

FROM THE CRADLE, TO THE CROSS, TO THE CROWN

Happy New Year's Vertical Church! As we enter 2023, I don't think there is a better entrance into the new year than to talk about how God makes ALL THINGS NEW! Anyone here ready for something new? As we have done over the last few years, there is a staple within our church where we start the year with our 21 DOP & Fasting! It's a time we set aside at the beginning of every January where we as a church call our people to make a concentrated effort to really set our heart apart to God and press into a time of fasting and prayer as we kick-off the year. If you are new to Vertical Church this is something we have made a vital part of who we are as a church and we really do believe that it has made a huge spiritual impact in the lives of the people who have taken this journey with us.

It just so happens that last week we started a new series titled "All Things New," and that is exactly what God wants to do in our lives over the next few weeks through prayer and fasting! Welcome to week 2 of All Things New where we are getting close to finishing our year long journey of reading through the Bible. Last week, we wanted to remind you of THREE REALITIES CONCERNING OUR SALVATION so that we can live out our calling as people made alive by Christ and so we will not let Christmas just become another holiday.

Today, as we start to prepare for the fast, we want to identify the greatest act of humility by explaining the incarnation of Christ so that you will be encouraged to live by Jesus' example. To do that, we are going to give you three ways to walk in humility so that you can live by Jesus' example! If you have your portion of God's word, turn with me to **Romans 12 & Philipians 2.**

I do not know about you, but I am so thankful this morning that Jesus never calls us to something that He does not prepare or give us the authority to walk in! More than that, not only does He prepare and give us the authority and everything we need, He went before us as an example! **Jesus will never call you to something that He Himself has not already done!** Incarnation is a word used to indicate that Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh. The word *incarnation* means **"the act of being made flesh."** John 1:14, **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."** Undoubtedly, the greatest act of humility is seen in this picture where Jesus steps out of Heaven, a place of perfection and seemingly gets laid in a cradle. Jesus went from everything obeying Him to learning how to obey! **Hebrews 5:7-8, 7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.."** One commentator put it like this, **"Jesus in Heaven only knew what it was like to be obeyed, yet coming to earth He suffered to learn obedience. Can you imagine the angels seeing Jesus humble himself from being obeyed and worshiped to doing it Himself?"** This is the incarnation at its fullest. This is Jesus humbling Himself by fully emptying himself so that He may fully understand what it is like to be like us walking in obedience to the Father. Jesus did not rely on any of His power as God to walk in humanity! For us to live by Jesus' example, humility is required! For Jesus to go from the cradle to the cross, it took humility; how much more should

we be walking in it as well? Over the last few weeks, we have looked at portions of what Paul had the opportunity to write in Scripture, and today we are going to continue on that journey. In Romans chapter 12, Paul is writing to the church at Rome about being a living sacrifice and that is where we find our first step of walking in humility

#1: Paul gives a mindset to adopt (Romans 12:2)

Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Don’t raise your hands, but how many of us have failed with the whole New Year, New Me mentality? We probably start off well, but it usually fades over a few weeks or even a few months, for whatever reasons. The idea that God makes All Things New is not a discount you see at the local gym at the beginning of every year. Just because you buy a membership does not guarantee weight loss, or strength; there is work that has to be done. Same goes with God making All Things New; you have to put some skin in the game. Just because you want God to do a work in your life does not guarantee anything; you have to give Him room and that is where fasting comes into play. If we have preached it once, we have preached it a 1000 times and we will continue to preach it and live it to the best of our ability; **If you want this year to be your best year, make it your best year spiritually.** Fasting is not to be taken lightly because when a heart is surrendered God moves and when God moves, things are made new! So many talk the talk, but never really walk the walk; or actually make room. God doesn’t sit on crowded couches when He has His own throne, and our hearts are supposed to be His throne, but so often we want Him to sit on the arm rest.

When Paul says to not be conformed by the pattern of this world, he’s telling us to give God His throne back. When God is actively sitting on the throne of our hearts, we are being transformed in His image. As we saw in the beginning of this journey, the Israelites were known for being conformed by the world. At the end of the day, what God truly wants more than anything is a close relationship with His children. Fasting allows us to grow closer with Him, the Israelites fasted for the wrong reasons. **Isaiah 58:2-5 (NIV)** **2** For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. **3** ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. **4** Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. **5** Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Fasting that pleases God is us surrendering our lives and true dependence on Him for life and everything in it. If we are to follow Jesus’ humble example, is that not the route? After Jesus’

baptism He is led into the wilderness and fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Remember Jesus does not lead us where He has not already ventured...During those forty days, when Jesus' flesh was at its weakest, He endured relentless temptation from Satan. Satan offered Him alternatives to God's plan, compromises that would satisfy His natural desires, and attacks upon His very identity as the Son of God (**Matthew 4:3**). Jesus used the Word of God, not His own strength, to defeat those temptations and remain victorious over sin. He demonstrated for us that fasting can strengthen us spiritually when we use it to draw closer to God.

