God’s Call on your Life

Called to work...

...to the ends of the earth.

Acts 13:2, Acts 1:8

2019

Men’s Ministry Monthly Devotionals

& Department Information
“You have got to be kidding me!” This was my first thought when I received the call to become the Director of Men’s Ministry and Disaster Relief for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. I knew that God had called me to be a pastor. I knew that God had called me to be a husband and a father. I knew that God had called me to make disciples. Now God was calling me to move into a new area of service, an area that I wasn’t sure I was prepared for. However, as I began to pray and seek the counsel of men who had poured into my life, it quickly became evident that God had been preparing me to serve in this role all of my life. This didn’t mean it would be easy. It didn’t mean that there wouldn’t be struggles and heartaches. What it did mean is that God would allow me to be part of what He is doing to equip Mississippi Baptists to reach the world and make disciples of Jesus Christ. The journey has only just begun but I can’t wait to see what God has in store.

The theme for 2019 is “God’s Call on Your Life, Called to work...to the ends of the earth.” based on Acts 13:2, While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." and Acts 1:8, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Each individual who has become a follower of Christ has received a call on his or her life. The call is to work...to the ends of the earth until Jesus returns.

The questions then may be: “What does the work look like?”, “Am I ready?”, or “How do I begin?” God always equips the called. He has called you. The work is to make disciples who make disciples. You begin by Worshiping, Praying, Fasting, and Sharing your faith. God will do His part but He commands and expects us to do our part.

So here is your opportunity to join God in what He is doing in Mississippi. Begin by seeking the Lord through worship, prayer, fasting and sharing your faith and see what God will do in and through you.

This manual is geared to supply men and men’s groups with devotions that lead to discussion and consideration of how God is calling you to fulfill His calling on your life. May God bless you and your church in 2019.

These devotions were written by Clay Anthony, Pastor Mason Joy, Pastor Jason Jones, and Pastor Whit Lewis.

Pressing Forward,

Shane McGivney
Men’s Ministry Department, Director
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board
Baptist men and boys have been captivated by missions since 1907. Our continuing goal is to assist all churches to begin and/or strengthen their Men’s Ministry work. The purpose of Men’s Ministry is to minister to the total man or boy by nurturing him to become a person with a Christ-centered mission.

The present Men’s Ministry program provides many flexible approaches for churches to involve men and boys in missions. Here are some of the ministries offered:

- **Central Hills Baptist Retreat** - Originally for Royal Ambassadors, Central Hills Baptist Retreat in Kosciusko now accommodates church groups, youth groups, summer mission camps, and other organizational groups. CHBR provides numerous outdoor activities such as fishing, canoeing, horseback riding, swimming, and hiking.

- **Church Renewal** - The Church Renewal Journey is a series of lay-led, revival-type weekends that take the church on a biblical-based, spiritual journey to becoming on mission with God. For more information, contact:
  
  Ernest Gunter: 662.231.1685  gunter_e@bellsouth.net
  
  Jerry Kirby: 601.799.1171  blueberryfarm@bellsouth.net
  
  Brady McMillen: 662.710.4078 brady@mcmillenrecon.com
  
  Terry Richards: 601.927.3048 tar@coffeebeancorral.com

- **Construction Missions** - Designed for individuals or groups who desire involvement with any type of ministry relating to construction.

- **Agricultural Fellowship** - Promotes Christian service by supporting international and north American missions through many services which include assisting agriculture missionaries, providing leadership development and establishing model farms.

- **Campers On Mission** - A fellowship who shares their Christian faith through campground mission service and revivals for churches.

- **Mission Service Corps** - A pathway for adults to serve as missionaries in an assigned ministry that supports evangelism and church planting efforts.

- **HAMS** - The objective of this fellowship is to promote Christian service by members of the amateur radio community. These amateur radio operators give special attention to Disaster Relief situations.

- **Mississippi Baptist Chaplain’s Association** - A fellowship of both professional and volunteer chaplains who work to provide pastoral care, support, and assistance to those involved in hospitals, businesses, fire protection, police, military, and prisons.

- **Criminal Justice Ministry** - Volunteers under the direction of Criminal Justice Specialists work to evangelize and disciple those who have become a part of the prison system.

