**Series OVERVIEW**

This four-week series is all about making room in our lives for God to do whatever he wants to. As we move forward in this season of breakthrough, we are asking God to do what only he can do in us and through us. We’re asking him to break through in our lives, our relationships, our church, our city, and our world. We’ll learn how the practices of fasting, prayer, and Sabbath can make room for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives as we continue to grow as apprentices of Jesus.

During this series, we will invite everyone to participate in 21-Days of Prayer and Fasting beginning on Monday, January 6, 2020

Static Research Requests (in order of priority):

Commentary (WORD) on key passages.

Relevant quotes that correspond with Big Idea.

Intro/hook ideas (WOW) that correspond with Big Idea.

Illustrations/metaphors that correspond with the Big Idea.

Practical responses/applications ideas. (WHAT NOW?)

Pertinent brain/social science insight.

**Week 1 | December 29, 2019 | Make Room for Breakthrough**

*Note (this is an all church videocast message)*

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:17, 2 Peter 3:9, James 5:13-20

**Message Big Idea:** Breakthrough involves surrender, a turning away from anything that is keeping us from whole-heartedly living as apprentices to Jesus.

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” -Matthew 4:17

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. -2 Peter 3:9

13 Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. 19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. -James 5:13-20

**Message Description**

As we continue in this season of breakthrough, we recognize that we have a part to play in making room for breakthrough. The words of the Community Music song capture this:

Here is where I lay it down

Every burden every crown

This is my surrender

This is my surrender

Here is where I lay it down

Every lie and every doubt

This is my surrender

And I will make room for you

To do whatever you want to

Do whatever you want to

Breakthrough often involves a surrender on our part. A letting go. A turning away from anything that is keeping us from whole-heartedly living as apprentices to Jesus in order to open ourselves fully to the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is a Biblical word for this, it’s called repentance.

“The Greek words for ‘repent’ and ‘repentance’ literally refer to experiencing a ‘change of mind.’ This implies that one’s thinking is going in the wrong direction, and to go in the right direction one must stop and go a different way. Repentance requires reorientation.” (Dean Pinter, The Story of God Bible Commentary: Acts)

Shake up the ground of all my tradition

Break down the walls of all my religion

Your way is better

Your way is better

Repentance requires reorienting everything in our lives around Jesus and his way because his way is always better.

As we end one year and begin the next, what do you need to turn away from? What do you need to not bring with you into the New Year? What do you need to surrender in order to whole-heartedly say “yes” to Jesus and make room for breakthrough?

This journey of letting go is not something we are meant to do alone. “...confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” James writes. “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)

A “righteous person” is someone who is rightly related to God. As we turn away from anything that doesn’t lead us to Jesus, our prayers become powerful and effective. We join God in bringing breakthrough. When people pray, God breaks through.

Theologian N.T. Wright describes it like this:

“Prayer isn’t just me calling out in the dark to a distant or unknown God. It means what it means and does what it does because God is, as James promised, very near to those who draw near to him. Heaven and earth meet when, in the spirit, someone calls on the name of the Lord. And it means what it means and does what it does because God’s new time has broken into the continuing time of this sad old world, so that the person praying stands with one foot in the place of trouble, sickness and sin and with the other foot in the place of healing, forgiveness and hope. Prayer then brings the latter to bear on the former.” -NT Wright, The Early Christian Letters for Everyone

At the end of this message, we’ll cast vision for the rest of the series. What we’re going to see over the next three weeks is that Jesus taught his apprentices to engage in spiritual practices that could continue to facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. We can incorporate these same practices in our lives to make room for the breakthroughs that the Holy Spirit wants to bring. During the next three weeks, we’re going to learn about:

Fasting

Prayer

Sabbath

All of these spiritual practices involve a letting go, a surrender. And, we invite everyone to not just learn about them, but participate in them by joining together for 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting (beginning Monday, January 6).

**Week 2 | January 5, 2020 | Fasting**

*Note: Prayer and Fasting Initiative begins Jan 6 - goes through Jan 27.  Will challenge people to participate in this message*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:16-18, Matthew 4:1-4, Joel 2:12-15

**Message Big Idea:** Fasting is not a magic bullet to get what you want, but a response to a sacred moment.

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. -Matthew 6:16-18

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” -Matthew 4:1-4

12 “Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” 13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. 14 Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing— grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. -Joel 2:12-15

**Message Description**

Fasting is “Abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.” It’s not dieting; it’s not a hunger strike. It’s abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.

