

NEW LIFE CHURCH

GREATER IS COMING!

22-DAY DEVOTIONAL AND FAST



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BIBLE VERSION:
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION



WELCOME

Intro from Pastor Hughes: What is fasting?

Traditionally, fasting means to abstain from food and/or drink for a set period of time. While in today's culture, people often fast by abstaining from other substances, habits or sources of distraction, throughout scripture, fasting is consistently a decision to adjust food consumption to honor God. The Bible is filled with examples of the critical role that fasting plays in the life of the believer. People fast to seek God's face, hear from God, prepare for something great, increase their spiritual strength, and to ask God to move on the people's behalf. In Ezra 8, Ezra calls for a fast after the temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt, and he gathers the Israelites to return there. "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might deny ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions" (Ezra 8:21). Esther proclaims a fast after she learns of Haman's plot to kill her people (Esther 4:16), and Jesus fasts for 40 days when he is tempted by the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4).

People also fast as a sign of repentance and mourning. In 2 Samuel 12, David fasts and prays to God after he orchestrates the death of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, and Bathsheba gives birth to her and David's son. The Bible says in 2 Samuel 12:16-17, "David therefore pleaded with God for the child; David fasted, and went in and lay all night on the ground. The elders of his house stood beside him, urging him to rise from the ground; but he would not, nor did he eat food with them."

Fasts can be either public or private, communal or individual. Christians all over the world participate in public communal fasts during the season of Lent, the 40 days leading to Easter, and in many Black churches, at the beginning of the New Year with "The Daniel Fast," only eating vegetables, fruit, and water according to Daniel 1:12-13. In recent times, modern-day believers have expanded their fasts to include abstaining from sugar, shopping, social media, cell phones, television, and secular music. Whatever the kind of fast you choose to do, the ultimate purpose is to seek God.

In this season at New Life Church, we are fasting to get ready for what God is going to do in the life of our church next! We are seeking God for our own building. We are seeking God to grow in our faith and trust in Him. We are seeking God so we will have

the spiritual strength and fortitude to be obedient to what God is calling us as individuals to give and sacrifice towards this work. We are also seeking God so we can consecrate ourselves, or set ourselves apart, for the holy work God is calling us to do. We are fasting in this season so we will be ready when we see the manifestation of God's promise. So get ready New Life! We hope you will take part in this journey over the next few weeks and get excited because God is getting ready to do something great!

TYPES OF FASTS

Before we look at the different kinds of fasts you can participate in during this time, please be reminded to consult with your doctor before you partake in a fast that alters your diet for a period of time, especially if you have preexisting, chronic health conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes. Also, speak to your doctor if you take prescription medications as fasting can impact the effects of those medications.

There are many examples of fasts in the Bible. Moses fasted for 40 days on the mountain when he prayed fervently to God because of Israel's sins (Deuteronomy 9:9, 9:18, 9:25-29; 10:10). David fasted several times because of the deaths of Saul and Abner, and he fasted when he pleaded with God to save his and Bathsheba's sick baby (2 Samuel 1:12; 2 Samuel 3:35; 2 Samuel 12:16). Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights while he was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). There are several other examples of biblical fasts.

A popular fast many Christians participate in at the beginning of every year is the "Daniel Fast." The origins of this fast are found in the first chapter of Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar conquers the King of Judah, Jehoiakim, and seizes Jerusalem. After the Israelites are taken into captivity along with their treasures, the king asks his palace master to bring some Israelites into the palace (v. 3). The king wanted Israelites of nobility who were intelligent and handsome. The king wanted to educate them in the language and literature of the Chaldeans (v. 4). The young men would also be given a portion of the king's food and wine (v. 5). Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were some of the Hebrew boys taken into the king's palace. All of them were from the tribe of Judah (v. 7). However, in the text, Daniel refuses to defile himself with the king's food. He pleads with the palace master to allow him and the other three to eat vegetables and drink water for 10 days. Daniel says that if he and the other three aren't as healthy and strong as the Hebrew boys eating the king's food and wine, then the palace master can deal with them accordingly, but if they are still healthy and well, then they should be able to continue their chosen diet. Verse 12 says,

“Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.” Verse 15 goes on to say, “At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations.”



Daniel also fasts at other times in the book when he seeks God because of the people’s sins and when he is praying for the interpretation of his visions (Daniel 9:3; 10:3). If you want to participate in “The Daniel Fast” during this time of prayer and preparation, here is a list of foods and drinks to consume and avoid (List compiled using “The Ultimate Daniel Fast” by Kristen Feola).

WHAT TO CONSUME?

- 1. Whole Grains** – Amaranth, barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, freekeh, millet, oats, purple rice, quinoa, rye, sorghum, spelt, teff, whole grain pasta, whole wheat, and wild rice.
- 2. Beans & Legumes** – Black beans, black-eyed peas, cannellini beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), great northern beans, kidney beans, lentils, peanuts, pinto beans, and split peas.
- 3. Nuts & Seeds** – Almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, nut butters, peanuts, pecans, pumpkin seeds, pine nuts, pistachios, poppy seeds, walnuts, sesame seeds, soy nuts, sunflower seeds.
- 4. Vegetables** – All (fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, and canned).
- 5. Fruits** – All (fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, and canned).
- 6. Oils** – Avoid deep-fried foods, but you can use coconut, olive, and sesame oils.
- 7. Other** – Unleavened bread (whole grain bread made without yeast, sugars, or preservatives), all herbs and spices are allowed, soy products are permitted.
- 8. Beverages** – Water (distilled, filtered, sparkling, spring, and mineral) should be your primary beverage during the fast. 100% fruit juice is permitted in moderation. Unsweetened non-dairy milk is permitted (coconut, almond, and soy).

WHAT NOT TO CONSUME?

- 1. Animal Products** – Meat, dairy (butter, cheese, cream, milk, and yogurt), fish, eggs.
- 2. Added Sugar** – Agave nectar, artificial sweeteners, brown rice syrup, brown sugar, cane juice, corn syrup, honey, malt syrup, molasses, and raw sugar.
- 3. Yeast** – Not eating yeast follows Jewish tradition. If you want more details about why yeast (or leavened products) is included, please visit ultimatedanielfast.com.
- 4. Refined Grains** – White flour, white rice
- 5. Processed Foods** – Foods that contain artificial flavors, chemicals, additives, and preservatives.
- 6. Deep-Fried Foods** – Potato chips, French fries, etc.
- 7. Solid Fats** – Butter, lard, margarine, and shortening.
- 8. Chocolate** – Milk chocolate, semi-sweet chocolate, dark chocolate, chocolate syrup, and cacao.
- 9. Caffeinated and alcoholic beverages** – Alcohol, coffee, caffeinated tea, and energy drinks.

Again, please consult with your doctor before you begin any diet-altering fast, especially if you have preexisting health conditions and take prescription medication.

You can alter this fast based on your dietary requirements if you are diabetic or have other metabolic diseases that require a certain diet.

You can participate in this fast from sunrise to sunset, or you can do a 24-hour a day fast.

If you are unable to participate in a dietary fast, you can choose a modern-day fast. You can fast from secular music and/or television. You can fast from social media. If you are married and your spouse agrees, you can fast from sexual intercourse (1 Corinthians 7:5). You can fast from something that's become a stronghold in your life. Remember, fasting is a time when you are in prayer, reflection, and seeking God for favor and direction. Do not forget to spend time reading the Bible during the fast. Our prayer is that during this fast, our church will develop a heart of generosity and clear vision for the way that God wants each of us to contribute to our first capital campaign. God knows exactly what we've been given and exactly what He wants us to give. Let's use this time to draw together and press into God's presence, as we seek the Lord for His instructions and prepare to pursue the Greater that He has in store!

