flawed and affected by sin. God is truly omniscient. He knows it all from beginning to end. He even knows the number of hairs on your head. So trustfully follow His leading as you read His word, pray for His will and seek His Godly counsel. He is on your side and is so trustworthy!

We are to trust Him uniformly (v. 6). In all we do and in every decision we make, we are to trust His wisdom, not just with big things but also with the little things.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Westside will be fully convinced of His trustworthiness. Take time to praise Him today for who He is and what He accomplishes. Take time to thank Him for how He directs Westside's path. And thank Him for how He directs your path.



Day 6 - April 29, 2018

Learning to Trust Him

“Trust in the Lord...Fear the Lord...Honor the Lord.”

(Proverbs 3:5-9)

In order to receive the blessing of God, we must trust Him. Trusting God is not something you take for granted by making simple confessions from time to time. Trusting God is having a complete, total, and daily reliance on His promises. Every day, you will face the choice of relying upon your own understanding or trusting in Him.

Let's choose to trust God. When you come to those places in life where you are at the end of your rope, your answer to "Can I trust God?", determines whether you grow beautifully or shrivel spiritually. The issue is, which will you choose? When God told Noah to build the ark, though it had never rained, Noah chose to trust God anyways. Abraham left everything behind because he chose to trust God. Joshua was faced with a decision, and he said, "Choose today whom you will serve...but as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord." What incredible trust in the Lord!

The reality of your trust in Him is revealed in how you acknowledge Him, how quickly you turn away from evil, and how you honor the Lord with your time, talent, and treasures.

Prayer Focus: Claim the following Scripture today and personalize it to Westside and yourself: "Do not let this happy trust in the Lord die away, no matter what happens. Remember your reward! You need to keep on patiently doing God's will if you want Him to do for you all that He has promised. His coming will not be delayed much longer. And those whose faith has made them good in God's sight must live by faith, trusting Him in everything. Otherwise, if they shrink back, God will have no pleasure in them. But we have never turned our backs on God and sealed our fate. No, our faith in Him assures our soul's salvation." (Hebrews 10:35-39)



Day 7 - April 30, 2018

My Goodness

If you were asked, "What does God want most from you?" how would you answer?

Many of us would find ourselves thinking about how 'He wants us to be good. He wants us to stop sinning. He wants us to love Him more, serve Him more, serve others better, believe deeper, pray properly, be more humble, work harder . . . and ultimately, answer that question right.'

This would likely lead us to the conclusion that no matter how hard we tried, we were bound to let Him down. In all of our years of being a Christian, we'd discover that we had yet to do any of it perfectly or even well. That would feel hopeless!

But there is hope! Beyond all else, it is relationship that He wants - relationship with you! He has done everything to make that happen. The only thing that prevented you from having a relationship with your heavenly Father is your sin. The beautiful thing, though, is that He took care of that through Jesus' sacrificial death and triumphal resurrection. God is love and "love keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Cor. 13:5). He promised He is "not counting our sins against us" (2 Cor. 5:19). So, when you come to God presenting your sin, His astonishing response is, "I took care of that already. So instead, come close and let's talk about how much I love you."

"Here I am, standing at the door, knocking. Anyone (no exceptions) who opens the door and invites me in (notice, no conditions except we say yes), I will (no ifs, and or buts) eat (fellowship) with him and he with Me."

A relationship with the Almighty God of the Universe. Without pretense or conditions. Clear and free, open and honest. Imagine that!

Prayer focus: If you have been trying to win God's favour by being good enough, confess that to Him. Tell Him you don't want to do that anymore and that you are opening the door to Him today. Thank Him for what He has done to make that possible and for the gift it is to come as you are. Pray that we will be a church that truly understands it is not what we can do but what He has already done.



Day 8 - May 1, 2018

The Conversation of Prayer

prayer /pre(ə)r/ Noun: 1. A solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to an object of worship. 2. A religious service, esp. a regular one, at which people gather in order to pray together.

What is prayer? Is it a request? A confession? Your heart's longings poured out before God?

Can you imagine a relationship where there is no communication? Prayer, at its simplest, is just talking with (not to) God. God wants relationship with us more than anything and "talking with" is something we would do with anyone we have a relationship with.

While we might still think of prayer primarily as asking God for something, prayer, properly understood, is a conversation with God. Just as we cannot hold a conversation with another person unless they can hear us, the very act of praying is an implicit recognition of the presence of God. And in praying, we strengthen that recognition of the presence of God, which draws us closer to Him. That is why the Bible recommends that we pray frequently and make prayer an important part of our everyday lives.

Still, prayer is much more than a conversation you might have with your doctor, or between two acquaintances who meet on the street, or when two friends visit over a coffee. God created us and knows absolutely everything about us. He loves us in our current condition. A conversation with Him can and should be the most intimate, risky and freeing one we will ever have with anyone.

"Call to me and I will answer you . . ." (Jeremiah 33:3)

Prayer focus: Thank God that he has made it possible for us to converse with Him. Pray that we would be a church rooted in prayer. Spend some time today abiding in Him. If helpful, use a journal to write your prayers or what you sense God is saying to you in prayer.



Day 9 - May 2, 2018

The Power of Love

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”
(1 Peter 4:8)

A woman named Beth was driving her husband Jim’s pride and joy, a little green MG. He had labored over this car for hours every Saturday for four years. He had wanted a car like this for almost all of his life. As Beth was driving, she saw a boy on a bicycle and swerved to avoid him. She heard the little car being crunched, scraped, and the glass breaking. Another driver stopped to help her out of the car. She was dazed but not hurt when the police officer approached her and asked for her insurance papers.

She did not so much fear the wrath of her husband, for he was gentle and nice, but she feared the great disappointment he would bear. She dreaded the hurt and anguish she would see on his face.

As she went to the glove compartment to get the insurance papers, she found them in a plastic package. To her surprise, on top of all the documents was a white envelope with the name ‘Beth’ on it. She opened it and began to read: “Dear Beth, if you are reading this, you have probably been in an accident. Don’t worry. I pray that you are all right, and just remember it is you that I love. Jim”

The best of us have wrecked our lives at times. We have made a mess. We have loved darkness rather than light. But the cross is God’s letter to us, that no matter how much we have wrecked our lives and disappointed Him, He still says, “Remember it is you I love.”