After all of that, Luke 4:14 tells us that Jesus goes back to Galilee full of the spirit. True fasting will refine your faith and it will bring you closer to Jesus and it may not be pretty, but you'll be full of the Spirit on the other side. This prepared Jesus for His ministry and it will prepare us for what God has in store for us. Jesus showed us that we have the power and authority to not operate in our own humanity, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. **If Jesus did not rely on His flesh to live in obedience to God, then we can't either.** This is the mindset we have to adopt church! To live a life of true dependence on God. Not just walking, but functioning in the power of the Holy Spirit. Every day, we make the choice to let God have His throne and we make room. To not be conformed to this world, but to live as citizens of Heaven. When we purposefully place ourselves in situations where we are having to trust in God rather than our flesh and desires is when God can and will make All Things New! We never know how much room our flesh and desires take up on the couch until we deny them sitting time. The first step of walking in humility is to adopt a new mindset, and the second step Paul gives is this

#2: Paul gives an example to follow (Philippians 2:6-8)

As we make our way to the book of Philippians, Paul is speaking to the church about how to live in humility in light of Jesus' example. To live a life of humility is not just adopting a new mindset but to also put into practice what comes with a new mindset. What is that? To live in unity with those around you. Your family, your co-workers, your community. The cashiers who are slow, the servers who get blamed for everything because you ran out of ice. The family member who knows it all and the selfish boss. Paul says living a life of humility is living a life of unity.

Philippians 2:1-5, "Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

This only happens when we are first united with Christ. Then we find comfort in His love, not just a sympathy type of love, but a strengthening love, a helpful love. With unity comes a common sharing in the Spirit, where The Holy Spirit moves and guides us in this life. In unity with Christ we find tenderness and compassion...are you not thankful for that this morning? Then Paul makes a personal request for the philippians that they would be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. How do we do that?

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, This is the 1st step of this type of unity. All ambition is not selfish, and some

ambition can be godly, but in our flesh with our desires leading the way, it is most likely selfish. A selfish heart cannot pursue the heart of God, nor can it contain two loves at once. The love of God and the love of the world!

4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. This is the 2nd step of this type of unity. It's where we put others above ourselves. It's where we give without the intention of receiving. It's where we serve without the fanfare. It's where we give the shirt off our backs because our neighbors are in need. It's what we see in the early church in **Acts 2:44**, **"All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."** As we put away our selfish ambitions, our conceit, and our tendencies to be high-minded and self-absorbed, we will naturally have a greater concern for the interests and needs of others. Paul is not saying to not take care of you and your own, but to not be so focused on you and yours that those in need don't feel the love of Jesus!

I love the fact that Paul teaches us how to live in unity through humility and then teaches us why? **5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:" 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;** We need to remember that Jesus' story didn't start in a cradle, but in the heavenly realms. Jesus had everything that could be heavenly imaginable, and there wasn't anything else He needed. Yet, He chose to let it all go! He didn't try to cling to what He already possessed! Why? Because when God gives, He gives with a purpose. It may be temporary here, but it always has eternal purposes! **7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.** In other words, Jesus gave Himself away to walk in the likeness of man! A very important note here is that Jesus did not become "less" God because of His incarnation. Jesus did not experience an eternal downgrade, rather humanity was just added to Him. **8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!** By leaving Heaven, Jesus humbled Himself and learned obedience. From the cradle, to being despised and rejected, to being lied to, being left, to being (hungry, thirsty, tiredness, weakness), choosing and submitting to death on the cross. Crucifixion was the most shameful death according to the Jews. Jesus came all the way from Heaven to the most despised death of all.. Who signs up for that? Jesus! How sin must look in the eyes of God when He sent His son from the throne to the cradle, for you and me!