In his famous “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus teaches on fasting saying, “When you fast…” seeming to imply that fasting would be a practice his apprentices would engage in. Jesus, himself, fasted for 40 days at the start of his public ministry (Matthew 4:1-4). Still, fasting is a difficult spiritual practice for many of us, not just because it requires us to go without food, but because many of us struggle to understand why we are doing it.

One reason we struggle with fasting is because our western culture teaches us a dualistic view of personhood. Many of us don’t see a connection between our bodies and our spirituality. Therefore fasting seems unnatural and even irrelevant. However, New Testament theologian Scot McKnight explains:

“The Bible does not say the body contains a spirit, like a beaker into which we pour a liquid, but that each person is a spirit and is body. In other words, Christian tradition teaches that there is a duality about humans, but there is not a dualism. WE are one person with an inner and outer dimension, but we are not comprised of two parts–an inner part and an outer part. Neither is it right to think that one is good (the inner) and the other bad (the outer)...Biblical fasting is about joining the material to the immaterial, the body to the soul, the body to the spirit in a unified, organic act.” -Scot McKnight, Fasting: The Ancient Practices

Similar to how raising our hands or clapping can bring our whole self to the act of worshipping God through singing, fasting is a spiritual practice that can join our body to our soul for a spiritual purpose.

Still, what is that spiritual purpose? What is fasting supposed to accomplish? What results are we supposed to experience when we fast?

McKnight suggests that to focus on the result of fasting is missing the purpose of the practice. He argues that the men and women in the Bible didn’t fast in order to get a result, they fasted in response to a sacred moment such as a death or the realization or sin or when their nation was threatened. It was the sacred moment that generated the fasting response. Sometimes a result would come out of the fast, but not always. The focus is not on the result, but on responding to the sacred moment.

“Fasting is a response to a sacred moment, not an instrument designed to get desired results. The focus in the Christian tradition is not ‘if you fast you will get,’ but ‘when this happens, God’s people fast.” -McKnight

In this message, we might focus on several kinds of sacred moments that we might respond to with fasting. For example:

**Sacred Moment: Requests**

When the desires of our heart are so deeply intense that we cry out to God to intervene. In the Bible, pleas were regularly accompanied by the embodied act of fasting. Fasting was a natural response to:

Personal needs and wants (1 Samuel 1:1-20)

Health crises (2 Samuel 12:15-19)

Protection (Ezra 8:21)

The failures of others (Deuteronomy 9:17-21)

The desire for guidance (Acts 13:2-3)

**Sacred Moment: Renewal**

Fasting in response to our hunger for God and our desire to grow closer to him. In this sense, fasting becomes a discipline we incorporate into our lives. It is a scheduled practice. This may, in part, be what Paul was describing about training his body (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

**Sacred Moment: Repentance**

The moment of turning from anything not leading us to Jesus and finding our way back to God. We respond by making our lives uncomfortable for a day in order to bring our entire person into harmony with the gravity of our sin and the need to turn from that sin to God. (Joel 2:12-15)

At the conclusion of this message, we will invite everyone to join us for 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting. There will be a component of this that will be corporate through the Bible Reading Plan and social media.

Resources:

Previous COMMUNITY Message on Fasting

Tammy’s Research Notes

Blog: Why I Fast

**Week 3 | January 12, 2020 | Prayer**

*Note: Small Group Sign Up is this weekend*

**Scripture:** Luke 11:1, Luke 11:3, Ephesians 6:18, Luke 18:1-8

**Message Big Idea**

Prayer is communicating with God about ourselves and others.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” -Luke 11:1

Give us each day our daily bread. -Luke 11:3

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. -Ephesians 6:18

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

4 “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:1-8

**Message Description**

Prayer is a central practice in the life of an apprentice of Jesus. Richard Foster writes: “All who have walked with God have viewed prayer as the main business of their lives.” Prayer is essential because through prayer we communicate directly with God.

Jesus’ first followers recognized the importance of prayer by watching Jesus model it. They asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). This is important for many of us to recognize because so many of us feel like we don’t really know how to pray. We can take heart in knowing even Jesus’ disciples needed to learn to pray (which is surprising since they very likely grew up knowing all sorts of Jewish prayers). “Prayer is a learned behavior,” writes John Ortberg. “Nobody is born an expert at it. No one ever masters prayer.”

Therefore every apprentice of Jesus should desire to grow in the practice of prayer.

