



**La Grange Community Technology Fast
Devotional Guide**

Introduction

Fasting is an ancient practice that helps us draw closer to God. It causes us to break our natural rhythms and focus on our spiritual needs. While fasting, we might discover that some of the rhythms we have developed are unhealthy. One blessing of fasting is the change that comes from giving something up and encountering God.

Technology can be a great blessing, but we can also become slaves to our devices. It is not uncommon nowadays to find individuals ignoring the people right in front of them because they are on their phone. Dinner conversations are stifled when the person you are eating with is regularly reading text messages or checking Instagram. Even parents sometimes tell their children to wait while they finish scrolling through their Facebook feed. We may do these things without even realizing it. Fasting from technology for even a brief period each day helps us to become aware of our habits and to be more present to the people around us.

We are facing a loneliness epidemic in our culture for various reasons. We were designed by our Maker to live in community. We need one another. As a town, we can begin to address the problem of loneliness. We can check in on our neighbors. We can open our homes and invite people around our tables. We can share meals and conversations with the people around us.

We hope this fast will encourage us all to draw closer to God and the people in our homes and our community.

Saturday, April 13

Acts 2:42-47

In this passage, Luke presents us with a picture of the early church. They did things that we might expect like pray and worship. However, the main focus of this text is on fellowship. The early church spent time together. They ate together and were in each other's homes. The Christian church in the first century was a Christian community. They understood the value of human connection and Christian friendship. Many people today feel lonely and isolated because they lack the community and friendship that was present in the early church. The cure to our illness is found in passages like Acts 2:42-47. We must value community and friendship more than whatever is distracting us and keeping us from being present to our families, neighbors, and church community.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, be present in our conversations and encounters with others. May we seek to practice Christian hospitality just as the early church did. May we invite people to our tables and seek to develop friendships that will bless us and others. We are grateful for Jesus who modeled the importance of table fellowship in his own life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Questions to Consider:

What are some things that hinder us from practicing fellowship like the early church?

Why is it important to develop Christian friendships?

How can we encourage hospitality in our community?

Sunday, April 14

Luke 22:24-27

On Palm Sunday, The Sunday of the Passion, we read from the 22nd Chapter of Luke's gospel. After Jesus' triumphal arrival in Jerusalem and before he gives himself up unto death at the end of the chapter, Jesus gathers at table with his friends. Once supper is finished and Jesus reveals that he is about to be betrayed, an uneasiness settles in upon the gathering. The disciples begin to bicker amongst each other and they begin, once again to set their minds on human things, not on Divine things. The disciples chiefly begin to argue about who is the greatest among them. The shadow side of social media in our culture is that it keeps our minds focused on human things, not on Divine things. It is all too easy to log on to a social media account and begin to size someone up, comparing our lives, our achievements, or our status, to our brother or sister, whom Jesus calls us to serve. This can lead to divisiveness and anxiety instead of love, acceptance and forbearance. Jesus' gift of his sacrifice on the cross reminds us of the lengths our God is willing to go in order to serve those who he loves.

Prayer: Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions to Consider:

As we embark on this Journey of Holy Week and put away our smart phones and computers for a while, in what way is Jesus inviting you to serve just as he served us?

What are the ways in which we are caused anxiety by comparing ourselves to others, in what ways can we lay that anxiety aside, repent of it, and look upon our brother or sister, not as a competitor, but as a fellow human being, made in the image of God?

In what ways does God speak to us in the quiet stillness when we lay aside those things that cause our thoughts to race?

Monday, April 15

Psalm 123

The Psalmist describes lifting our attention out of ourselves and to God. As we lift our eyes to the heavens, we see something new, experience God's mercy and hope. We are reminded to look outside of ourselves, that bringing our attention out of ourselves frees us from contempt, both our contempt for ourselves, and for those who have contempt for us. We are beckoned to seek God's mercy by leaving our scorn and pride behind us, living in God's mercy together.