DAILY DEVOTIONS



A Generous Parent

Day 1

***“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him”
– Matthew 7:11***

Do you know God wants to bless you? Do you know God delights in giving you the desires of your heart? Sometimes this reality surprises people because of their distorted view of God. For various reasons, many people believe God takes pleasure in withholding things from us. They picture God dangling our desire in front of us like a person who taunts a horse with a carrot. However, this could not be further from the truth.

Jesus teaches in Matthew 7 about the kingdom of God and God’s true character, and the true character of God is generosity. Jesus uses human parents as examples to reinforce how God wants to bless us. He says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Jesus describes humans as evil because we are “shaped in iniquity” and “conceived in sin” as the psalmist says in Psalm 51, and if we, as sinful people, desire to and know how to bless our children, how much more loving, generous, and kind is our Heavenly Father. I also like this text because Jesus teaches the disciples that God doesn’t just give gifts, but He gives “good” gifts. The Greek word used in the original text is *agathos*. It means of value and moral quality. It also means generous. God doesn’t just give us any kind of gift. God gives gifts that are of great value and worth to us and that richly benefit us.

Have you ever had to purchase a gift for a Christmas office party or for your child’s gift exchange? What do you usually purchase for those types of events? I don’t know what you’ve experienced, but sometimes to me, it doesn’t seem as though people put much effort into buying gifts for those occasions. Thankfully, God doesn’t approach giving to us that way. God gives us His best. The Bible says in James 1:17, “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” God calls us to be a reflection of Him. We freely give and give generously because God first gave to us (1 John 4:19).

Call To Action: *In what ways are you going to mimic God’s generosity this week? Jot down a giving goal and do your best to meet it!*

Intention Matters

Day 2

***“and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell”
— Genesis 4:4-5.***

The story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 is a complicated one. We have two brothers with two different responsibilities making offerings to God. Abel keeps the sheep and Cain tills the land. However, God accepts one offering and rejects the other. If you research this story, you'll see that commentators and scholars agree that we don't know exactly why God rejects Cain's offering. However, there are clues in the text. The word order in the original language, Hebrew, of Genesis 4:3 suggests Cain brought God whatever was close at hand, while the description of Abel's offering suggests he brought God the best of his flock. Abel takes great care to give God the firstlings of his flock while Cain doesn't put any effort into his offering. This story suggests that when it comes to our giving, intention matters.

2 Corinthians 9:7 says, “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” This means God wants you to give because it's in your heart to give. God wants you to give because you are moved by compassion and care to give. God does not want us to give because we've been coerced or forced to give. This is because what's in our hearts matters to God. The intention matters. Jesus teaches about the condition of our hearts and our intentions in the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 6. He says in verses 2-3, “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

The care and quality of Abel's offering speak to his heart and his intention. He makes the best offering because he acknowledges the greatness and holiness of God. This is the type of giver God wants us to be. What is your intention when you give? Do you give out of obligation or do you give to acknowledge God's lordship over your life and God's goodness to you? Intention matters, so let us make sure our hearts and motives are pure when we give. And the good news is that when we give cheerfully and with a pure heart, God will “provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Call To Action: Write down three reasons why you want to start giving or increase your giving in 2025. What do you expect to receive from your act of giving? Write down what you want God to do in your life as a result of this sacrifice.

The Ultimate Trust

Day 3

“She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days” – 1 Kings 17:15.

Many people believe that one of the main reasons why Donald Trump secured the presidency for a second time is because of inflation and the high costs of daily necessities like groceries. People believe working-class Americans all over the country didn't care about the major issues such as the war in Ukraine or immigration because they were concerned about the costs of eggs, milk, meat, and gas. In college, I took a Psychology class where I learned about Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs." There are five tiers in his hierarchy of human needs. The diagram of his hierarchy is a pyramid, and people cannot reach the top of the needs pyramid, which is self-actualization, until their basic needs on the first tier are met. The basic needs include breathing, food, water, shelter, clothes, and sleep. I believe Trump's campaign tapped into this thought process to become successful. He appealed to people's basic needs.

Now, imagine struggling with the financial strain of this inflation and someone, a stranger, asks you to give him or her the last bit of food you have in your pantry. Also, it's not just you in the home, but you have a child. This is the situation a widow faces in 1 Kings 17. There is a drought in the land, and the woman's husband is deceased, so she and her son are on their own. They don't have much. In fact, when Elijah sees her, she is gathering sticks so she can make a fire to prepare their last meal. She says, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die" (1 Kings 17:12). Elijah then tells her to not be afraid and instructs her to make him a little cake and then something for herself and her son and God will ensure that her jar of meal and jug of oil will never fail. She does what Elijah says, God performs a miracle by multiplying her rations, and they eat for many days.

I don't know about you, but I know what it's like to come down to the last dollar or the last bit of flour and oil. I know what it's like to have a bank account in the negative and have someone ask for money. These situations feel completely hopeless. However, God wants us to know there is nothing too hard for God, and we have access to an abundance of resources because we are God's children. The Bible says in Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it..." This means God will give us what we need. All we need to do is trust God. God is the same today as yesterday and forever more. God still performs miracles.

Call To Action: What are you believing God for today? Jot down a list and be attentive to it throughout the day as you meet God in prayer. Trust God, and watch God do the miraculous!

Heaven's Currency

Day 4

"Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God' – Mark 11:22

When I travel to different countries, I love to exchange American dollars for the currency of the country I am visiting. I enjoy comparing their paper money and coins to American money. I get a thrill out of the different designs and leaders other countries put on their money. I even save some coins for my collection. I'm also fascinated by the worth of the American dollar versus other forms of currency. I get excited if I can purchase more with less money because of the value of American dollars in certain places. For several years, I held a freelance job as a writer for two companies in England, and I loved seeing the exchange rate of the pounds I earned for American dollars.

In the same way, did you know that heaven also has its own currency? Yes, heaven has its own currency. However, heaven's currency doesn't consist of paper or coins of precious metals. Heaven's currency is faith. In Matthew 17:20, Jesus says to the disciples after they could not cast out a demon, "For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." The Bible also says in Hebrews 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." The Bible is filled with stories of people using their heavenly currency to do the miraculous. The men who lower their

paralytic friend through the roof to see Jesus use their faith (Mark 2:1-12). The woman who suffered for 12 years with the issue of blood uses her faith to get her healing (Mark 5:25-34). Mary and Elizabeth use their heavenly currency to birth Jesus and John the Baptist. There is a great cloud of witnesses who use their faith to access heaven and do the miraculous.

What does this mean for us as modern-day believers? It means we have to use God's tactics if we want to receive from Him (Isaiah 55:9). It means if we want the blessings and promises of God, we cannot use earthly methods. We can't bribe God or try to pay for the things of God with earthly money. What is the American dollar to Almighty God, the creator of the universe? In order to tap into our heavenly bank account, we must first have faith. Having faith means trusting God. It means making our petitions known to God (Philippians 4:6). It means aligning our lives with God. We have to lay aside every weigh and sin that stop us from receiving from God (Hebrews 12:1). We have to develop the right mindset to receive by increasing our belief in God's word, and then learning how to wait on Him. Waiting can be difficult, but the Bible says in Romans 10:11, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

Call To Action: Spend time in the word today and find three examples of people using spiritual means to receive God's blessings. Write them down and study them.

