



DAILY DEVOTIONALS

*for individuals, families
or small groups*

JANUARY 9 - 29, 2017

Thank you so much for picking up a daily devotional!
In this booklet you will find scriptures related to the 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting and questions that will help you grow in your personal spiritual journey.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

For each week of the series, there is a reading and reflection questions for Monday - Friday. These daily questions are designed for personal reflection and would also lend themselves toward family discussions. Weekly questions, designed for further reflection with your family or in small groups can be found at the end of each week's readings.

When discussing as a family or group, do not feel that **all** questions need to be answered. Choose the questions that you feel will generate the best discussion. Let others answer the questions without interruption—or criticism. This should be a safe time to speak honestly.

We hope this resource is useful to you. We would like to thank the individuals who took the time to put this together. If you have any feedback or questions, please contact Pastor Dave Raufman at Northpark Community Church at 322-7200 or David@NorthparkCC.org.

For more fasting resources, please visit:
www.NorthparkChurch.org/Fasting

FOUNDATIONS

Week 1 | JANUARY 8, 2017

MONDAY

BACKGROUND

John, now an elderly disciple of Jesus, is imprisoned on the island of Patmos. He is visited with a vision, a revelation, of what is to take place in the future. Prophecies are always clearer after fulfillment and this prophecy still remains a mystery. In this study we will focus on the messages to the seven churches located in what is today, Turkey. These churches are similar in strengths, weaknesses, temptations and problems common to believers and churches everywhere. For this reason, we can read these letters and find application to us today.

PRAYER

Lord, I ask you to help me understand this study and how it applies to me, today. May both this study and the pastor's messages accomplish what You have planned for me. Help me to hear and obey. Amen.

READ: Revelation 1:9-20 (NIV)

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. **10** On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, **11** which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, **13** and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. **14** The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. **15** His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. **16** In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. **18** I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

19 “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. **20** The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. To who is this message being sent? How does it apply to you?
2. Who is the message from? What are the clues to His identity?
3. What are the stars and lampstands? In what ways are you like a lampstand?

TUESDAY

BACKGROUND

Much of the book of Revelation is in symbolic language which requires effort to understand or interpret. Our study will focus on the first three chapters and the messages to seven churches. Our purpose is to glean applications to our lives today.

PRAYER

Lord, I admit that I often read Your words without a fully-engaged-pay attention mindset. Help me to focus today on what You want to say to me. Amen.

READ: Revelation 1:9-20 (NIV)

(See Monday)

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What caused John to fall like a dead man?
2. Honestly, if this vision came to you this morning, how would you have reacted? What would be going on in your brain right now?
3. Would you be fearful? What would be your number from zero to 100 on your pay-attention meter? Explain.

WEDNESDAY

BACKGROUND

The Northpark family begins each year with prayer and fasting. Our aim is to seek God's leading for the year ahead. It is also a time for personal and corporate growth. We believe that the pattern of prayer and fasting is a standard operating procedure for God's people in all times. We are determined to be faithful and obedient to God's directives. In today's reading, Jesus is preparing to begin his earthly ministry. Note what Jesus does before beginning a public ministry.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to be intentional about life. I ask for Your wisdom and guidance as I move into the flow of life—expecting You to work through me. Help me to realize that nothing is accidental about today, all is part of Your plan. Amen.

READ: Matthew 4:1-11 (NIV)

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." **4** Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **6** "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" **7** Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." **10** Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" **11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. Describe Jesus' guidance system?
2. What does Satan learn about Jesus from this encounter?
3. How does Jesus handle the temptations?
4. What does this have to do with you?

THURSDAY

BACKGROUND

Jesus does not regard prayer and fasting as optional behavior for believers. Notice verses 5 and 16. The word *when* is not interchangeable with the word *if*. Notice the motivation behind prayer and fasting. Most of us like to be regarded favorably by others. It is tempting for us to want others to know of our good deeds and obedient behavior. Jesus warns us to be aware of playing to the wrong audience.

PRAYER

Lord, may my eyes stay on You and not on those around me. May I be obedient and faithful to Your leading. Amen.

READ: Matthew 6:5-18 (NIV)

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **7** And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. **9** “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **10** your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. **11** Give us today our daily bread. **12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ **14** For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **17** But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, **18** so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. Why do we want the approval of others? How important is the opinion of others for you?