Prayer Focus: Spend time in prayer adoring God for His love. Pray that as we move forward as a church, we will always lean towards cultivating a loving relationship with God and each other. Ask the Lord to highlight someone you can love well today.



Day 10 - May 3, 2018

Changed by the Power of God

“As the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” (James 2:26)

How do you know that God’s power has truly changed your life? Well, in the same way you would know when a high-voltage electrical line has touched you. After a person has entered into a relationship with Jesus, it becomes almost shockingly obvious to them and those close to them. A new life replaces an old life and change becomes beautifully evident. When God comes into your soul, it will and should be known. Does the Bible teach about the evidence of a new life? Well, James’ letter in scripture really helps to give us a clear understanding of what true life transformation looks like after we have put our faith in Jesus.

Paul also speaks of this in Romans by using the story of Abraham. Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of the Jewish nation. So why was Abraham Paul’s example of what it is to live a life saved by faith in God? Was it because of Abraham’s good deeds that God accepted him? Not at all! If that was the case, it would have had everything to do with what Abraham could offer and nothing to do with what God had already given. Scripture tells us, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:1-5). So, our faith is revealed in how we respond to what we have received from Jesus.

In no way are Paul and James contradicting each other. In fact, they are complementing each other. Paul stresses the root of faith, while James stresses the fruit of faith. Paul looks at our salvation from the divine perspective and James looks at it from the human perspective. Paul sees the fire and James sees the smoke coming out of the chimney. The two go hand in hand.

Is your faith evident to others? Does your faith flow out of your character and dictate your actions? Can others (spouse, children, close friends) see a difference in your life versus the lives of those who do not know the Lord?

Prayer Focus: Ask the Lord to increase the faith of every member of Westside so that it is obvious to the outside world. Pray Matthew 5:16: “In the same way, let your [Westside’s] light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven.”

Day 11 – May 4, 2018



Anointing Brings Harmony

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore.”

(Psalm 133)

Remember the television show M*A*S*H? For those of you who don’t, it was based on an American emergency medical unit in the Korean War. Characters include Hawkeye Pierce, B.J., Father Mulcahy, Colonel Potter, Radar and Hot Lips Houlihan, and they all have very different personalities. They are constantly playing jokes on one another and arguing over different political views and the war, but there is always one thing that continues to bring them together. No matter the argument or the practical joke being pulled, when they hear the sound of the helicopters bringing in the wounded, they are always united in the operating room.

In this time of hurt and pain, we cannot afford to be another church that spends most of its time arguing over things that will not matter when we reach eternity. We must, together, bring our differences before the Lord and allow Him to merge them in the unity that only His Spirit can bring.

Just as Aaron, the high priest, was anointed on his head and the oil ran down his body, so the Holy Spirit descends from our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Allow the anointing of His Spirit to bring harmony to all things.

Prayer Focus: Pray that as God fulfills His dream for Westside, we will experience genuine harmony as a result of the Holy Spirit moving among us. Ask God to show you specific ways that you can bring unity to Westside. Ask Him to reveal if there is any way that you are not walking in unity. Pray that the value of unity will be more important than our own opinions.

Day 12 - May 5, 2018

Community Anointing



“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore.”

(Psalms 133)

This psalm was written for David’s coronation as king of Israel. Wow! What a struggle it was for David from the time that he was anointed king by Samuel leading up to the day of his coronation and finally ruling over a united twelve tribes. You see, it was David who united the tribes. David understood that harmony could only be achieved when they lived out the unity of their faith. Because of this unity, the days of David and Solomon were without question, the most glorious days of Israel’s history. Never has Israel possessed all of the land that God gave her except in those days.

There is a message in this for today's church. As the twelve tribes united under one king in the Old Testament, so the church of today must unite under the King of Kings. As Israel once experienced great glory because of their unity, so we too will experience an even greater glory in the days to come. As they experienced a tremendous victory over their enemies because of their unity, we too will enjoy freedom from the enemy’s control.

Unity is not uniformity. You can tie two cats’ tails together and have unity but not peace! Let’s seek ways to be united even in our differences.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Westside will experience and demonstrate true unity of purpose. Pray that we will be one, and in that, win the hearts of the lost. Ask God how you can help our church be unified. Ask Him to use Westside as a place of healing for those who are hurting from brokenness.

Day 13 - May 6, 2018



Are You Dangerous?

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

(Joshua 1:9)

Once Jesus calls us out of sin’s bondage, we have the privilege of embarking on a beautiful journey with Him. We get to follow Him as our Leader into His promised purpose and future; our destiny. Along the way, God will stretch us and enlarge the horizons of our vision.

Jim Elliot, a missionary who gave his life while ministering to the Auca Indians, asked himself the odd question, “Am I dangerous?”

Why ask this question? Dangerous to who? Dangerous how? Well, if we are honest with ourselves, we may find that we are utterly ordinary and undistinguished. We profess, simply by being Christians, to know a power the world cannot reckon with. And not only that, we have that power living inside of us. It can become easy though, as Christ followers, to position ourselves in a way where we do not stand out for what we believe or reflecting God’s Kingdom values. There, we face the danger of becoming content with the evil in the world, forgetting our call to put on an armour of light (Romans 13:12). We are often passive in this battle against an evil that has come to seek, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). It is unlikely that someone who is content to leave the enemies of God unchallenged is truly a danger. Oh, that God would make us dangerous!

So, how do we become a danger? According to Joshua, there are several principles:

Choose to be strong.

Choose to be courageous.

Choose to be obedient.

Read Joshua 1 and write down everything God commands him to do. Then reflect how these commands compare with what the Lord is calling you to do.

Prayer Focus: Pray 2 Chronicles 15:7 for our church: “But as for you [Westside], be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.” Ask the Lord to invigorate us with strength, courage and submission to Him as we follow Him into this new season. Pray these traits for yourself as well as you dare to be dangerous!

Day 14 – May 7, 2018



He Knows the End

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."
(Jeremiah 29:11)

Those of us who made the mistake of going to see the movie, "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel" might remember the owner's desperate attempt to calm his concerned guests when he said, "Everything is okay in the end, if it's not ok, then it's not the end."