The Giving Principle

Day 5

"give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" – Luke 6:38.

There are governing principles in every area of life. A "principle" is defined as a basic rule or idea that describes or controls how something works. There are principles in government, law, science, medicine, education and the list can go on and on. Do you know there are also principles in the kingdom of God? Do you know there are divine rules, or laws, that describe how things work in the Spirit? Jesus spent His entire ministry teaching the principles of God's kingdom to the disciples and those who sat in his

company. We find these principles in the holy Bible. There are even principles around giving. Some of them include:

- You should freely give with a cheerful heart (Matthew 10:8; 2 Corinthians 9:7).
- You should give to whomever asks (Luke 6:30).
- You should give sacrificially (Luke 21:1-4).
- You are just a steward over what God's given to you (Matthew 25:23).
- We are financially responsible for each other (Acts 4:34-35).
- You will reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7-9).

It's important for us as believers to know kingdom principles, especially principles around giving, because they outline how we are to govern ourselves as disciples. When we live by kingdom principles, then we will see godly outcomes. We all want to live in the abundance of God, and we quote Jesus from John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." However, we will not experience God's abundance if we live contrary to God's principles.

A couple of years ago, I saw a social media post by a church friend. She said she needed money and felt alone. I sent her \$100 via CashApp and posted in the note section, "You're not alone." I just wanted her to know she was seen and that there were people who cared about her. A little while after her post, I vented on social media about breaking my Macbook and not having the money to replace it. I wasn't expecting anything. I just wanted to vent. One of my online friends saw my post and blasted it to his thousands of followers along with my CashApp. In less than 30 minutes, someone sent me \$1,000 to purchase a new Macbook. When I gave \$100 to a friend, I wasn't expecting anything back. I just wanted to bless her out of my abundance, but because I allowed God to use me to bless someone, when I was in need, God moved on someone's heart to bless me. This is how giving in the kingdom of God works. No, we shouldn't give expecting something in return, but God says that if we give generously, we will receive greatly, and the blessings keep flowing amongst everyone!

Call To Action: *What is your experience? Have you ever been blessed to be a blessing and then God blessed you again because of your generosity? Make a note so you can remember what God has already done in your life during the times when you need encouragement.*

Much is Required

Day 6

“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much as been entrusted, even more will be demanded” – Luke 12:48b.

Oxfam International reported in September 2024 that the top one percent of the world’s wealthiest people own more wealth than 95 percent of the earth’s population. Oxfam International also says a global oligarchy, or a small group of billionaires, govern and control the world as a result. This is problematic because the distribution of power and wealth is unequal and contributes to horrible living conditions for many in the world. For example, this means the richest countries, mostly in the west, continue to get richer while the poorer countries, those we deem as third world, get poorer. As a result, those countries and their people are systemically kept in poverty. A global oligarchy also means corporations have more control of the world since these billionaires run them. Most corporations are only concerned with their bottom lines, not the living conditions of the masses. In December, we learned of the murder of the United Healthcare CEO, Brian Thompson. The news reports that some of the bullets and casings had on them “delay,” “deny,” and “depose,” allegedly referencing how United Healthcare unfairly handles their medical claims. Now, as believers, we do not condone murder, but we’ve read countless stories about the ways in which oppressed people respond and act out due to their oppression. In Genesis 2:11-12 scripture says, “One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” Moses becomes enraged when he sees the enslavement and forced labor of his people. It was a great injustice from which God ultimately uses Moses to deliver his people.

Now, Jesus calls us to a greater level of being and living. We are called to live by a higher standard. Jesus says in Matthew 5:20, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” This means it is not enough for us to merely follow a list of rules. We must love our neighbors as ourselves. We must operate with a pure heart and godly intentions. We must have the same mind as Jesus. We must see people and care for them the way Jesus does. In the Bible, every time Jesus sees people in need, he is moved with compassion for them. Philippians 2:4-5 says, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...” We shouldn’t desire to amass wealth like the billionaires who run the world for our own selfish gain. We must think of the needs of others before ourselves. We must view our resources as a means to bless others and build a more equitable world for everyone.

Call To Action: *Today think of and list three ways you can use your resources to bless someone else.*

Of Banks and Barns

Day 7

***“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God”
– Luke 12:20-21.***

I’m fascinated by the show “Hoarders.” It fascinates me because I’m shocked by the amount of stuff people can accumulate. Most of the people on the show struggle with some kind of trauma or mental illness that causes them to hoard things. In fact, I haven’t seen one episode yet in which the people were just greedy. But don’t be mistaken! Just because I haven’t seen a greedy hoarder, it doesn’t mean they don’t exist. I believe some of them are just presented to the public differently. I’ve seen greedy hoarders on shows like “MTV Cribs” or the old-school show “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.” On these shows, the celebrities are not viewed as hoarders, but as connoisseurs and collectors of rare, fancy, and expensive things such as cars (Jay Leno), shoes (Mariah Carey), Hermès purses (Drake), or even real estate. I find the shows that focus on celebrities just as fascinating because I wonder who can wear 500 pairs of Air Jordan sneakers or who can drive 100 cars? These people have stored up for themselves more wealth and material things than they can even spend or use during their lifetimes.

The rich man in Jesus’ parable in Luke 12:13-21 would have been on a show like “MTV Cribs.” He lives on a great piece of land that produces abundantly, but instead of sharing his wealth by giving it to his neighbors or the needy, he decides to hoard it and store it all in barns for himself. He even tears down his old barn and builds a bigger one to hold all of his grain and goods. However, the text says once he finishes filling his barns and thinks he can relax and enjoy the rest of his life, he discovers his life is coming to an end. God says his soul will be required of him that night, and all that he’s acquired will be enjoyed by someone else.

According to scripture, only what we do for Jesus will last (2 Corinthians 4:18). 1 Corinthians 3 goes into detail about our work for Jesus. The work Paul talks about is spiritual work—welcoming the stranger, giving to the needy, feeding the hungry, clothing

the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, advocating for the “least of these,” and loving your neighbor as yourself. When tried by the fire as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 3, these works will not be consumed for they are the work of God. Giving is the work of God. God does not call us to be hoarders of blessings and the things of God, but we should freely give to others what’s been freely given to us. This is how we store treasures in heaven.

Call To Action: *Are you hoarding blessings for yourself? Do you think of only yourself when God gives you increase or do you think of how you can bless someone else? Spend time today meditating on these questions.*

From Obedience to Blessing

Day 8

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’ – Genesis 12:1.

Do you know you take great leaps of faith every day? I know this may shock you, but every day you leave your house, you take great leaps of faith. You step out on faith when you get into your car and drive down the highway. You step out on faith when you drive through the Baltimore Harbor tunnel. You exercise faith when you purchase and consume food from the grocery store or restaurant. You take great leaps of faith when you send your children to school. You step out on faith when you get on an airplane, and the list can go on and on. You’re taking great leaps of faith because you weren’t present when the roads, bridges, and tunnels were constructed, and yet, you trust they will maintain their integrity when you use them. You did not harvest or prepare the food you consume from the grocery store or restaurant, but you eat it and give it to your family hoping the regulations in place will keep you safe. You may not personally know who is teaching and caring for your children at school, but you send them each morning in faith, believing they will return unharmed. If you really think about it, you’ll see that every day we take many great leaps of faith by simply doing our daily routines.