2. Humans are by nature are flawed (thanks to the Fall). Our motivations are seldom pure. If you waited for 100% pure motives, what do you think would happen?

3. What does this reading say to you?

FRIDAY

PRAYER (Your own prayer)

READ: Matthew 6:16-18

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **17** But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, **18** so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What is the outcome when fasting for show?

2. Is it a temptation for you to tell others what you are fasting (for reasons of approval)? Explain.

3. What is your desired outcome for this time of prayer and fasting? What might God desire?

WEEKLY QUESTIONS

For Small Group or Family Discussion

1. What is your previous experience with prayer and fasting?
2. In your opinion, what is the purpose of prayer and fasting?
3. What biblical reference to prayer or fasting stands out to you?
4. Do you think that God is impressed with what we give up? Explain.
5. Why is it a good idea to ask God to indicate what we shall fast and how we are to pray?

REPENTANCE

Week 2 | JANUARY 15, 2017

MONDAY

BACKGROUND

Jesus' messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 provide us with a useful tool in self-examination. Common threads through the letters include praise for successes, reprimands for failures, command for correction and exhortation to be faithful. We can apply these to ourselves today individually and as a church. We begin this study looking at the message calling for repentance or a change in direction. For the meaning of repentance is more than remorse for wrong doing, repentance includes a turn-about change in direction – going towards God.

PRAYER

Lord, Your word is often a mirror to see ourselves objectively. As I read Your letters, may I see myself accurately and make necessary adjustments. Thank You for keeping me on the path towards You. Amen.

READ: Revelation 2:1-11 (NIV)

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. **2** I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. **3** You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. **4** Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. **5** Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. **6** But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. **8** “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. **9** I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. **10** Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

11 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What is the church at Ephesus doing right? How am I and we as a church doing in these areas?
2. For what does the church need to repent? How does this speak to you?
3. What is the outcome for the victorious (faithful)?

TUESDAY

BACKGROUND

There is freedom from sin and death for the believer, but this is not a license to participate in the idolatry of materialism or hedonistic sexual immorality prevalent in the world today. These were the elements present in the teachings of Balaam, Jezebel, and the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation. Our fallen culture entices us to sin in the same way as the first century church was tempted. We must not be fooled by clever arguments that attempt to redefine sin into something more tolerable.

PRAYER

Lord, You are the light and truth. I cling to You, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the manual for life – the Bible to keep me on the right path. Help me to be wise and not naïve. Thank You, Amen.

READ: Revelation 2:12-29

12 “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. **13** I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives. **14** Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. **15** Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. **16** Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. **17** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

18 “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. **19** I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. **20** Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. **21** I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. **22** So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely,

unless they repent of her ways. **23** I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. **24** Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, **25** except to hold on to what you have until I come.' **26** To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— **27** that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father. **28** I will also give that one the morning star. **29** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What are the images of Christ in this reading, and what do they mean to you? (Jesus is more than the gentle shepherd)
2. What did the church need to repent (turn away from)? Does this apply to you or the church today in any way?
3. What hope do you find in this reading?

WEDNESDAY

BACKGROUND

We do not have to imagine very hard about what evil is like. Evil abounds. Satan knows that he has but a short time until he, the prince of this fallen world, is dethroned and eternally punished. Our present world is stained and saturated with Satan's lies and promises of pleasure. Revelation describes the second Advent which brings judgment, and makes all things right and good as it was in the beginning. We still have time, the Church is alive praying and focusing on those still needing to hear the good news. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we have hope and victory. The letters to the churches in Turkey were meant to encourage, correct, and give hope to believers like us living in a temporarily fallen world.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to live with a sense of the ticking clock. There is still time to complete my assignment. May I live boldly, unafraid to obey You in the moment by moment encounter I have with those who need You. Amen.

READ: Revelation 3:1-13 (NIV)

3 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. **3** Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. **5** The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. **6** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. **8** I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. **9** I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. **10** Since you have

kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. **12** The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. **13** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. For what does Sardis need to repent? What does this mean to me?
2. What are the churches doing right?
3. What does it mean if your name is in the Book of Life?
4. What personal applications do you find in today's reading?