All of us have seen at least one Disney movie. One thing you can always depend on is that "they all lived happily ever after" at the end of the movie. For many of us, these movies become a comfort to watch when the world around us is so unpredictable and chaotic. We do not have to get too uptight if the protagonist is in peril, because we know in the end the villain will be out of the picture and the protagonist will claim their happy ending. We already know the outcome, and because of that, no matter what our dear protagonist goes through, we watch with anticipation and excitement because we know their victory is on its way. And how fun it is to see how it all happens!

As believers, God has promised us our very own happy ending, which is found in His victory. You may go through challenges, heartache, disappointments, and at times even feel like you've fallen behind. In the midst of that, you have to remind yourself, "God holds my future in the palm of His hand. He already knows the outcome. God never ends in defeat! God's plans for me are good, and I will come out of this better and stronger than ever before!" Remember, we know God's final act of restoration, and it ends in peace, joy and victory!

Prayer focus: God is so awesome! Thank Him for having a wonderful plan for your life and Westside. Pray that we would trust in His word, even when we don't understand. Thank Him that He is good and that there will be victory in Jesus!



Day 15 - May 8, 2018

From Defeat to Victory

The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:24

Abraham Lincoln is widely recognized as one of the greatest presidents in the history of America. He stood tall and strong in a very critical and decisive time in their history. We certainly would regard him as a successful man. But this man also experienced many failures throughout his life.

When Abraham Lincoln went off to the Black Hawk War he was a captain. Through no fault of his own, he returned a private, which brought an end to his military career. His little country village shop "winked out" as he used to say. He failed as a businessman as well.

As a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, he was too impractical, too unpolished and too temperamental to be successful.

Turning to politics, he was defeated in his campaign for the legislature.

He was defeated in his first attempt to be nominated for Congress and in his application to be Commissioner of the General Land Office.

He was defeated in the Senatorial election of 1854 and in his aspirations for the Vice Presidency in 1856.

Finally, he was elected President of the United States when it seems they needed his leadership most and despite his past failures. Though our stories may not be as dramatic, Lincoln's story in many ways can be all of ours. The enemy of our soul tries to use our repeated defeats against us as he whispers in our ears, "You're a failure and will never win!" Lincoln's example can encourage us all to be brave and trust God for a beautiful new future for us as He works it all together for "the good of those who trust in Him."

Prayer Focus: Pray that Westside will trust God for a new future and new location. Pray Galatians 6:9: "Let us [Westside] not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Ask the Lord to encourage you in your walk with Him. In your prayer time, ask God for victory over evil for Westside and yourself.



Day 16 - May 9, 2018

Approaching

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

During the American civil war, a soldier who had suffered a personal tragedy went to the White House to request an exemption from service. When he arrived, he was refused entry. Disappointed, he left to sit on a nearby park bench. Soon a young boy approached him and ask him why he was so sad. The soldier began pouring out his heart to this young boy. Finally the boy said, "Come with me." The soldier followed the boy back to the White House and around the back. None of the guards attempted to stop them. Even generals and high-ranking officials stood to attention and let them pass. The soldier was amazed. They came to the presidential office. Without knocking they went into the West Wing and into the Oval Office. There was the President in conversation with the Secretary of State.

As soon as they walked in, the President stopped and turned to the boy and said, "Todd, what can I do for you?" Todd replied, "Dad, this soldier needs to talk to you."

We have unprecedented access to our heavenly Father through His son, Jesus. May we take full advantage of this access and seek conversation with our Father as one would speak to a friend, sharing our requests and hearing His heart for us, even simply sharing our day, our joys and our disappointments. Let's share everything with our Father and not forget to listen in return.

Prayer Focus: Thank God today for Jesus' finished work on the cross that allows us to have complete access to the Father. Thank Him that we can bring any need we have to Him. Pray that as a church we will never grow weary of bringing our needs to the Lord. Tell Him what you need today (Matt. 6:11). Listen for His response.



Day 17 - May 10, 2018

Can Jesus Do a Mighty Work Here?

“He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.” (Mark 6:5)

Here we have a sad picture. Jesus, in a sense, came to church but could do no mighty works. During that time, Jesus' reputation in Nazareth was not a good one, leading to a tough first year of ministry. He was off to a good start when He stood up and read from Isaiah 61. Scripture even speaks of how they “were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.” But, as soon as He told them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” they became enraged. So enraged that they ran Him out of town to a cliff, where they wanted to push Him off the edge. “But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way.” YIKES! Talk about rejection! Most people in that situation would have dusted off their feet and pronounced judgment, never to return. Jesus, however, is not like most. Even in rejection, He still had a burning desire to do a mighty work among the people.

That burning desire has never gone away. Jesus still wants to do a mighty work through His church and people. He is ready, willing and able to powerfully work in and through us.

Prayer Focus: Pray that He will do a mighty work through Westside. Ask God to show you if there is a roadblock of unbelief in your life or a lack of expectation of what God can do in and through us. Listen and respond. Pray expectantly and trust.



Day 18 - May 11, 2018

How Much Is Too Much?

“She broke the jar and poured the perfume on His head.” (Mark 14:3b)

The story of the woman from the town of Bethany who anointed Jesus' head is one of the few stories of Jesus' life that is contained in all four gospels. This story was so beautiful that it remained written upon the disciples' hearts so that they never forgot her act of devotion. It contrasts the hatred and rejection that Jesus received at the hands of most with the love He received by the least of these. Her act of worship and devotion was impactful. It was an act of love that the Lord deserved from all but was only given by a few.

May this deed prompt us in our call to worship as we remember it is not a matter of “how much is enough,” but rather a matter of a heart desiring to “give it all.” This woman's act stretches our understanding of sacrifice. That perfume in the alabaster bottle was very valuable. It was worth a year's wages and may have been saved for a very special occasion. What is the most extravagant thing you have done for the Lord and how can you continue to walk out in that extravagance? What can we learn from this Scripture?

Real love is always extravagant.

Extravagant love is always criticized.

Jesus always comes to the defence of those who are criticized
for being extravagant in their devotion towards Him.

Prayer Focus: Pray that all of us connected to Westside will love Jesus just as the woman from Bethany, and out of that overflow we are extravagant in the giving of our time, talents and treasures.