Since we know we put faith in so many people, places, and things on a daily basis, why is it so difficult for us to trust God? God proves His trustworthiness to us over and over again. When we wake up with a reasonable portion of health and strength and

breath in our bodies, we have another opportunity to experience and recognize God's trustworthiness. Even more so if you have food, shelter, clothing and a way to provide for yourself and family. The Bible is also filled with examples and promises from God that demonstrate why we can put our trust in Him. In Genesis 12, the Lord instructs Abram to leave his "country, family, and father's house to go to a land God will show him." Imagine going about your day, business as usual, and all of a sudden God starts speaking to you, telling you to leave everything to follow Him. This is what happens to Abram. Abram has already made a life for himself. He is established. He's married. He has a home and many possessions. I'm certain Abram has a routine that he's comfortable with and mastered at this place in the text. He knows the land and terrain where he lives, but God says to leave it all. What would you do in that situation? Abram's story might produce anxiety in some of us, but I love this passage of scripture because after God tells Abram to leave his country, God reassures him that his leap of faith will be worth it. God makes Abram a promise. God says if you obey me and go, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2-3). God doesn't give Abram any details, but He says if you go, I'll bless you. I will reward you. In other words, Abram's greatest blessing is on the other side of his obedience to God's call.

Call To Action: *What is God calling you to leave? What is God calling you to do so He can bless your life? Pray about it, and write down what God is asking you to let go of so He can replace it with greater?*

In the Blink of An Eye

Day 9

We are going to focus on Abram for a few reflections because God performed so many miracles in his life. In Genesis 12:10-20, Abram moves his entire household to Egypt because of a famine in the land of Canaan. They go to Northern Africa because Egypt didn't have to rely on the precarious patterns of rainfall like Canaan. In Canaan, Abram participated in "dryland farming," which depended on rainfall. If there was a drought, there was no harvest. Egypt, on the other hand, had a stable source of water via the Nile River, so the people there flourished through "irrigation farming." Well, in the text, Abram moves his entire household to Egypt for a season. If you read the story, you'll see that Abram gets into trouble by telling Pharaoh that Sarai is his sister and not his wife.

However, although he deceives Pharaoh, Abram still obtains favor from him. During his time in Egypt, Abram acquires more sheep, oxen, donkeys, slaves (not as in U.S. chattel slavery), and camels (Genesis 12:16). By the time we get to chapter 13, Abram's wealth and prosperity are restored. Genesis 13:2 says, "Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold." We don't know how long it took for Abram to rebuild his wealth, but God completely turns Abram's situation around. Abram and his household go from surviving a famine to thriving with more than enough.

How many of us are struggling to survive a famine right now? For some of us, our "famine" is called inflation and many fear that the incoming president's proposed tariffs on international goods, could make things worse. Some of us may be struggling now to buy groceries, put gas in our cars, and get clothes for ourselves and children. Our bank accounts might even look like a famine—the money is dried up. But the good news in this text is God can turn all of it around in the blink of an eye. God can turn our situations around and take us from just getting by and merely surviving to thriving—even in the midst of a famine or inflation. If you read the Bible, there are many examples of God prospering His people in the midst of famines, wars, Babylonian captivity, and other harsh circumstances. For example, God empowers Joseph to interpret a dream about an upcoming famine and elevates him to a high position in Egypt so he can save his family (Genesis 41:41-46; 50:20). The children of Israel grow in numbers and prosper in Egypt despite oppression by a Pharaoh who doesn't know Joseph (Exodus 1). God blesses the Israelites when they are in Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 29:4-7). There are so many more examples, and they teach us that God can and will turn your situation around. There is nothing too hard for our God. It doesn't matter what's happening in the economy, God will take care of you. Jesus admonishes us in Matthew 6:25-26 saying, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Call to Action: Are you going through a personal famine? Write down what you need today. Find scriptures about God's promises that speak to those needs. In the coming days, document how God meets those needs to serve as a reminder that God will take care of you.

A Tip or a Tenth?

Day 10

***“He blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High,’ maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High,’ who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’ And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything”
— Genesis 14:19-20.***

There is a stereotype in the United States that African Americans, or Black people, do not tip. Have you heard this before? As a result, Black people often receive subpar service or are completely ignored in restaurants and other places that render services because the employees believe Black people don't tip. In fact, a 2015 Washington Post article stated that 34 percent of servers out of 1,000 surveyed said Black people are bad tippers. 36 percent of those servers said Black people are below average when it comes to tipping. If you do a Google search, you will see tipping is a very controversial issue, especially since the option to tip has spread into almost every industry including retail sales. Even when I'm purchasing goods online, I'm given the option to include a tip.

In the Body of Christ, we are not required to tip the preacher for good sermons or the ministry leaders for good programs and services; however, there is a standard for giving in the church and it's the tithe. Tithing means that we give 10 percent of our earnings to God. The New Bible Dictionary, 3rd Edition, says the custom of tithing did not originate with the Mosaic law (the law of Moses), but in Genesis 14:17-20 in which Abram gives King Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of war. It also says tithing wasn't practiced exclusively amongst the Hebrews, but other ancient people practiced tithing. We also see tithing in the Hebrew Bible, or Torah, in which the people are mandated to tithe "the seed of the land," "the fruit of the trees" and "herds and flocks" (Leviticus 30:32). There are also subsequent laws in the Bible regulating how tithes are used in Numbers 18:21-24, 26-28; Deuteronomy 12:5, 6, 11, 17; 14:22-23. Tithing was and still is, an important part of worship to God. It's an act of faith and trust.

Call to Action: God calls us to have an attitude like Abram. We should know everything belongs to God. What are some of the beliefs holding you back from thinking like and releasing the tithe like Abram? Write them down and pray to the Lord about them.

God's Credit Report

Day 11

“But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have sworn to the Lord, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, ‘I have made Abram rich’” – Genesis 14:22-23.

Proverbs 13:22 says, “The good leave an inheritance to their children’s children, but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous.” Many Christians use this scripture when talking about the transfer of wealth from the wicked to the righteous and when justifying how they’ve acquired money or material things. But when we look at Abram’s story in Genesis 14 after he defeats several kings to rescue his nephew, Lot, we find him turning down the spoils of war and the king of Sodom’s wealth and possessions because he doesn’t want anyone to take the credit for his success and prosperity except for God. Imagine going into an intense battle, risking your life, engaging with the enemy, winning the battle, and hauling all of the stolen money and items back to your country only to give it all back to the king without any reward. Abram didn’t even take anything for the hundreds of men he took into battle. No gold medals. No plaques. No gold coins. Not even a celebration dinner. If we were honest, many of us wouldn’t be able to do what Abram did. We couldn’t walk away from a major victory and recovery of so much treasure without receiving a little something for ourselves after all of our time and effort! Remember, Abram wasn’t forced to go into battle. He went to rescue his nephew Lot. But his victory allowed him to recover the kings’ possessions.

Abram knew what God promised him. God promised to bless him and bless all of the families of the earth through him. Abram also had history with God. It’s likely that he remembered his time in Egypt during the famine and how God increased his wealth and possessions. By the time we find Abram in chapter 14, he’s been restored and he knows what God can do. He knows God can increase his wealth and enlarge his territory. So, when the king of Sodom tells Abram to take some possessions for himself in verse 21, Abram says, “No.” He tells the king of Sodom that he made a promise to God that he wouldn’t take any of his possessions so the king could never say it was because of him that Abram became rich. Abram says no because he wants God to get all of the credit for his victories and success. Wow!