THURSDAY

BACKGROUND

Our secular culture seems to agree that if there is a heaven those who mind their own business, do no harm to others, and are basically kind will be eligible to enter. Our passage for today would probably be disturbing for those holding such a view.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, the basis for eternal life with You. It confounds the wisest in this world, and the cross is a marvel even for those who know and follow You. May I listen and obey You, today.

READ: REVELATION 3:14-22

14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. **15** I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! **16** So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. **17** You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. **18** I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. **19** Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. **20** Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. **21** To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. **22** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

THINGS TO PONDER

1. For what reason does the church at Laodicea need to repent?
2. What does God expect of us?
3. Where are you on God's passion meter?
4. What is the good news here for the believer?

FRIDAY

BACKGROUND

To understand today's reading you need to know what led to David's prayer and fasting. It is not pretty. David sees a beautiful woman bathing on her rooftop. He sends for and sleeps with her (Bathsheba). She is pregnant with David's child, and married to Uriah, one of David's elite warriors. David summons Uriah to the palace hoping that Uriah will cover up David's adultery, and Uriah will think the child is his. Uriah does not visit Bathsheba. David has Uriah placed in a battle scene where Uriah dies. David takes Bathsheba as his wife. But, God knows what has taken place, and David is confronted by God through the prophet Nathan. God's punishment is that the child will die. This brings us to the passage for today. David, a man after God's own heart, admits guilt, and pleads with God for the child's life.

PRAYER

God, You are love, mercy, and justice. You are a Holy and compassionate God. You are sovereign and all wise. Help me to see and understand that You are in control and work out all things for Your purpose. May I be like David, quick to repent and eager to please You. Amen.

READ: 2 Samuel 12:16-21 (NIV)

16 David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. **17** The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. **18** On the seventh day the child died. David's attendants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, he wouldn't listen to us when we spoke to him. How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate." **19** David noticed that his attendants were whispering among themselves, and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked. "Yes," they replied, "he is dead." **20** Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. **21** His attendants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!"

THINGS TO PONDER

1. How does David respond to God's punishment? How do I do in this area?
Do I try to excuse myself or do I own up immediately?
2. Why does David fast and pray?
3. What is your reaction to this episode in David's life?

WEEKLY QUESTIONS

For Small Group or Family Discussion

1. How do you usually handle sin, do you tend to make excuses, blame, just move on without dealing with the sin, or repent?
2. Is it easier for you to ask for forgiveness or forgive others? Explain.
3. What indicates repentance?
4. Do you think OUR Church has an angel? Explain.
5. As part of the last instructions for all believers (Revelation) Jesus dictates letters to real churches existing at that time. What do you think was God's purpose? Are these letters helpful today? Explain.

PETITION

Week 3 | JANUARY 22, 2017

MONDAY

BACKGROUND

What does petition mean? Not the kind of petition people outside Walmart are asking you to sign, but the biblical kind. Simply stated petition means to ask, to urge, or request. Throughout the Bible when people are facing difficult problems we see them asking God for help. For many people today prayer is understandable, but fasting is something to do before certain blood tests. The idea of self-denial is pretty unpleasant. So fasting is rather uncommon. We as a church, recognize that we live in difficult times and we need God's help to navigate well. We spend 21 days focusing on God, praying, fasting and seeking God's input. We know that we need God's help and direction.

PRAYER

Lord, You have my attention, my ear is tilted towards You. Thank You! Amen.

READ: Revelation 2:1-11 (NIV)

2 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. **2** I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. **4** Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. **5** Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. **6** But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

8 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. **9** I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. **10** Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you,

the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. **11** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What in the letter should cause the church at Ephesus to pray?
2. How might Smyrna pray?
3. For what do we at our church need to pray?
4. What are your top five petitions for yourself and those close to you?

TUESDAY

BACKGROUND

Probably one of the biggest reasons we petition and fast is that we know that God is all-powerful and we are not. He is all knowing and we are not. He is all wise and we are not. He is all knowing and we recognize that we don't know for sure what might happen five minutes from now. In fact, after thinking about why we pray, we come to the conclusion that we would be pretty foolish to rely on our own meager resources to navigate this life.

PRAYER

Father in Heaven, You are our fortress, the provider, wise beyond our comprehension and in You we trust. There is no other like You. I am here to hear and obey. Amen.

READ: Revelation 2:12-29

12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. **13** I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.

15 Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

18 "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. **19** I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. **21** I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. **22** So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely,

unless they repent of her ways. **23** I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, **25** except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

26 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— **27** that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father.