Day 19 - May 12, 2018

Powerful Jesus

“At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, ‘Who touched my clothes?’” (Mark 5:30)

In Mark 5, we observe three important incidents that happened in the life of Jesus. In these events, Jesus revealed Himself as the powerful Son of God. Through the first, Jesus revealed that He was more powerful than demons. He and His disciples encountered the most demon-possessed man in the region. When He showed up, the demons immediately began to beg for mercy and with one word they left the man, never to return. Keep reading and you’ll notice that Jesus was revealed as someone more powerful than death. When Jairus’ daughter fell ill, Jesus was sought after to come and heal the girl. But before He arrived the girl had already died. Unfazed, Jesus brought her back to life simply through the power of His word.

In the middle of these two great revelations, there is this rather simple but powerful incident where Jesus showed Himself to be more powerful than sickness.

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” (Mark 5: 24-30)

Through this act of healing, we learn that we should not only have spiritual life but spiritual health. We should find this in our own body and in our corporate church body. Though many have received salvation and spiritual life, many are not well. Jesus says in John 10:10, “... I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” The way to experience spiritual health is the same way to experience spiritual life – that is, to come into contact with Jesus.

Prayer Focus: Ask God to give spiritual health and vitality to Westside and to you as an individual. Pray that our future efforts and energy in mission and ministry flow from a deep well of spiritual life and health.



Day 20 - May 13, 2018

Power to Transform

“For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves.” (Colossians 1:13)

One of our challenges in this day and age is a tendency to take the topics of sin, Satan, salvation and the Saviour a bit too lightly. It can be easy to reduce sin into a simple problem and Satan into a mythical cartoon character. The reality though is that Satan is the very real prince of this world. He is the chief of innumerable demons, the father of lies, the ruling monarch of darkness and is here to seek, kill, and destroy (John 10:10).

On the other hand, many are tempted to turn salvation into an intellectual decision as they reduce our Saviour into just another religious leader. In the New Testament, Jesus never asked for compliments or tributes from those who rejected His claims as Messiah. Instead, He stood alone as the “only begotten of the Father.” He taught that He and the Father were one and that He alone was the way to life and relationship with the Father. We may trivialize these things, but in light of eternity it is not a trivial pursuit. The very word salvation reflects all that God the Father has done to rescue us from sin and death. The New Testament presents our salvation not as a mere decision but as a miraculous, supernatural deliverance! Colossians sounds a wakeup call as it proclaims the powerful truths of our salvation. It is a call to never take the cost of your salvation too lightly.

Prayer Focus: Today is the halfway point in our 40 days of prayer. How encouraging to remember that our prayers are directed to a God who miraculously rescued us! Ask God to help you to never trivialize His salvation and love. Pray that the people of Westside will daily deepen their relationship with Him. Pray for generous giving on Commitment Sunday as a result of increased faith and trust. How is God asking you to step out in faith on Commitment Sunday?



Day 21 - May 14, 2018

Contentment

Though the Apostle Paul's life started off with privilege and affluence as a highly educated Jewish scholar and high-ranking political figure, it ended up being a life of poverty and hardship. As he changed the trajectory of his life to be one that proclaimed Christ, he experienced frequent imprisonments, brutal whippings, beatings with rods, shipwrecks, drifting out at sea, and was even stoned and left for dead. However, running the race of the gospel was his life's mission, so he remained joyful in hardship as he kept working hard, often without sleep, food, or drink. He persevered through it all doing whatever it took to strengthen, challenge and encourage the church.

In Paul's later years, he found himself chained to a Roman soldier under house arrest for preaching Jesus. While waiting his sentencing, which would likely be death, you can almost hear the rattling of his metal bracelet as he picks up his pen to write to the church of Philippi. "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." (Phil. 4:11). What peace. It is astounding and certainly in vast contrast to the state of the churches to whom he wrote. Often he wrote to churches who were in turmoil simply because they did not know how to be content. Imagine a church who understands the power and peace of Christ in us!!

Still, Paul was just as human as the rest of us, so contentment was not his natural reaction. He wasn't born with it, nor did he receive it one day as a gift. He said, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phil 4:12-13) He truly understood that abiding in Christ meant one had everything they needed.

Prayer focus: Let us pray that we personally learn to be content in all things and, as a result, become a church content in all things. May our ultimate goal be God's glory as we express our gratitude to Him. Whether you find yourself in comfort or in difficulty, thank God for what you do have in your current circumstances. Ask Him to use them to teach you the secret of contentment. Celebrate that it is possible to do all things through Jesus, who gives you strength.



Day 22 - May 15, 2018

God's Great Relocation Project

"Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'"

Numbers 13:30

God is in the business of moving His people out of their comfort zone and into His Promised Land. Although we are often content where we are, God loves us enough to not leave us there. Sometimes we can get a little stubborn about His changes, because let's face it, rarely is change easy. It addresses our need for control and lack of trust in Him. Good thing we follow an amazing Father whose timing is perfect. He knows exactly how He made us, and exactly how we need to be pushed into the plans He has for us.

A good example of this is found through the children of Israel. As they were moved out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, God sent miracle after miracle to get them out and reveal Himself as the great I Am. Even so, they did not have the courage to go and possess what He intended for them. In fact, they said in Numbers 14:3, "Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" What a lack of trust! Probably a familiar feeling to us all.

Note what Paul says in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God has begun a work in our church and YOU are part of it. May we take heed of the lesson learned from Israel as they discovered God's Promised Land. May we be wise enough to realize that God began this great project, and He will continue this work until completion. He is trustworthy as we enter into God's Promised Land for us as a church.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will continue to lead the way and that our faith will remain steady as we continue with the vision He has given Westside. Thank the Lord for loving you enough not to leave you where you are and ask Him to give you strength as you take on the discomforts of change. Thank Him for the privilege of being part of this church during this exciting time in our history.



Day 23 – May 16, 2018

You Make the Call

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Baseball umpire Durwood Merrill, tells of his rookie years of umpiring in the major leagues. On his first time umpiring a game with the famous pitcher, Nolan Ryan, Ryan’s second pitch was so fast, Merrill never even saw it. Instead, he froze, unable to make the call. Finally he yelled somewhat tentatively, “Strike!” The batter backed out of the box and said, “Ump, don’t feel so bad, I didn’t see it either!”

This story is an excellent illustration of what modern life can feel like. Change is occurring so fast we sometimes miss it. Still, we are called to make daily decisions about very important things.