Abram’s victory and stance in this text teach us many things. First, Abram trusted God to prosper him. Abram had access to the king’s wealth, but he turned it away because he knew God would take care of him and his entire household. Second, this story teaches us about greed and integrity. Greed and the lack of integrity have caused the downfall of so many people.

However, when you know the One who is the source of all things, you will know that you don't have to lie and scheme to gain wealth and success. God will give it to you in His time. Finally, since Abram knows God is the source of his success and prosperity, he wants God to get all of the credit. Abram wants his life to be a living testimony of the goodness of God.

Call to Action: *Reflect on your life's victories. Write them down. Think about some ways in which your victories can point others to Christ so God gets all of the credit.*

Surviving Seasons of Lack

Day 12

“He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” – Deuteronomy 8:3.

When I entered ministry in my twenties, I didn't have much money. I was a full-time student living in the Divinity School dorm at Howard, and I didn't have a job. I worked as a graduate assistant at the school, which paid my tuition, and I lived off of what was left of my student loan after I paid for my housing. I was broke. I was seeking ordination in a major denomination, so they required me to attend all of their conferences and meetings. At every conference, the elders took up a very public offering. They called certain groups to the altar, in front of hundreds of attendees, and asked them to give a specific amount of money. The offering for my group, candidates for ordination, was \$50. One year, I didn't have that amount. As the candidates for ordination lined up for the offering, I panicked because I didn't have anything to put into the basket, and I didn't want to fake like I was putting something into it. My friend, David, saw my nervousness and asked me what was wrong. I told him I didn't have any money for the offering. Immediately, he reached into his pocket and handed me \$5 so I would have something to give. I was so relieved and grateful that I wouldn't be embarrassed in front of the church leaders and other candidates. Almost twenty years later, I look back with compassion on myself. I was just a young girl trying to do what God called her to do, but I was consumed with the fear of what people would say because I was struggling through a season of financial lack.

If you live long enough, you will discover that you will go through seasons of lack and struggle. I wish I could tell you that being a believer in Jesus Christ would prevent you from these hard times, but I would be lying to you. Oftentimes, we go through these seasons because we are believers and God wants to work something out of us or work something into us. Romans 5:3-5 says, “And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” God uses struggle and hard times to produce godly qualities and character in us. The good news is that just because we are in a season of lack does not mean God has forsaken us. It doesn’t mean we’ve done anything wrong. We are just going through God’s process. We are being sanctified. We are being made holy. We are learning what it means to develop the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5).

In Deuteronomy 8, God tells the children of Israel that He took them through the wilderness for 40 years and allowed them to experience hunger so He could humble them. God used these negative experiences to teach them that “one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (verse 3). God wanted them to know that they need more than food, water, clothing, and shelter. Their very lives depended on God. This is a lesson God wants to teach us today.

Call to Action: *What have you depended on instead of God? Think about some ways you can surrender your life to the Lord and completely rely on Him.*



What's His is Yours

Day 13

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” – Romans 8:14.

If you are a parent or have children in your life, you know about the “Terrible Twos.” Parents magazine describes this phase as “a normal state in a child’s development in which a toddler can regularly bounce between reliance on adults and a newly burgeoning

desire for independence.” The American Academy of Pediatrics says this phase is characterized by “increased physical activity, more expressive emotions, mood swings, and temper tantrums.” This can sometimes look like children throwing themselves down onto the ground and kicking and screaming if they don’t get their way. Children can have crying fits or even hit their parents. Have you ever seen a parent drag their child out of the grocery store or Target? Have you experienced this yourself? It can be a frustrating time for children and parents.

Well, the Lord showed me that sometimes believers go through a similar phase in which we bounce from reliance on and trust in God to trying to exert our independence. This can occur when the Lord allows us to go through seasons of testing, and we throw our own temper tantrums because the process is uncomfortable or even painful. In the book of 1 Kings, there is a story about a prophet named Elijah who was on the run from an evil queen named Jezebel. He told God he had enough and wanted to die (1 Kings 19:4). In another passage of scripture, there was a prophet named Jeremiah who threw a little bit of tantrum when he wished he had never been born because of the obstacles he faced (Jeremiah 20:14). Even the psalms are filled with David’s complaints to God, so you’re in good company if you’ve ever yelled at and complained to God. I can be honest and say I’ve gone through this stage in my walk. I’ve shaken my fist at the air, cried, begged, and pleaded with God when I was going through hard times and it didn’t seem like God was answering my calls.

But God doesn’t want us to be infants and toddlers when it comes to spiritual matters (1 Peter 2:2). God wants us to mature in our faith in Him. We don’t have to beg, plead, and bargain with God. He is our Heavenly Father, and as children of God, we have access to everything that belongs to Him. In case you didn’t know, everything, even you and me, belongs to Him. Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” The Bible describes us as not only children of God, but joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines heir as “one who receives property from an ancestor” and “one who inherits or is entitled to succeed to a hereditary rank, title, or office.” When the Bible says we are joint heirs with Christ, it means we can receive all of the benefits and blessings of being a son or daughter of God – just like Jesus. Many of us don’t understand what it means to be an heir because when our family members died, they didn’t have anything to leave to us. In many cases, they left bills. However, that is not the case with God. We have a great inheritance, and we don’t have to throw temper tantrums to receive it. All we have to do is seek God first and His righteousness and all things will be added to us (Matthew 6:33).

Call to Action: *Have you fully grasped what it means to be a joint heir with Christ? Search the Bible and find at least five scriptures that show you what you have access to as an heir in God's kingdom. Meditate on those texts.*

Provision in Unexpected Places

Day 14

During my first month in seminary, I landed a graduate assistantship as the editor of Howard School of Divinity's newsletter. I was so excited because writing is what God called me to do, and the position paid all of my tuition. However, I had a huge problem in accepting the job. I didn't have a computer or a laptop. Shortly after I celebrated getting the job, I started crying because I didn't know how I would fulfill the duties without a computer. I was still a new believer so I threw myself down onto my bed and started crying and praying to God. I asked Him, "How? How will I be able to do this job with no computer?" Just as I was praying, my phone rang. It was my stepmother. She told me that one of the members of our church in New Jersey died and her family wanted to know if we wanted her computer. I couldn't believe it. God answered my prayer right at the moment I asked. I enthusiastically told my stepmother yes, and I had the computer within the week to start my new job and produce the school's newsletter. God hasn't always immediately answered my requests for provision, but God has shown me over the years that He will provide even if it's through the most unconventional ways.

The story in Matthew 17:24-27 is the perfect example of how God will perform miracles to give us what we need. In the text, the collectors of the temple tax come to Peter and say, "Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?" The Jews were required to pay a tax for the upkeep of the temple in the same way we give for the upkeep and ministries of the church. Peter responds by telling the collectors "yes" and goes to Jesus. Jesus uses the collectors' question to teach Peter about taxes and the rulers of this world. Jesus tells Peter that the kings of this earth take their tolls and taxes from everyone except from their own children. Kings and rulers of this world build their wealth, power, and status at the expense of others, but let their own children go free. However, Jesus decides to pay the temple tax anyway as to not offend the collectors. Jesus submits to their request even though he is the son of God. He instructs Peter to go to the sea, cast a hook, take the first fish he catches up, open its mouth, and there he will find a coin to pay their temple tax (verse 27). Peter does what Jesus says and finds the money they need to pay their taxes.