Prayer: Relational God among us, help us to see your will in letting go of ourselves for your service. Lift us out of pride and contempt and into your mercy and glory. Remind us that seating our identity in you knits us together as a people, inviting your mercy into our midst as we invite others to experience your interweaving in our lives through our invitational hospitality and intentional relationships with each other. Lift our eyes to you Lord, so that in seeing You, we see each other in your Light. We pray all this through your Son, Jesus. AMEN

Questions to Consider:

What does lifting our eyes to God reveal through God's light?

How are we inspired and moved by God's mercy?

How does pride and contempt keep us from forming relationships with each other?

Tuesday, April 16

Genesis 2:25

What would it be like to live life with no shame? In this short passage, God has just completed creating Earth and all its inhabitants. He looked over all his creative works and saw “that it was very good!” (Gen. 1:32, NLT) Man and woman were in a perfect relationship together and with God. Man and woman were fully exposed before each other and God and were not ashamed. It didn’t last long though. In Genesis 3:6-7, the man and woman ate of the fruit and “immediately their eyes were opened” and “suddenly they felt shame at their nakedness.” Because they were naked and ashamed, they covered themselves in fig leaves to hide - from each other and God.

Questions to Consider:

What are you ashamed of? Why?

What do you want to hide from others? This is your source of shame

How can one who is ashamed - an outcast, naked, and unclean - come before God? Read Matthew 8:1-4.

Final Thought:

We all have a mess in our lives we are ashamed of and hide from others. However, if truth sets us free (John 8:32), then allowing the truth to be revealed to the darkest corners of our lives is what Jesus has come to do. He has come to help the “ashamed” - to set the captives and oppressed free, allow the blind to see, & bring Good News to the poor (Luke 4:18-19). Allow Jesus to bring truth and healing to your shame. He has come to declare you “Not guilty!” and to make you whole, holy, and useful in His Kingdom.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Thank you for coming to set the captives & the oppressed free. Thank you for giving sight to the blind and Good News to the poor. Your life, death, and resurrection accomplished that for me. Like the leper, I kneel before you for healing. I want to stand before you unashamed. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Wednesday, April 17

Psalm 46:10

Some years ago friends of ours gave us a beautifully framed print with these words from Psalm 46. Located above the quote was a quaint painting of a beautiful white park bench surrounded by colorful fall foliage. Soft light giving almost a halo like shine to the items in the image. Gorgeous. Beautiful. Peaceful. If you frequent Christian book or gift-stores you might have come across similar artistic renditions of “Be still and know that I am God;”

We are following the invitation to put down our electronic devices and face family, friends, and members of our community face to face instead of using electronic means of communication. My rendition is “screen-free time” including TV, PC, tablet, phone. It’s only for four hours each day — you can do it! “What are we expected to do?” Is a valid question.

When I started looking into Psalm 46:10 it became apparent that it was near the end of a Psalm that is a so-called “Song of Zion”. It describes the ongoing strife and battle the inhabitants of Israel in general and citizens of Jerusalem in particular had to endure which were caused by the surrounding hostile nations.

Ongoing fighting, threats of violence, uncertainty in economic as well as military matters. Nothing romantic about it. Even more importantly the image of GOD in this Psalm is not that of a lover, but of a mighty warrior and general commanding His troops to the rescue of His people. Verse 7 does not leave any doubt, when the Psalmist proclaims, “The LORD who commands armies is on our side! The God of Jacob is our protector!” (NET)

The very phrase “Be still ...” can properly be translated as “desist”, as in laying down one’s weapons. The NET rendition of this verse is striking to me, “Stop your striving and recognize that I am God!” The context makes it likely that this command was directed towards the enemies of Israel and not GOD’s chosen people.

However, when we encounter the text today, we can accept GOD’s invitation to stand down in our own efforts and refocus on what GOD is doing in our personal life as well as in our community at large. The invitation to desist from using our own strength and discover GOD’s handiwork can be best followed by using at least part of the four hours to reconnect with GOD the old-fashioned way using a printed copy of GOD’s word and pen and paper. Spend some time journaling and reconnect to GOD and fellow (hu-)man.