We find ourselves in a time, where more than ever before, we need a solid foundation. We need that true north to help us navigate through life. God’s heart and wisdom revealed in scripture is our true north. It contains the solid, always relevant truth, that continues to guide us.

How amazing, that “...the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12).

Prayer Focus: Pray that our church community will grow in immersing ourselves in and reflecting on scripture. Ask God for His word to sink into our heart, mind, character, and actions. Pray that His word continues to remain our compass, pointing us to His will.



Day 24 - May 17, 2018

Watch Out for the Dream-Stealers

“....so I sent messengers to them with this reply: ‘I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?’”
(Nehemiah 6:3)

In chapter 6 of Nehemiah, enemies tried to stop him from completing the vision God birthed his heart to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls. But Nehemiah stayed focused. With the goal of bringing God glory, he completed the vision (6:15). What an inspiration for the season we’re in. We might face obstacles, discouragement, and possible delays but we continue to move forward towards completing our future Meeting Point of Hope.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will strengthen us to fulfill this vision. Pray that we will be able to bring Him glory in the process and expand His kingdom as a result. Pray that God will help us be on guard against the enemy and that He will stand against any of the enemies’ plans prevent this from happening. Ask the Lord how you can be a part of this dream by using the time, talents, and treasures He has given you.



Day 25 - May 18, 2018

Every Hit is Necessary

Those who grew up in Winnipeg probably still have visions of the old brick buildings that date back to the pre-1900s. How many people must have walked past them on their downtown shopping trips. Many of these buildings needed to be demolished. The instrument of choice at that time for demolishing these buildings would have been a large crane with a 2-tonne wrecking ball at the end of its cable.

When the ball would come crashing against the side of the brick walls, nothing seemed to be happening. Over and over again it would 'BOOM' as it hit, without any evidence that the wall was affected in any way.

One crane operator was asked about this apparent ineffectiveness and responded that the wall was in fact being weakened even though nothing seemed to have changed. He said, "After about 30 hits, the wall seems to be unchanged, but with just one more the mortar shatters and the wall crumbles. We never know exactly which hit will bring the wall down, but we know every hit before that happens is necessary."

Jesus once told a story to encourage us to keep praying (Luke 18:1-8). In the story, a widow repeatedly comes before a judge that is neither God-fearing nor a respecter of people. At first, the judge denies her requests for justice. Finally, the judge does grant her justice, not because he cares about her, but to get rid of her. Jesus said that if this evil judge finally responds to repeated petitions, won't God who loves you and who desires justice respond to us?

If God is seeming to delay, be encouraged that all of your prayers are necessary. Your prayers are not meant to change God, but instead the more you seek Him, the more He can mold your will to His will. He is not trying to frustrate you but is instead doing a deep work in your heart. He is doing something that, at the time, you simply cannot see. But, take heart and keep praying. You never know if the next prayer will be the one that 'brings down the wall' and God's will is revealed. Sometimes that wall is in your circumstance, sometimes it is in your heart.

Prayer focus: Thank God that He hears our prayers. Thank Him for the work He is doing even if it isn't evident quite yet. Ask Him to give us courage and faith to keep bringing our petitions before Him. Ask Him to soften your heart to His will in the process.



Day 26 – May 19, 2018

Don't Drop Out of the Battle

“In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me:
“Flee like a bird to your mountain.” (Psalm 11:1)

In 1984, during the Olympic Games hosted by Los Angeles, there was a memorable event during the women’s 3,000-metre race. Two premier long-distance runners were entered: Zola Budd, a South African running for Great Britain, and Mary Decker from the USA. During the race, the two bumped. Budd landed awkwardly and was cut deeply by Decker’s spikes but was able to continue. She finished a disappointing seventh. Mary Decker suffered a pulled left hip stabilizer muscle. Her injury put her out of the race.

In a spiritual sense, there are many Mary Deckers today. Wounded, they have quit running the race. Among the many images of life found in scripture, we discover the image of the runner and the image of battle. As believers in Jesus Christ, we begin with a spiritual birth. Soon we discover that this journey can be much like a battle. It is very difficult to persevere while in battle. In 1 Kings 22, the Bible records the time when King Ahab of Israel joined with Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to battle against Syria. In the midst of the chaos, Ahab is struck by an arrow. He groans to the driver of his chariot, “Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I’ve been wounded.” (Verse 34)

There are many like Ahab and Decker who have been wounded, and therefore abandoned the race. Scripture warns us, “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?” (Galatians 5:7) A disturbing part of today’s culture is an aversion to any kind of commitment. We only have perseverance for short-term, quick-fix remedies. Our attitude is often one of, “What have you done for me lately?” rather than, “What can I do for you?” God teaches us differently. He calls us to selflessly persevere.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Westside will be faithful as we persevere with all that the Lord has given us. Ask the Lord who you can encourage to persevere today. Proverbs 11:25 says, “...he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” Welcome this promise as you act upon it.



Day 27 – May 20, 2018

The Absurdity of Going Back

“Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

(Galatians 3:3)

It is amazing to think that Jesus promised God’s very own Spirit would arrive as He ascended into heaven. What followed was a miraculous turn of events where the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples praying in an upper floor duplex in Jerusalem. They began to speak in other languages so that people outside their window heard the gospel in their own foreign language. The Spirit continued to live and move among this new church. New birth, baptism, transformation and freedom followed. No one could deny this was a work of the Holy Spirit. Imagine that some in the Galatian church attempted their new life and mission strictly on their own strength. Paul was shocked. Not only did he know it would be impossible, he wondered why they would even try.

Prayer Focus: Pray that we will be a church who walks in God’s strength, rather than our own strength. Ask the God of grace to deepen your relationship with Him as you become more and more intentional in recognizing the strength given to us by the Holy Spirit.



Day 28 – May 21, 2018

GPS: Good Prayer Stimulator

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.
(Proverbs 3:5-6)

There was a man who needed to drive his family from Canada to the train station in Buffalo. His GPS gave him a pretty quick route, getting his family there an hour ahead of departure. After saying goodbye, he returned to his car and entered the address of his next location in St. Catharines, Ontario. He was planning on crossing the border at Niagara Falls. When leaving the parking lot, he naturally turned back the way from which he had come but the GPS announced that he was going the wrong way. He turned around and discovered that the GPS was estimating a fast arrival, requiring only a half-hour drive to St. Catharines!