Albeit short, this story teaches us several things. Jesus knows we are subject to the rules, laws, and governing bodies of this world. He doesn't ask us to not pay our taxes and bills for the sake of ministry. Jesus surrenders to those in authority, and he is our example. You will see that surrender is a reoccurring theme when it comes to Jesus' ministry. But Jesus knows all of our financial obligations and responsibilities. For many of them, we don't have a choice, we have to pay. Federal and state taxes, social security, and Medicare are taken out of our paychecks before we even see the money. God doesn't condemn us because we surrender these monies to the government and not to ministry. God will bless us with more than enough so we can meet our financial obligations and so we can give generously to the "least of these" and towards the building of God's kingdom. God will do it even if He has to perform a miracle like making the money appear in a fish's mouth. The point is, God will provide in the most unconventional ways. All you have to do is seek Him, and He will lead you to your financial blessing.

Call to Action: *List the bills stopping you from tithing or from giving more generously towards the cause of Christ. Pray over them and ask God to show you where you have room to give more.*

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

Day 15

"The point of this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" – 2 Corinthians 9:6.

I believe one of the reasons why Christians struggle with giving is because wealth and generosity in the kingdom of God are the complete opposite of how we view and handle money in the world. According to the world, if you want to become wealthy, you have to accumulate a lot of money. You may decide to put your money into an interest-bearing account so that the money can grow. You might invest money in the stock market so you can capitalize off of the next fruitful venture, and if you want to give philanthropically, you can set aside a set amount of money for 501(c)(3) entities so you can claim a tax write-off at the end of the year. God's kingdom doesn't work that way. The Bible says if you want to be truly wealthy, invest in heaven, and make your deposits there (Matthew 6:19-21). The Bible says if you want to live an abundant life, surrender your life to

Jesus, and He will add all things unto you (Matthew 6:33; John 10:10). When it comes to giving, the Bible admonishes believers to give to anyone who asks, no matter why they need the money (Matthew 5:42). And, if you want to inherit the earth, you shouldn't be a "shark," but practice meekness because "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). All of Jesus' teachings about wealth and generosity go against what we've been taught by the world. As a result, we are confused when it comes to giving!

We are especially perplexed when it comes to the law of sowing and reaping. The writers of the New Testament penned much of it during a time when people lived in a predominantly agrarian culture. This means people were familiar with farming and agriculture. When Jesus says, "the fields are ripe and ready for harvest" in John 4:35, the people understood what He meant. When Paul talks about sowing and reaping in 2 Corinthians 9:6, his words connected with the intended audience. Since we live in a technology-driven society, sometimes it's hard for us to grasp the principle of sowing and reaping. However, in this text, Paul breaks it down for the church he's encouraging to be generous in the collection they are taking up for the saints. He says to them, if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly, but if you sow bountifully, you will also reap bountifully. This means you will receive by the same measure you give. I know many of us have not worked with soil or visited a farm, but when you are starting a garden or planting vegetables or berries, you throw a lot of seed into the ground so you can reap a greater harvest. You do so because some seed will die. Some will be eaten by animals and insects. Some will not properly germinate. You will lose some seed, so you scatter as much seed as you can to ensure a mighty harvest. It's the same way in the kingdom of God when it comes to giving. If you want to reap much, you have to sow much, but you are sowing into other people and into the work of the Lord. New Life Church is intentional about pouring into and empowering people in the church and in the community. What better place to sow seed?

My family went through a major transition in 2024. I had to redo my budget as a result. I accounted for every penny every month. Towards the end of the year, I became intentional about giving. I fought hard to remain encouraged and believe in God's abundance for my life. One Sunday, I released my last \$50 believing in faith I would be OK because God would supply my needs. The following day when I woke up, I saw that my good friend Cash App'd me \$500. She said she just wanted to bless my family for Christmas because she knew of our struggles during our transition. I sowed \$50, and God allowed me to reap a mighty harvest. God will do the same for you.

Call to Action: Think of some ways you can practice biblical generosity and sow in the kingdom of God. Create a plan of how you're going to financially invest in the advancement of the Gospel and ministry in 2025.

Shared Resources in the Beloved Community

Day 16

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” – Acts 2:44-45.

As a parent, one of the first lessons I taught my children was about sharing. I had to teach them at a very young age too because even as toddlers, my children didn't want to share their toys with each other. In fact, one of their first words was "mine." When they saw their sibling with one of their toys, they would run towards them, snatch it out of their hands, and yell, "Mine!" It's almost as if humans have an innate ability to be stingy with their belongings. You have to be very intentional from a young age to show children how to be generous with their toys and to share with their brothers and sisters.

In the first few chapters of Acts, we learn about what it was like to live in the first community of believers in Jesus. After thousands of people had an encounter with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, they listened to a powerful sermon by the Apostle Peter and their hearts were radically changed. They had no desire to be stingy and hoard all of their possessions for themselves. In this beloved community, they didn't consider any of their money or things their own. The people sold their possessions and used the money for the family of faith. Acts 2:46-47 says, "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people, and day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." By Acts chapter 4, believers were also selling their land to give the money to the apostles for the betterment and sustainment of the community. Acts 4:34 says, "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold."

I frequently talk about how the people in my life have blessed me in my time of need. I wouldn't have made it financially through this past year if it wasn't for the kindness and generosity of my family and friends. We are building our beloved community at New Life. Imagine what it would look like if we allowed the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and enable us to become trusted family members who cared for everyone's financial and material needs. No one would go without what they needed. In most cases, God uses people to meet needs. Are you willing to say "Yes" to God's call to give to others?

Call to Action: *What's holding you back from giving on the level God wants you to give? Write it down. Ask God to help you overcome those obstacles. Think of some ways you can meet someone's need this week.*

The Power to Gain Wealth

Day 17

“Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today” – Deuteronomy 8:17-18.

Whenever my family gets together, our conversation oftentimes turns to what God has done in our lives and what God is doing. My mother and her siblings tell stories from when they were growing up in the 60s and 70s in South Jersey and how God provided for them despite their circumstances. One of the stories they tell is how my grandpa, who is 91 years old, worked hard as a firefighter and ultimately became a captain, to purchase a home. They were the first Black family on their street in Moorestown, New Jersey. My grandpa is a military veteran and doesn't have a college education, but by the grace and power of God, he was able to buy a house, provide for his family, and invest and accumulate a lot of money. In his sunset years, my grandpa attributes all of his success to God. To this day, he knows it was God who gave him the ability and power to gain wealth – despite the “roadblocks” society placed in his path as a Black man living through Jim Crow. My family's stories of how God provided and moved in our midst sustained me until I had my own experiences with God. Now, I have my own testimonies. Even though my stories are different from those who've gone before me, one thing remains true – every good and perfect gift indeed comes from above (James 1:17).

In Deuteronomy 8, God is preparing the children of Israel to enter and take possession of the Promised Land. He reminds them why they remained in the wilderness for 40 years and what happened during that time. God says to them, “Your clothes didn't wear out. Your feet didn't swell. You didn't go hungry, and now you're going to enter into a good land flowing with milk and honey.” God tells them to not forget Him when they partake of all of the good food in the land and after they've built their homes. God warns them to not exalt themselves and think that it was because of their own efforts that they are living in prosperity because it is the Lord who “gives you the power to get wealth.” God wants them to remember everything comes from Him, and God has the power to build up and add to or tear down and strip away. He is the source.