- **Disaster Relief** - Each year Mississippi Baptists minister physically and financially to those who are deprived of essential needs of life due to widespread natural and man-made disasters. Disaster Relief volunteers desire to assist victims of disaster through food preparation, shelter provisions, counseling services, communication, medical aid, child care, and clean up.
For 55 years Mississippi Baptists have enjoyed sending new suits to pastors in new work areas. Many of these pastors have no suit nor have extra money to purchase one. Since the ministry’s inception in 1963, Mississippi Baptists have provided more than 8,000 suits to these pastors as our way of supporting their ministry and showing them we care.

Since 2001, Mississippi Baptists have also been able to send more than 2,600 gift cards to pastor’s wives. So often pastor’s wives do without the things they need to support their husband. The gift card is a special way to show them they are not forgotten and that they are appreciated.

This year each suit will cost $175. As in previous years, this ministry is made possible by your generous year-round donations of any amount.

Donations to this ministry can be a rewarding fundraising project for any group in your church or BSU: Royal Ambassadors, Girls in Action, WMU, Men’s Ministry, VBS, or Youth.

Checks should be made payable to MBCB and designated “Suit Project”

Please mail to:
Men’s Ministry
MBCB
PO Box 530
Jackson, MS 39205-0530
We assist:

- Churches and associations in developing, conducting, and strengthening ministries that reach out and minister to the needs of "prison world" people.
- Prison administrations and/or program agencies by providing worship services, discipleship/Bible study opportunities, and personal ministry to inmates.
- By conducting specialized volunteer and staff training upon request.

We offer churches and associations:

1. Personal office and on-field consultation
2. Basic training for volunteers
3. Ministry awareness conferences
4. Planning and guidance information
5. Specialized volunteer training for inmate, family, ex-offender/family, and victim ministry

We offer prison administrations and program agencies:

1. Assistance in selection, training, supervision and evaluation of the designated chaplain, who may be volunteer or employed.
2. Assistance in enlistment, selection, training, assignment, supervision and evaluation of religious program volunteers.
3. Provision of the Discipleship/Evangelism Program, an in-depth Bible study that provides opportunities of spiritual growth and development for inmates. This is a program offered through the Men’s Ministry Department. Only selected, trained Criminal Justice Ministry volunteers will provide leadership for the Bible study. Specifically selected and approved materials will be provided by the Men’s Ministry Department.
4. Provision of specialized training for volunteers and staff.

You can help give someone hope behind the bars and beyond the walls.

Contact:  
Charles Jones  
601.752.2021 – home (preferred)  
662.721.0264 – cell

John W. Henry  
601.508.0293 – cell  
jwhenry42@gmail.com

...I was in prison and you came to visit me.  
Matthew 25:36
2019 Camp Dates

May 27 - May 31  Camp Ruby (adults with developmental disabilities)
June 27 – June 29  Children’s Mission Camp
July 1 – July 3  Children’s Mission Camp
July 8 - July 10  Children’s Mission Camp
July 11 - July 13  Children’s Mission Camp
July 15 - July 19  Summer Mission Camp for Boys
July 19 - July 20  Lad/Dad Weekend
July 22 - July 24  Children’s Mission Camp
July 25 - July 28  Children’s Mission Camp
July 29 – July 31  Children’s Mission Camp
August 1 – August 3  Children’s Mission Camp

Children’s mission camps are 3-day co-ed camps
Mississippi Baptist Chaplain’s Association

The Mississippi Baptist Chaplain’s Association relates to persons serving pastoral care roles in hospitals and health care facilities, industries, correctional facilities, military, rehabilitation, public safety, and other institutions. The Association is set up to afford members an opportunity for professional growth, communication, and fellowship.

Chaplains who serve in positions both volunteer and compensated, or who served in such positions at the time of their retirement, are invited to join by paying a membership fee of $30.00 per year and attending scheduled events.

Members are eligible to vote and attend the winter retreat and fall banquet free of charge. Members’ spouses are considered associate members. While they do not have voting rights, they are welcome guests at the retreat and the banquet. Membership fees are due annually.

Mississippi Baptist Chaplain’s Association members are professional or volunteer chaplains who are affiliated with Mississippi Baptist congregations.