After several miles and many turns, he finally decided to pull over so that he might enlarge the map. As he investigated the GPS screen, it revealed a route that was taking him to St. Catharines the American way, east around Lake Ontario crossing into Canada near Kingston, then traveling back through Toronto, Hamilton and eventually arriving in St. Catharines. Realizing he must have missed something, he took a closer look at the GPS, where the clock revealed the tiny p.m. beside 8:37. This was not the 8:37 a.m. arrival he had anticipated. Forty-five minutes later, back at the train station, he was finally on his way back to Canada. Needless to say, he was late for his meeting.

Modern technology can sometimes be faulty, yet we trust it quite easily. How much more then should we trust God, who is perfect in all of His ways and wisdom. Everywhere we go, in every decision we make, we can always get our direction from Him.

God can lead and guide your future and the future of our church. Let's trust him in this unique season of visionary risk, investing in our future.

Prayer Focus: Ask God to show you when you are still leaning on your own understanding and not fully trusting Him. Acknowledge that He is all-knowing and will never steer you astray. As you pray about how to sacrificially give to our Capital Initiative together with our church community, ask Him to direct all of us and give us the faith to respond to His guidance.



Day 29 - May 22, 2018

Jesus Prayed Painful Prayers

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."

(1 Peter 4:12-14)

"The worst thing that could come to any child of God, is to be satisfied by any present condition." - Smith Wigglesworth

There is a false idea sometimes preached that if you pray with enough faith, you can avoid all hardship. We see from the life of Jesus, though, that He was abandoned, broken, betrayed and eventually murdered. In the midst of it all, He prayed - often - and in faith to His Father. Just days before His near-death flogging and torturous life-ending crucifixion, He said, "Now my soul is troubled (God, this is really hard, I am struggling), and how should I pray? (Father, is there any way out? No, for it was for this very reason that I have come. Don't get me out of it, get me through it.)" (John 12:27, 28 paraphrased)

Right to the end, Jesus continued to pray. While hanging from nails, He forgave the ones who had driven them through His flesh. He eventually proclaimed, "It is finished," and prayed one final time to His Father, "Into your hands, I commit my spirit."

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." 1 Peter 5:10-11

We are told we could suffer but are promised strength. We are called to rejoice in our suffering. When we finally walk into God's presence and enter into eternity, we will suffer no more. What an honour it is, for this little while we have on earth, to tell God that He is worthy even in the midst of pain. What an honour to have a chance to look like Jesus in suffering, revealing to a hurting world that we have something far greater to place our hope in.

Prayer Focus: If you are going through something difficult, pray that God would get you through it. Ask Him to grant you the strength and perspective to rejoice always. Pray that Westside would be a church that remains faithful to Him, giving thanks to God no matter the circumstances. Pray that we would look different than a suffering world, as we know a greater hope that lasts eternally.



Day 30 - May 23, 2018

Faith and Where to Place it. The apostle Peter "got it".

"Come," Jesus said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water...
(Matthew 14:29)

Matthew 14: 22-33 gives a great example of how to pray, listen and obey! In the midst of a storm, the disciples called out in fear. Jesus answered, "Trust me." But that wasn't enough for Peter. He needed to know that Jesus could be trusted on a very personal level - one on one, just him and Jesus.

Jesus simply replied, "Come." Peter listened and then obeyed. He walked on water - not because of how much faith he had but because of whom he placed his faith in. How do we know that? Jesus said so. When Peter took his eyes off Jesus, he became distracted by the turmoil around him and began to sink. Jesus responded with grace. He immediately reached out and grabbed him. Then Jesus said to Peter, "You have so little faith. Why did you doubt me?" Peter's sinking wasn't about how much faith Peter had. It was about why Peter doubted Jesus' ability.

Could our turmoil and fear be because we have placed our faith somewhere other than Jesus? When was the last time we stepped out of "our boat" and walked on water with Jesus? What wind and great waves are we facing right now? Can we have faith like Peter? Can we call out in prayer, listen for Jesus' response and then step out in obedience?

If Peter walked on water because he placed his "little faith" in Jesus and was obedient, what could Jesus do with us if we truly placed whatever faith we have in Him and obeyed? If Jesus used Peter's faith as the cornerstone of His church, how could He use our faith expressed in our offering on Commitment Sunday to further in His Kingdom? Aren't you excited to see?

Prayer focus: Today we have two major topics of prayer. First, pray on an individual level. Ask God to reveal any way He is calling you to step out, even if your faith is little. Pray that we would be a church willing to say "yes" no matter what chaos is happening around us. Second, pray that God would reveal to you and the rest of Westside how He may be calling us to step out in faith in how we give to Creating the Future Together Initiative.



Day 31 – May 31, 2018

Conversion = Changed Life

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.”

1 Timothy 1:12

After Watergate (a political scandal that happened under President Nixon’s administration, later leading to his indictment), there was an abundance of books that were published by the various personalities involved in the scandal. One of the most famous was Chuck Colson, who wrote the very famous “Born Again.” This book detailed his conversion to Christ. All of these years later, we think of Chuck Colson as a great man who has had such an impact on the world through his prison ministries. We forget that before his conversion, he was known as “the hatchet man”, as he played a huge part in obstructing justice. It was a common saying in Washington that Colson would walk over his own mother for Nixon!

Another player in the Watergate scandal was the very boisterous G. Gordon Liddy. One of the great quotes from his book tells of a time when a certain court date came around. Everyone had been discussing Colson’s conversion to Christianity. As Colson walked into the courtroom, Liddy was overheard to say, “Oh, no, if Colson would walk over his own mother for Nixon, just think what he will do for Jesus!”

Time has truly revealed a powerful life transformation for Colson. He certainly is another astounding example of how God can change a life. In 1 Timothy, the Apostle Paul encourages Timothy to cherish, protect, and preach the Gospel. This is because Paul knew that the Gospel message is the most powerful and crucial element to a transformed life. At Westside Gathering, the Gospel is preached to transform lives, nurture relationships, and impact communities.

Prayer Focus: Pray that Westside will always be a place that impacts the world for Jesus. Pray that each one of us will join together as God asks us to, to help expand His kingdom and bring many to Jesus.