Thursday, April 18

Mark 14:32-42

Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, facing what is certain to be an excruciating death. He is aware that the time has almost come and he has some very human needs. He needs to do what he always does when he faces his demanding life – he needs to pray. Jesus needs to touch base with his Heavenly Father and get grounded. He asks for the cup to be removed but he also submits to God's will – Thy will be done.

But Jesus needs something else. He asks his closest friends – Peter, James and John – to accompany him. He explains his agony to them and asks them to stay awake, to watch with him. Jesus doesn't just need the Heavenly Father, Jesus needs human care and understanding. He doesn't want to be alone; he needs someone to face this hour with him. Can you watch with me just one hour?

Prayer: Jesus, our Brother and Friend, during this Holy Week may we attend to our prayers and watch with you as you sacrifice yourself for us. But let us also see those around us who are facing impossible situations. Let us see those who need someone to watch with them. Let us see those who need human care and understanding. Let us see those who are alone. Open our eyes to see and open our hearts to care. Let us free up just one hour to watch and wait and care for someone in need. In your service and for your sake, Amen.

Questions to consider:

If you could free up one hour in your busy week to reach out to someone who is alone, how would you do that? Invite a neighbor? Volunteer at Second Chance or AMEN? Check with the church to find a need that you could fill?

Jesus says that when we care for someone in need, we are caring for Jesus (Mt. 25:40). In whose face do you see Jesus? How can you accompany that person?

When you're in need, it's very hard to ask for help. How can you make yourself more open and available and approachable? How would you ask someone if you could spend some time with them?

Friday, April 19

Luke 22:14-20

At the climax of his life and on the night before his death, Jesus paused to eat a meal with his closest companions. We may ask: with only hours to spare before his death, shouldn't Jesus prioritize and focus on something more important than sitting down for dinner?

Or, is it possible, that we are the ones with the wrong priorities?

It is easy for our common meals to take a back seat to other events: work, ball games, television, school projects, etc. Additionally, mealtime can be lost by putting attention on our phones or by eating fast food in the car. Certainly, life doesn't allow for us to have a peaceful dinner together everyday, but how highly do we prize our shared meals? Jesus chose to spend his last night around the table -- what about us? Do we prioritize, at least a few times a week, the family dinner?

At that famous meal, Jesus gave bread to his disciples. Are we blessed enough to have bread to share with our neighbors who are hungry? The bread we share does not need to be food. What about sharing our time and compassion with the lonely, grieving, sick, imprisoned, and forsaken?

Finally, for Christians the meal has a meaning far beyond nourishing the body. Jesus gave the bread and wine, commanding his disciples "Do this in Memory of Me". It is possible to hear the longing, the pleading in Jesus' words: *do this in memory of me, do this so you never forget me...* This Communion connects us with Christ at the Last Supper as well as the Heavenly Banquet spoken of throughout the New Testament. What could be more important?

Questions to consider:

The family dinner, compassion for a neighbor, communion with God -- what I am I willing to remove -- to sacrifice -- from my life to make room for these good works?

Saturday, April 20

Luke 23:52-56

Holy Saturday is a day for vigil keeping; a day to wait and watch the clock tick slowly toward the dawning of the new day. On that first Holy Saturday, the women waited—waited for the sabbath and the sun to rise so that they might tend to the body of Jesus. It was the last act of compassion they expected to give to their Lord.

How—in this Saturday—will we remember the waiting, the confusion and loss and grieving of that first Saturday? How might we tamp down our knowing so that we might experience the silence of the tomb?

Easter will dawn, but on Saturday darkness remains. Imagine the disciples locked in their upper room, while the women rest in the sanctuary of their households. How will we rest this day so that we might greet tomorrow with all the revelation it will bring?

Who will gather with us in the quiet darkness before the dawn?

Holy God, impatient to hear the rest of the story, we pray for courage to face the uncertain darkness. We pray for patience to sit in your holy time of rest until the unknown is revealed to us once again. We pray for all who will participate in this moment for the first time, for all who will participate in this moment for the last time, for all who will participate in this moment for a lifetime—asking that you refresh our senses as we rehearse your redemption story. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.