28 I will also give that one the morning star. **29** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What are some reasons for the church at Pergamum to pray?
2. Why should those in Thyatira pray?
3. How are the societies in these letters similar to our society? How should we in Fresno pray?

WEDNESDAY

BACKGROUND

It is rather amazing that the letters to churches written almost 2000 years ago somehow still address believers world wide in every century since. This gives us good reason to listen with focus as we read these pages. The Lord is speaking to us, right now.

PRAYER

Lord, there is no one like You. You formed the entire universe and all that happens is in Your control, the galaxies, planets, and down to the atoms and electrons. May I give You my best attention and obedience, today. Amen.

READ: Revelation 3:1-13 (NIV)

3 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. **3** Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. **5** The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. **6** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.

What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. **8** I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I

know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. **9** I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who

claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and

fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. **10** Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your

crown. **12** The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of

heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. **13** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What stood out to you in this reading?
2. For what do the churches in this reading need to pray? How does this apply to you?
3. What do you learn in this reading about the second Advent? (When Jesus comes again)

THURSDAY

BACKGROUND

The letter to Laodicea indicates that God is not impressed by a laid-back, whatever attitude. It seems that God's values usually crash head-on with what the world values or advocates.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to identify what is important to You that I might mirror your values to others. I want Your light to shine out from me. Amen.

READ: Revelation 3:14-22

14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. **15** I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! **16** So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. **17** You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. **18** I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. **20** Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. **22** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

THINGS TO PONDER

1. How does Jesus identify himself to the church at Laodicea? What gives Him the authority to give orders to the church?
2. How does this church need to pray?
3. Does this reading apply to you in any way?

FRIDAY

BACKGROUND

Believers have often fasted and prayed when facing difficult problems. It is easy to conclude from these incidents that God takes prayer and fasting seriously. It would be a mistake to conclude that we can manipulate God for our purposes by prayer and fasting. God knows our heart and intentions. In the following two accounts God's people are faced no win situations. There is no way to overcome these problems with their own resources. The outcomes were not included in the readings, but you may want to continue reading in the Bible to see what happened.

PRAYER (Your own prayer)

READ:

2 Chronicles 20:1-3 (NLT)

After this, the armies of the Moabites, Ammonites, and some of the Meunites declared war on Jehoshaphat. **2** Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army from Edom is marching against you from beyond the Dead Sea. They are already at Hazazon-tamar." (This was another name for En-gedi.)

3 Jehoshaphat was terrified by this news and begged the Lord for guidance. He also ordered everyone in Judah to begin fasting.

Esther 4:13-16 (NLT)

13 Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. **14** If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?" **15** Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: **16** "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die."

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What motivated prayer in each reading?
2. In both of these cases the need was national rather than individual. What do you think our nation faces that call for prayer and fasting?
3. What in your family and circle of friends and neighbors calls for prayer and fasting?

WEEKLY QUESTIONS

For Small Group or Family Discussion

1. Describe your prayer life.
2. In a face-to-face discussion with God about prayer, what might He say to you?
3. Is it any problem for you to be always asking God for help? Do you think that it might be annoying for God? Explain your answer.
4. What is something that you have learned about prayer that has been helpful?
5. Is there any need that God doesn't know about? So, why pray if God already knows the situation?

ACTION

Week 4 | JANUARY 29, 2017

MONDAY

BACKGROUND

The letters to the seven churches in Revelation contain examination, diagnosis, prescription, and often encouragement to stay the course. The churches are expected to listen, trust, and obey. We are looking at these letters as if they are addressed to us. We are looking at these letters in terms of repentance, petition and action. We are expected to listen, trust and obey, so that we are all God intends for us to be in these end times.

PRAYER

God, the words that You inspired the prophets to write down long ago still apply to us. May I hear what you are saying to me, and not think that this is for someone else. Help me to listen, trust, and obey.

READ: Revelation 2:1-11 (NIV)

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. **2** I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. **3** You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. **4** Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. **5** Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. **6** But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. **9** I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. **10** Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your

victor's crown. **11** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What action(s) is/are needed by the church at Ephesus?