I believe some hindrances to giving and generosity are fear, a scarcity mindset, lack of trust in God, and unbelief. Regarding a scarcity mindset, it's not surprising that this way of thinking is so pervasive because our society and culture teach us that there is a finite number of resources, and we are in a race (a rat race) to acquire as much of it as we can. Many believe the ability to gain wealth starts and ends with them and what they can produce. However, God wants us to know that He gives us the power to gain wealth. God gives us the resources to produce goods and services. God puts people in our paths who can promote us. We are not "lone rangers" in our businesses or places of work. It is God who multiplies our efforts and who increases us. I believe the believers in Acts 4 sold their land and houses for the financial benefit of the church and community because they knew God was the source of their wealth. They knew that if God could bless them once with material wealth, God could do it again. They also knew God would take care of them. They had their sights on heaven and the power of God, so they didn't care about worldly possessions. They had great faith in God's ability to prosper them.

Call to Action: *Are you using your resources for God's purposes? Write down ways you are using your time, talent, and treasure for the spreading of the Gospel and the building of God's kingdom. In what ways can you increase your giving at New Life?*

A Question of Responsibility

Day 18

"Then the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins" – Haggai 1:3-4?

If you've read the Bible in its entirety, then you know that the question of responsibility is a reoccurring theme. Am I responsible for the actions of this woman you gave me (Genesis 3:12)? Am I responsible for my brother (Genesis 4:9)? Am I responsible for these stiff-necked people (Numbers 11:10-15)? Am I responsible for delivering the Jews (Esther 4:14)? Am I responsible for leading men into battle (Judges 6:15)? Am I responsible for my neighbor (Luke 10:29)? The list can go on and on when it comes to people's questions for God about responsibility. I believe it is because as humans, we don't want to carry the weight of certain responsibilities. We also don't believe we are capable of handling certain responsibilities. Many people don't even want to be responsible for the consequences of their own actions, so they definitely don't want to be responsible for others who are out of their control.

Have you ever known someone who just did not want to be responsible? They didn't want to grow up. They didn't want to work. They didn't want to pay bills and their fair share. They didn't want the responsibility of leading or providing for a family. They don't want the responsibility of a leadership position because it requires too much. When you read the Bible, you'll discover that God wants us to be accountable and carry certain responsibilities. God calls us to be responsible for the poor, downtrodden, widows and widowers, orphans, foreigners, prisoners, our brothers, sisters and neighbors, and the "least of these" (Psalm 82:3; Proverbs 14:21; Proverbs 14:31; Luke 6:30; Deuteronomy 16:9-11; Luke 10:36-37; Matthew 25:40-45; and so many other scriptures). Another way the Bible communicates responsibility is by using the word "stewardship." The Holman Bible Dictionary defines stewardship as the "responsibility to manage all the resources of life for the glory of God, acknowledging God as provider." You can find an example of this kind of stewardship in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Another example is in the book of Haggai.

In the first chapter of Haggai, the word of the Lord comes to the prophet, Haggai, the governor of Judah, and the high priest. God says to them, that while people are building their luxury houses, God's temple lay in ruins. God tells them the reason they've been sowing much and reaping little is because of their neglect of rebuilding the temple. Many of the Jews had returned from Babylonian exile to Jerusalem, and they were rebuilding their lives, but they neglected the temple. God reminded them that the temple, or the house of God, was their responsibility. My favorite part of this text is when God's word is given to the people, they respond immediately and get right to work on rebuilding the temple. There is no question of responsibility. There is no question of how they are going to get the work done. The people just "do it" as the Nike slogan says. Haggai 1:12 says, "Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel [governor of Judah], and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all of the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of the prophet Haggai, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared the Lord."

New Life Church is launching a major capital campaign so we can purchase a building for our branch of Zion. Will you abdicate your responsibility as one who benefits from the ministry and work of His house, or will you be like the children of Israel and do your part without hesitation?

Call to Action: *Think of ways you can financially support New Life's capital campaign so we can purchase or build our church. Pray on how much you can give, and then make a commitment.*

Stewardship Matters

Day 19

“For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” – Matthew 25:29.

A little over a year ago, my preteen daughter asked me to download an online game to her computer called Roblox. Initially, I gave her permission. I learned the game allowed her to build a virtual world and interact with her friends (I deactivated the option for online strangers to interact with her). The game wasn't a problem for me until she started to spend her entire afternoon on the computer. As a result, I began to limit her time. After a few more days, I deleted the game because it became a “time killer” for her. A “time killer” is a meaningless activity that robs a person of all their time. My daughter wasn't happy with my decision, but she ultimately accepted it. She didn't have a choice. I told her instead of wasting time playing in a virtual world, she could use her time more wisely developing and investing in her real world. She could use her creativity and imagination to write poetry and songs. She could read more books. She could practice on her ballet bar to hone her technique, and she could invest in face-to-face time with her friends. I let her know that she was not being a good steward of her time because Roblox was wasting so much of it.

In the same way, there are things in our lives that steal our time, talent, resources, and energy from more productive and life-giving endeavors. Social media can be a huge time killer. One can easily waste hours scrolling on various platforms. Television can be a huge distraction. Compulsive shopping can be very addicting and wasteful of our financial resources. There are many things that prevent us from doing what God called us to do by distracting us with meaningless activities. Have you ever thought about how much sleep you could get if you set a time to turn off your T.V. and stuck to it? Have you ever thought about how much time you could invest in your children, business, or ministry if you put your cell phone down and got off social media? Have you ever thought about how much money you'd be able to tithe, save, or invest if you stopped chasing fast fashion trends and TiKTok's latest gadgets? If we were really honest with ourselves, we could find many ways in which we could be better stewards of our time, money, and lives.

In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells the Parable of Talents to remind believers of God's expectations of us. First, Jesus teaches that God expects us to be good stewards over our blessings. We are supposed to be good keepers of the time, money, energy, and resources God gives to us. This means we can't be wasteful. We have to be strategic and intentional in what we do and how we use our resources. Through this parable, God

reveals that He expects us to multiply what we've been given. The good servants in this parable multiplied the talents their master gave to them. The bad servant hid his one talent in the ground until the master came back. He didn't do anything with it. God expects us to use what we have to multiply our impact in the kingdom of God. If you have the gift of writing, singing, helping, encouraging, organizing, administration, preaching, or teaching, use that gift to uplift others. If God has blessed you with money, use the money for ministry and to help those in need. Multiply your impact because this parable also teaches us that we are going to give an account to God of how we've used our resources. We are going to be held accountable for what we did or didn't do for the kingdom.

Call to Action: *What does good stewardship look like to you? Write down some ways you can be a good steward over the resources God's given to you. Put one of those things into practice this week.*

What Do You Prioritize?

Day 20

“But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” – Matthew 6:33.

A few years ago, I interviewed for a very lucrative writing job. I was a freelance writer for a Christian app, and a full-time position opened up for someone to lead the direction for all of the app's content. I learned of the salary because one of my ministerial colleagues worked for the company in the accounting department. I was extremely excited because my goal has always been to become a published Christian nonfiction writer, but I was also excited because the salary would enable me to do all of the things I've always wanted to do. Things like traveling internationally, taking care of my mother, and helping my siblings. Almost immediately when I learned of the salary, I started daydreaming of all the things I would do and the things I would buy. I imagined my dream car, a BMW luxury SUV with all of the bells and whistles. I let my imagination sweep me away into fantasies of a life of luxury. I didn't get the job.