Your journey with God will be seasoned with opportunities of obedience and you and I have the choice to follow through or choose to be disobedient. If there's anything we can learn from Jesus it's that the path will have resistance. You'll have times of rejection and you won't be everyone's cup of tea. You won't have every step laid out for you, but it'll take faith. You want to live a life of humility from the example of Jesus? Empty yourself before God...your wants, your desires, your ambitions, your heart, your family, your job, your achievements, your past, your failure, your future, your hurt and allow Him to consume all of you! Jesus shows us that it's

worth it..why? Because God gets glory! He becomes known and He becomes more than just a rumor! Lives will be transformed and heaven gets populated! But here's the thing, God never leaves a humbled heart alone! He exalts! Can you imagine being exalted by God? Look at how He exalts Jesus

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. God crowns Jesus above all! Jesus could have crowned Himself at any point, yet He humbles Himself before God and His Father does it! You and I will not get that exact exaltation from God, but you know what our humility gets us? An adoption into the family! A seat at the table! The opportunity to call Him Father, Abba! Which leaves us with one response and it's our 3rd step of humility

3. Paul gives a reason to worship (Philippians 2:9-11)

Worship....so many times worship is defined by where you worship, what you're wearing, who's looking and how you feel that we miss the true meaning of worship. True worship is God centered worship! This means we worship from the heart and the way God designed. We worship because of God's mercies and those are everything He has given us that we don't deserve: eternal love, eternal grace, the Holy Spirit, everlasting peace, eternal joy, saving faith, comfort, strength, wisdom, hope, patience, kindness, honor, glory, righteousness, security, eternal life, forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, freedom, intercession and much more and oh JESUS and His incarnation, His birth, His life, His Death and Resurrection and eventually His Return! He's been crowned, church! He's victorious and undefeated!

If you're like me though, you possibly go through different seasons of worship; don't crucify me, but I have dry seasons of worship at times. It may not last long, but they happen. Whether it's life circumstances, lack of faith, or just the ebbs and flow of where I am spiritually. No excuses, just transparency. That's why fasting is such an important piece of our spiritual journey. It has the implications to get you exactly where you need to be spiritually with God. **Your relationship with God only grows as your worship grows!**

So here is how we are going to end today's message..

I want to share with you 5 Steps to developing a Successful Fasting Plan. (I encourage you to make note of these in your 21 DOP Journal and prayerfully consider your plan over the next week as we prepare ourselves for Next Sunday and the start our 21 DOP

A Successful Fasting Plan:

- 1) Identify what you want to see breakthroughs in:** (Select a purpose for your fast. You may even have multiple purposes)

In scripture we see 4 main reasons why God's people FASTED!

- a) They fasted for breakthrough during times of calamity or great difficulty where they were desperate for God to show up and change their situation. Maybe you have a difficulty or situation you are facing and you need God to show up. Make this a prayer focus
 - b) They fasted for breakthrough during times of confession regarding sin and disobedience. What sin or sins have you in its grasp for which you need deliverance. Make this a matter of prayer.
 - c) They fasted for breakthrough regarding renewed worship where their hearts had grown cold and indifferent towards God. Maybe you need a renewed heart for worship. Busyness or complacency has set in. Make this a matter of prayer
 - d) They fasted for breakthrough during times of great decision making such as deciding on key leaders. Maybe you have a very difficult or important decision to make. Make it a matter of prayer.
- 2) **Identify what you will deny yourself** (make it sting your flesh and stretch you to really have to depend on God) Everyone can participate even if you are limited health wise regarding food. Select something that you will give up for the entire 21 days.

(Example)

- Full Fast (1 day, 3 days, 7 days)
- Daniel Diet Fast (Search Online what is acceptable what is not)
- Liquid Fast
- Social Media/video games/TV & Netflix (whatever competes for mind and time space that you enjoy)

I would like for everyone who participates to pick something both food related and activity related that you enjoy that would really sting your flesh.

3) **Identify what you will replace it with that will edify you spiritually**

- Devotion Material (We are providing a free devotion book to help lead you through the fast)
- Book to read that will edify you spiritually
- More Time Set aside for prayer through the day (have a prayer plan where you focus on certain things so that it doesn't get redundant and include worship music)

- Weekly Prayer gathering and devotion time (Wednesday @ 7)
- Plan to be with us each Sunday in January for our Services

4) **Identify someone to hold you accountable**

5) **Commit to the full 21 days.**

- Use this week to prayerfully consider your plan and be ready to start Sunday morning January 8th through night fall on Sat. January 28th
- Change it up each week or feel free to vary you process (give an example)

3 full day fast with water only

4 full days liquids (smoothies, juices)

14 days of Daniel

Combine along with an entertainment fast for the full 21 days as well

The beautiful thing about setting a GOAL is that you can **CELEBRATE** what you achieve. Even if you don't meet your goal any progress you make in this fasting process is a win especially if you approach it with the right heart motivations.

Finally, as you fast I want you to do so privately and without a lot of fanfare. Fasting should never be used as something to impress people with how spiritual you are. The only person that really needs to know about your fast is your accountability partner. Here is what Jesus says about fasting:

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV) 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.

If you want this year to be your best year, make it your best year spiritually.

Worship Team Comes Back Up

(Make end of message a time for concentrated prayer and commitment for 21 days)