Day 32 – May 25, 2018

P.U.S.H. - Pray Until Something Happens

A man was praying one day in his cabin when the Lord appeared with an assignment. He showed him a large rock in front of his cabin and explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might. The man obeyed. For many years he toiled from sun up to sun down pushing the unmoving rock. Each night the man returned to his cabin worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain.

“Why kill myself over this?” he thought. “I’ll just put in my time, giving just the minimum effort and that’ll be good enough.” And that’s just what he planned to do— until one day he decided to take his troubled thoughts to the Lord. “Lord,” he said, “I’ve labored long and hard in Your service, putting all my strength into doing that which You’ve asked. Yet, after all this time, that rock hasn’t even budged half a millimetre. What’s wrong? Why am I failing?”

The Lord responded compassionately, “My friend, when I asked you to serve Me, you accepted. I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all your strength, which you’ve done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to Me, with your strength spent, thinking that you’ve failed. But is that really so?”

“Look at yourself. Your arms are muscular, back is mighty, hands calloused, and your legs are strong. Through opposition you’ve grown much and your abilities now surpass that which they once were. Your calling was to be obedient, to push, and to exercise your faith and trust in My wisdom. This you’ve done. I, my friend, will now move the rock.”

At times, when we hear from God, we can tend to use our own intellect to assume what He wanted, when what God ACTUALLY wanted was just our simple OBEDIENCE as we placed our FAITH IN HIM. By all means, exercise the faith that moves mountains, but know that it is still God who moves the mountains.

Prayer Focus: Ask God to reveal ways you may be assuming you know His will. Pray that we would be a church quick to obey and trust. Pray we would remain flexible to whatever God’s will may be and that we would trust Him when things seem hard.



Day 33 – May 26, 2018

Pray. LISTEN. Obey.

“Speak Lord; your servant is listening.”
(1 Samuel 3:10)

“When I pray, I don’t say anything. I just listen.” - Mother Teresa

Wow! You are on day 33 of this prayer initiative. We have brought many requests to God. How sweet to do so! But it is always important to keep in mind the friendship we have with Jesus. Just like we have things to say to Him, He has things to say to us. Wonderful things to tell us! “Your thoughts - how rare, how beautiful!” (Psalm 139, MSG)

If listening for God’s voice is unfamiliar to you, here are some tips to cultivate daily conversation with Him. Remember, He longs for relationship. Relationship is not one-sided, and when love is at the core, it delights in communication. Think about those you love. Because of your love, you want to speak to and be heard by them.

When God speaks to us, it is often in a whisper. Once Elijah went to God to hear from Him. As he waited, a powerful wind passed through, then an earthquake followed by a fire, but the Lord was not in any of those things. “And after the fire came a gentle whisper.” The Lord was in the whisper. It is a whisper filled with peace and one that often requires faith.

If you are unsure how to listen to that whisper, try reading scripture. See if a whisper nudges your heart and reveals truth to you. When that happens, know that it is God speaking to you. How wonderful! If you are not sure which scripture to start with, try Psalm 139.

Prayer Focus: First pray that we would be a church slow to speak but quick to listen to all the wonderful things Jesus wants to say to us. Now, go take five minutes to sit in silence and see what Jesus might speak to you. Even if it seems silly, don’t be afraid to have faith that He is a Father eager to speak His heart to His children.



Day 34 – May 27, 2018

We Get To!

“We love, because He first loved us.”
(1 John 4:19)

It is not uncommon to hear a passionate call from the church for members of the church to do more towards helping the less fortunate in the community. However, the church is not the only place you hear that cry. Once a local newspaper journalist chastised his fellow atheists and humanists for falling short when it came to giving financially to their local communities. Much to his frustration, the statistics continued to show that people of faith were much more generous than his unbelieving partners.

Now, this shouldn't be a surprise to us Christians. Yes, there are Christians who try to motivate others by using guilt and manipulation. You yourself have probably given from a sense of obligation before. But, for the believer, we should have a deeper, more pure motivation behind our giving.

We give because He gave. Jesus modeled giving in the most humble way, sacrificing himself for our benefit; giving His life for ours. Out of our gratitude we want to give back, not as payment (how could we repay God?), but to experience the joy that comes with giving. It is also a tangible way we can partner with God in doing His transformational work in the world. Many of us have come to experience that we can never outgive God. We will only experience that on the other side of trust.

We give, not because we have to but because we get to!

Prayer Focus: Ask God to teach us how to be a church that does not give out of legalistic demand, but a heartfelt gratitude, excited to partner with God's work in the world.



Day 35 – May 28, 2018

Hope of the World

“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18b)

A phrase that has captured the hearts of many church leaders came out of something God was doing in Chicago through a church that started with a passion to turn irreligious people into devoted followers of Jesus. That church grew substantially, seeing many people come to faith from secular and religious backgrounds.

“The local church is the hope of the world” was the phrase that caught the imagination of many people.

I (David) will never forget baptizing a couple who came to faith after a long battle in their marriage that was eroding over multiple accounts of unfaithfulness. The marriage seemed lost, the hope for relationship and trust seemed impossible. So often, even among Christians, this kind of betrayal can lead to marital breakdown. I witnessed a miracle. Each spouse started a journey following Jesus, and God did something miraculous in their lives and marriage. It was God’s work, but it happened in the soil of a church community!

This stuff really happens. Lives actually do get transformed, often from broken and difficult circumstances. “The local church is the hope of the world!”

What if Westside suddenly ceased to exist? Imagine, right now, Westside - *poof* disappeared! Would anyone notice? Many people have been and continue to be eternally impacted by God through the ministry of Westside. What if Westside increased its ministry reach? What if there is more that God has envisioned for us to accomplish for His Kingdom? What contribution would He want us to bring to make that happen?

Prayer focus: Thank God for raising up Westside. Thank Him for placing you in a local church that brings hope to you and many others. Pray that we would continue to be faithful and relevant to a needy world and that God would help us realize our full redemptive potential. Pray specifically about the realization of our overall vision - transformed lives, healthy relationships, and impacted communities.



Day 36 – May 29, 2018

Life of Prayer

“...pray without ceasing...for this is the will of God...for you.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

For better or for worse, texting has become a very convenient form of communication that allows us to reach anyone, at any time, anywhere. It also makes private communication possible in situations where voice communication is not. We have this same access to God through prayer.