Needless to say, I was upset, but I was more disappointed in myself. After years of walking with the Lord and serving God, as soon as the prospect of a six-figure salary came my way, I immediately thought about all of the things I would buy. Yes, I wanted to buy things for my mother and siblings, but some of my first thoughts when it came to that large amount of money were what I could purchase to make my life better. After all, I deserve it, right? That's what advertisements would like us to believe. My thoughts

centered around shopping. Do you know that God will sometimes make your plans fail or deny you certain opportunities if He knows those opportunities will destroy you? Yes, God will close certain doors or delay certain blessings if He knows we are not ready to handle the magnitude of them or if those blessings will lead us away from Him. The Bible says in Mark 8:36, “For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” Some versions say what profits a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul. God prioritizes our soul and spiritual wellbeing over our ambitions and desires for wealth and riches.

Matthew 6:33 reminds us that seeking God should be our first priority. Striving after the things God values and holds dear should be our second priority. God prioritizes feeding and clothing the hungry and naked. God prioritizes giving the unhoused shelter. God prioritizes being generous to those in need. God prioritizes making sure children and those children without parents are provided for. God prioritizes charity. God prioritizes loving one’s neighbor as one’s self. This is what it means to seek God and His righteousness. We are to seek God’s ways of doing things and caring for people. We are to seek and embrace the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). Once we do that, the Bible says all of the material things we need will be added unto us. That means we don’t have to strive so hard for them because God will freely give them to us. We shouldn’t worry about things like clothes and food because God knows we have need of them and will provide for us.

Call to Action: *Be honest with yourself and think about what you’ve been making a priority over God. Is it marriage? Is it your job? Is it acquiring more money? Is it your children? Ask God to help you reprioritize your life so you can keep God at the top. After which, write down your top five priorities.*



Write The Vision: Make It Budget

Day 21

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” – Acts 4:32.

I went through a major life transition in 2024 that cut my household income greatly. As a result, I had to rework my entire budget. I put together a personal budget before, and I manage the department budget as part of my job, but I never scrutinized my bank statements. I never tracked every cent that came into and left my possession until now. Before I sat down and looked at the numbers, I freaked out a bit and called my mother crying because I didn't know if I had enough money to cover all of my expenses and maintain my current standard of living. However, after I pulled up several months of bank statements, examined my spending, totaled my expenses, and looked at my income, I discovered that I had more than enough money to cover everything including the tithe. All I had to do was learn to maintain the new budget. It took a couple of days to put my budget together, but after all of my hard work, I learned that everything I needed was already “in the house.”

I believe that this is going to be the same testimony of New Life Church. I believe by faith that everything we need to find and acquire a church building is already in the house. We just need for everyone to do their part and release what they have in their possession. Whether that is money, gifts, talents, or time, everything we need to make this next step is already in the house. Again, the believers in the first church in the book of Acts didn't have any needs because they put together all of their resources. Everything they needed was “in the house.” They didn't have to go outside of the Body of Believers to meet needs because the resources were already there. I believe the only thing stopping us from being like the church of Acts is our surrender. We have to surrender what's already in our hands. In Acts chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira refused to surrender everything that they had in their hands and then they lied to the Holy Spirit about it. You see what happens to them in Acts 5:5. However, when we fully trust God and surrender what's in our hands, we will see God perform great miracles. We see what Jesus does with the two fish and five loaves of bread in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, and Luke 9:10-17. The disciples surrender the resources they have for the feeding of the people, and Jesus multiplies it so everyone has more than enough. Oftentimes, our blessing and our multiplication begins with our surrender.

Christians love to quote from Proverb 31; however, I believe many do not know how much intelligence, resourcefulness, diligence, and intentionality it takes to be this kind of woman, especially when it comes to money. Proverbs 31:16 says, “She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.” You can’t buy a field without first counting the costs and making sure you have enough money to purchase it and cultivate it. This woman made a budget. She drafted her vision. Proverbs 31:20 says, “She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.” We also see her surrender or release what she has in her hands to bless someone else. This is why God multiplies her. He can trust her with more because she is generous. This woman isn’t just someone’s wife (because we like to quote Proverbs 31 when it comes to preparing for marriage), she’s an asset to ministry. She’s a great resource in the kingdom of God.

Call to Action: *The Bible admonishes us to write the vision (Habakkuk 2:2) and count the costs (Luke 14:28). Have you written the vision for your life? Have you counted the costs or made a budget? Update your 2025 budget or create one so you can be a better steward and see what is already in your hands.*

Pressed Down, Shaken Together, and Running Over

Day 22

“give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back” – Luke 6:38.

The Calm app describes living in “survival mode” as, “It’s [your brain] constantly on alert to protect you from threats (real or imagined) and can stop you from resting or enjoying life.” It goes on to say that some of the symptoms of living in survival mode include difficulty making decisions, lack of motivation, persistent stress, inability to focus and concentrate, inability to relax, and mood swings and irritability. I believe since the onset of Covid-19, many of us have been living in survival mode, and it’s been hard to transition out of it. The recent presidential election results may have thrust many into living in survival mode since we do not know what to expect with the incoming president and the changes his administration will make. Many are stressed and fearful. Living in survival mode also impacts our spiritual lives because that mentality makes it hard for us

to rest in God's promises. It also makes it hard for us to accept that we can live in abundance and not in lack. A survival mode way of thinking almost makes it impossible to accept God's best for our lives.

The good news is we don't have to live in survival mode. Many fall victim to it because they believe their money and resources begin and end with them. But those of us who've been walking with the Lord a long time know we have access to all things through Him. We have supernatural power through Jesus Christ. Jesus will multiply and increase what we already have in our hands so our "oil" never runs out (1 Kings 17:16). We know God will supply all of our needs by His riches and glory (Philippians 4:19). We know the answers to God's promises are "yes" and "amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20), so we don't have to live in survival mode. We can reject that way of thinking and surrender to God and rest in His promises knowing we will be OK. Sometimes trusting God can be hard because people have let us down. When people have broken their promises to us, we project our hurt, pain, and distrust from them onto God, but God is not a man. God will not lie (Numbers 23:19). God will do everything He's promised. We don't have to worry.

Luke 6:38 contains one of God's promises. In the text, Jesus teaches the disciples about the kingdom of God. He gives them many examples of how God's kingdom is completely opposite of the world's systems. Jesus tells them in verse 38, "give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap." He commands them to give, and He tells them not to worry about releasing what's in their hands because it will be given back to them. However, He says not only will you receive back what you've given, but you will get more than you need or asked for. It will be a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.

I like to bake snacks like cookies, sweet bread, and cakes. Sometimes, I have to spoon the flour into the measuring cup to ensure the correct measurements. I discovered that if I spoon the flour into the measure cup, I can pack more flour into it than just scooping it from the jar. When you scoop flour from the jar, you could create air pockets and the measurements will be off, negatively impacting what you bake. In the same way, God gets the most blessings back to us by scooping resources into our laps, and not only does God make sure that there are no air pockets or empty spaces in our containers, but the Bible says, the blessings will be pressed down so more can be put in. Isn't that good news! If you give, you're going to receive so much in return that your cup, your container, whatever you use to hold the blessings, will be running over. You will have more than enough.

Call to Action: *Have you been living in survival mode? Write down the ways in which you need to trust God or how you can trust God more with what you've already surrendered. Pray on these things.*



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COMING!**

NEW LIFE CHURCH