2. What is Smyrna to do?

3. What might apply to you?

TUESDAY

BACKGROUND

The church is the body of Christ. We are meant to minister to the world as Jesus did when He walked here in human body. These letters are meant to help us, the church, to fulfill our role. Each believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit gifted to do God's will. Every one of us is an actor, a doer, and none of us are meant to be inactive spectators.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to find my role in the body of Christ. May I obey the Spirit's nudging, as I am learning to listen, trust, and obey. Amen.

READ: Revelation 2:12-29

12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. **13** I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.

15 Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

18 "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. **19** I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. **21** I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. **22** So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. **23** I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay

each of you according to your deeds.

24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, **25** except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

26 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— **27** that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father.

28 I will also give that one the morning star. **29** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What are the believers at Pergamun being encouraged to do? (What action?)
2. What action or actions does the church at Thyatira need to take?
3. Does any of the messages to these two churches apply to Northpark or to you as a believer?

WEDNESDAY

BACKGROUND

Coasting through life sounds good, nice, effortless, but even the best highway has turns, uphill grades, stop lights, and obstacles. Following Jesus requires focus, frequent corrections, obstacles and hazards---coasting is not standard.

Fortunately, we have an on-board navigator—the Holy Spirit keeping us on track. We also have a hard-copy manual (the Bible) to guide us through the toughest terrain. The path ahead known as the end times demands that we stay attentive and focused.

PRAYER

Lord, if I have any delusion of not needing help, may I see that as bunk. I need You, and Your help moment by moment. Thank You for Your constant presence. Amen.

READ: Revelation 3:1-13 (NIV)

3 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. **3** Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. **5** The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. **6** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.

What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. **8** I know

your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I

know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not

denied my name. **9** I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who

claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and

fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. **10** Since you have

kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your

crown. **12** The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. **13** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What action does Sardis need to take?
2. What does the Philadelphia church need to continue?
3. What happens to those who neither listen nor obey?
4. Anything personal for you in these two letters?

THURSDAY

PRAYER

Lord, You said that whoever has ears let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. I am listening, and I intend to put into action those things that I hear. Thank You for not being silent and aloof. Amen.

READ: REVELATION 3:14-22

14 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. **15** I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! **16** So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. **17** You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. **18** I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. **20** Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. **22** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What do those in the church at Laodicea need to do?
2. Who does God discipline or rebuke? What does that say to you?
3. Is there anything that you need to continue or begin doing?

FRIDAY

BACKGROUND

God had allowed those known as Jews to be captured and taken by the Babylonians as punishment for their unfaithfulness. Now, God is orchestrating the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. Ezra with the financial and logistic support of the Babylonian king will lead a large group of Jewish refugees to Jerusalem. Before they leave, Ezra calls for all to fast and pray for God's protection. They will have to travel unprotected by Babylonian troops through an area with many bandits. They really need God's protection. In the second reading we see that before leaving for a missionary journey Saul later called Paul join with the sending church to fast and pray for God's help. We at Northpark begin each year with prayer and fasting for similar reasons.

PRAYER (your own prayer)

READ: Ezra 8:21-31 (NIV)

21 There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. **22** I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." **23** So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. **24** Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, namely, Sherebiah, Hashabiah and ten of their brothers, **25** and I weighed out to them the offering of silver and gold and the articles that the king, his advisers, his officials and all Israel present there had donated for the house of our God. **26** I weighed out to them 650 talents of silver, silver articles weighing 100 talents, 100 talents of gold, **27** 20 bowls of gold valued at 1,000 darics, and two fine articles of polished bronze, as precious as gold.

28 I said to them, "You as well as these articles are consecrated to the Lord. The silver and gold are a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of your ancestors.

29 Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the house of the Lord in Jerusalem before the leading priests and the Levites and the family heads of Israel." **30** Then the priests and Levites received the silver and gold and sacred articles that had been weighed out to be taken to the house of our God in Jerusalem.

31 On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way.

Acts 13:1-3 (NLT)

13 Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called “the black man”), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. **2** One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.” **3** So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What was the reason for prayer and fasting in the first reading?
2. Why were those in the second reading praying and fasting?
3. From all of your study so far, what are some of the reasons for prayer and fasting?

WEEKLY QUESTIONS

For Small Group or Family Discussion

1. Why are you praying and fasting this year?
2. What biblical example of fasting and prayer stands out to you, and why?
3. Who is it important to tell if you are fasting?
4. When, according to the Bible, should you probably not tell or advertise it to? Why?
5. What are you learning about God?