Still, even those who know how to pray often struggle to pray consistently. Why? Because we wonder if prayer really changes anything. The parables Jesus taught about prayer were directed at this struggle (Luke 18:1-8). He urged his apprentices to pray boldly and not give up!

In this message, we will focus on two kinds of prayer: Simple Prayer and Intercessory Prayer.

In Simple Prayer, we talk to God about what is on our hearts. Not the things we think we should pray about, but the natural and present thoughts from our day.

“We bring ourselves before God just as we are, warts and all. Like children before a loving father, we open our hearts and make our requests. We do not try to sort out the good from the bad…. We tell God, for example, how frustrated we are with the co-worker at the office or the neighbor down the street. We ask for food, favorable weather, and good health.” -Richard Foster

Dallas Willard defined pray as “talking to God about what we are doing together.” That’s the essence of simple prayer. Simple prayer is the most common form of prayer in Scripture. Jesus told us to pray these kinds of prayers when he instructed us to pray for “daily bread” (Luke 11:3).

In Intercessory Prayer, we talk to God about the needs of others with an expectation that he will intervene. Richard Foster writes, “...if we genuinely love people, we desire for them far more than it is within our power to give, and that will cause us to pray.”

Intercessory prayer begins with listening to God so that we can pray boldly and confidently according to his will. One of the most powerful forms of intercessory prayer is praying Scripture over another person. While simple prayer is the most common form of prayer in Scripture, intercessory prayer is the most commanded (i.e. Ephesians 6:18).

We might consider pointing people to the “Inner Room” prayer app as a helpful tool for Intercessory Prayer. This free app allows you to input prayer requests and then leads you in guided times of prayer. Some locations might also choose to offer “The Prayer Course” as a next step.

In this message, we’ll also want to invite those who have not participated yet to join us for the remaining 14 Days of Prayer and Fasting.

Resources:

Tammy’s Research Notes

**Week 4 | January 19, 2020 | Sabbath**

*Note: Small Group Sign Up is this weekend (week 2). This is also Blast Weekend*

**Scripture:** Matthew 11:28-30, Genesis 2:2-3, Exodus 20:8-11

**MESSAGE BIG IDEA**

Sabbath is not a legalistic rule but an invitation to human flourishing.

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” -Matthew 11:28-30

2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. -Genesis 2:2-3

8 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. -Exodus 20:8-11

**Message Description**

Desire is the great motivator in life. It’s desire that gets us out of bed in the morning. It’s desire that drives us to accomplish, achieve, and accumulate. Desire in itself isn’t bad, but when desire begins to control our lives, we are in danger because desire can never be satisfied.

Thomas Aquinas once asked, “What would it take to satisfy human desire?” His answer: “Everything.”

Desire is infinite, but we are finite. Therefore, our desire can lead us into a chronic state of restlessness. Our culture only exasperates this sense of restlessness with its endless bombardment of messages that cause us to desire more and more.

The result? So many of us are plagued by busyness, hurry, greed, anxiety, discontentment, envy, and exhaustion.

It’s into the craziness of our restlessness that Jesus comes and offers us rest (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus invites us to a way of life that is characterized by restfulness. It’s a life of margin, enjoyment, contentment, slowing down, gratitude, and delight. But we can only experience this life of restfulness if learn to rest. Rest is essential to apprenticeship with Jesus.

Since the beginning of time God has given us a practice to experience this rest. It’s called the Sabbath.

“The Sabbath is an entire day set aside to stop - stop working, stop wanting, stop worrying, etc.—and to simply rest in God’s presence.” -John Mark Comer

The original arrangement God set up “in the beginning” included this day of rest (Genesis 2:2-3). Shabbat literally means “to stop” and it is essential to shalom or “human flourishing.”

Yet so many times we kid ourselves and think we can plow through without it. God’s people have always been prone to this mistake. God actually had to include it in the list of The 10 Commandments because we so often resist stopping. The command to rest is not a legalistic rule; it was given because rest is essential to our flourishing.

In this message, we’ll want to challenge people to begin to incorporate Sabbath into their lives. We’ll give practical suggestions on how to live this out. In a previous Community message, we encouraged people to use these four words as a guide to practicing Sabbath:

Stop (Psalm 46:10)

Rest

Delight (Psalm 149:4)

Contemplate

We might give a specific challenge to set aside time for Sabbath rest during this final week of the 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting with options from setting aside a few hours to a whole day.

**Resources:**

John Mark Comer Teaching

Previous COMMUNITY message on Sabbath

Tammy’s Research Notes