In the New Testament, Paul makes a call for “frequent prayer” as he urges believers to “pray without ceasing.” The words “without ceasing” in Greek is related to a constant cough. What an illuminating way to communicate the spirit of prayerfulness that should be a consistent part of all of our lives! Prayer was as natural as breathing to Paul, because he understood just how much he utterly depends on God. He hoped all believers would have that same conviction and would, therefore, ... “pray without ceasing”. He wanted us to know that no occasion is too small or decision too insignificant to not cover with prayer.

It is important, that just like Paul, prayer becomes as natural for us as breathing. We should pray while we drive, eat and even while texting. Prayer allows us to listen to our heavenly Father and become more like Him in the process. Ask God to infiltrate your life with the powerful spirit of prayerfulness.

Prayer focus: Do you have a “prayer life” or a “life of prayer”? Ask God to teach you how to depend on prayer, even more than your breath. Thank God that He is always listening. Ask God to teach Westside how to be a church in constant prayer.



Day 37 – May 30, 2018

When You Fast...

“Then I proclaimed a fast, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions . . . So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.”

(Ezra 8:21-23)

If prayer is our constant companion, then fasting just may be its cousin. Webster’s definition of fasting is “to abstain from food.” For Christians, fasting usually includes that but is typically a decision to starve the flesh so our spirit will hunger for more of God and his vision for our lives.

We are told to keep fasting a personal matter. It should remain between you and God. Jesus tells us when we fast, we should continue on as normal, “so that it will not be obvious to people 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.” (Matt 6:18)

Fasting is, in no way, something done to win God’s favor. Nothing can add to the demonstration of His love poured out on the cross. He already has done everything. His love is complete and forever unconditional. We don’t gain brownie points by fasting. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” Fasting is also not a way to force God to do what we want. Jesus said, “Ask and you shall receive.” Not once did he say, “*Fast and ask ...*”

Now that we know the reasons we don’t fast... why do we fast? If you really want the truth, we fast because our flesh is a big animal that wants to bark all day and unless we tame it it will run rampant. When you fast, you are telling your flesh, “Be quiet and stop trying to run my life, you big comfort maniac!” So, more than anything, fasting is for our *benefit*. Fasting, accompanied with prayer, trains the mind and heart to focus on the things of God rather than our physical pleasure or earthly desires. It is a spiritual discipline that helps us become more sensitive to God and see more clearly His will for us.

Prayer focus: Fasting is a topic easily misunderstood. Pray that we would be a church that understands why fasting is important. There are only a few days left before we finish our 40 days of prayer. Consider spending at least one day fasting, or a few meals, as you pray for God’s direction on Commitment Sunday and surrender our next season to Him. Ask God to highlight someone from Westside you could invite to fast with you.



Day 38 – May 31, 2018

My Dwelling Place

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
(Psalm 91:1-2)

If you read Webster's definition of abide, you will find it says, "to continue in a place; sojourn." Here is one way scripture describes it: "I will abide in the house of the Lord." What a beautiful sentence! It truly captures the simplicity of Christ's invitation when He says, "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4).

Our invitation to abide is not one of coming and going. We have not been invited to merely be a guest in the house of the Lord. No, we have been invited to come and live! God is asking us to make Him our dwelling place. And as if that is not enough, our King of Kings says, "Because I dwell (live) in you." Though we have this extraordinary invitation, we often don't take full possession of it. We easily abide in distractions that take our mind off of our circumstances. This ends up leaving us vulnerable and unprotected when we face unexpected trials.

When you read Exodus 33, you see many invitations for Israel to abide in God's presence, yet they refuse and determined to remain in their "comfort zone" until they reach their destined Promise Land. This broke the heart of Moses, as he understood that their inheritance was not the actual Promise Land but God Himself!

God tells Moses, "...go up to the land I promised... I will send an angel before you... But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." But because Moses wanted God's presence more than anything else, He told God that he would not go into the Promised Land unless God Himself came with them. What a beautiful heart cry. It is all meaningless if Your presence doesn't go with us. Without You Father, what is the point?

Because God longs for fellowship and communion, His response immediately went from, "I will send my angel," to (vs. 14), "My presence WILL go with you and I will give you rest." Just as we are to abide in Him, He abides in/with us. Though He is knocking, He lets us open the door. But the most amazing part is, after Moses has asked so much of God because he truly understood God's heart, he then turned around and said, "Now show me your glory!" Imagine we would be a church with such boldness before the God's throne.

Prayer focus: How busy can we get with everything but communion with God? Ask God to help you prioritize His presence. Pray, that within Westside, God would raise up a generation desiring His presence, as we will never reach the world if He does not go with us. Pray that we would not be a church content to simply go with an angel. And most of all, pray our desire to abide will not come out of a hunger for love, but from love.



Day 39 – June 1, 2018

Going Public

Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say "'Dad. . .'"
(Luke 11:2)

It is not uncommon for Christians to be nervous about joining a community group once they realize that they might have to pray out loud. So if that's you, don't feel badly, you're not alone. But still, why is this? Well, often we get this idea in our head that a good prayer has to have fancy words, repetitive phrases and go on and on. On top of that, it can be easy to become concerned about what others think of your prayer. This happens when the focus is on you and your audience rather than God.

If you really want to know how to pray, observe little children with good dads. Watch these kids fearlessly come to their Father at any time to speak to him about anything on their mind. They'll tell him their needs, show him their scrapes, and even simply tell him about their day. We too, get to speak to God our Father through prayer. And we get to speak to Him just like children. How simple. How sweet.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matt. 19:14) Wow! So not only are we welcomed to pray like children, we are told that if this is our attitude, the kingdom of heaven is ours. Jesus even warns us, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:3). It seems like remaining in the simple mindset of a child is really important to Jesus.

When the disciples ask Jesus this same question, "How do we pray?" Jesus replies, "Pray like this: 'Our Father...'" This is because even Jesus prayed to His Father. He could have chosen other ways to address God, but always chose Father. He then invites us to do the same. As you get to know God as a good Father, you will find your conversations with Him, even when in public places, become more and more relaxed and also more bold. Just as we learn in Matthew, you will start to truly discover what it is for the kingdom of heaven to be yours.

Prayer focus: Spend some time with your Dad today. As you do, boldly ask Him to help Westside be a church that resembles the little children so that the kingdom of heaven will be ours.