2019 scheduled events:

- Spring Retreat March 15 - 16
- Chaplain’s Training September 20
- Fall Banquet October 29
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Monthly Lessons
Men, have you ever noticed road surveyors on the side of the highway? You and I are passing by at high speeds and there stands a man with his tripod looking off in the distance. My father did such work years ago. I recall him explaining just what he was looking at and writing down. Off in the distance was a target that, once focused on, would make the distance between his tripod and that target level. I did not understand what he was doing and I am sure there is a great deal more to the job than that but I do know this: If the surveyor’s angle is off, even by a slight number at the beginning, then by the time his “target” comes into focus, the whole plan of levelness and straightness is off by a large margin.

The point is that any plan must start off the right way or the end results will be disastrous. We see this played out in Acts 13. There we read of a group of early church leaders getting together to plan for the work that God had called them (vs. 2b). These men had an assignment from God to spread the gospel far and wide but they realized that they must begin well or the results could lead to trouble. All bases had to be covered. All points had to be checked. The gospel was too precious to squander on bad plans. Souls were at stake.

So, what did these men do first? Pack? Read up on travel brochures? Language lessons? Exchange money? No, we read plainly that the first order of business in their mission endeavor was to worship and fast (vs. 2a). Solid planning for a gospel saturated mission trip is necessary. Tickets, passports, language barriers, materials, and funding are all vital parts to what must be dealt with for a successful attempt to reach people. Those listed in Acts 13:1 understood this fact but never let it be lost on any of us that first they knew to worship God before they left to serve Him.

Note the order of how their mission was given to them: The Holy Spirit speaks to them only after they worshipped, not before. Even the Holy Spirit recognizes what is to come first from our lives. God must be worshipped before He can be shared. We must get started right in our mission efforts or we will miss every target that we aim at by miles. God calls us to witness and serve Him as we get to know Him. As we get to know Him we will see clearly that there is no greater call than to share our knowledge of our saving King.

As a group or church together, download applications on your phones such as Operation World, NAMB Mobile and IMB Pray. Here you will find prayer prompts and needs listed at your fingertips. Share this information with your church family and as you worship you will see the greatest need of others the world over is to know Jesus.

Speak to your pastor or mission’s leader about adding a moment each week to your church services that include prayer moments from the above lists. Do not keep this information to yourself. More gospel ground can be covered together.
In April 1793, William Carey, along with members of his family, set sail from England to the Bengali region of India. This was a transition solely for the purpose of preaching the gospel of Jesus to an area that had not been reached. As he preparing for this move, Carey had a conversation with his sister that included the following,

*I am about to journey into a very dark hole unsure of what awaits. To which his sister replied, "You climb down into that dark hole. I will gladly hold the rope.*

I know what you are thinking, “No rope is that long.” True, but she was not referring to a physical rope. Her mind was squarely on the spiritual needs that her brother was going to face. She would support her brother and his efforts through prayer. Through hardships, rejections, and even the death of family members, William Carey was sustained by the prayers of his sister. There would have been an insurmountable list of needs for a brand-new mission endeavor in such a foreign land but what would have been greater than prayer?

Men, we must understand our limits. Our gender is not the best at admitting weakness or asking for help. We desire to handle things on our own and prove our worth in handling any sort of issue. Men are to be strong and tough and able to withstand various types of troubles. Can I admit something to you? It does not have to be that way. Physically we need help from time to time and no doubt we need help on a spiritual level qui often. William Carey knew this truth first hand.

I am sure that Barnabas and Saul (Paul) knew this truth as well. They too found themselves headed out to uncharted territory in Acts 13. They were tasked to spread the gospel to people that had yet to hear of Jesus. Yes, they needed resources. They had to plan on a route. They had to have funding. We can be sure that they also planned on eating on their trip. Many plans had to be made for this journey. Many needs had to be addressed. Yet what was the greatest need that these two men had as they began this gospel journey?

Acts 13:3 states that before either of these men took a step on their journey, they were bathed in prayer. Can you imagine what the content of those prayers would have been? Today we are surrounded by comfort and technology that the early church could not dream of. We can only imagine the struggles of facing down governments that were against you from the start; having to rely on strangers for housing needs and overcoming language barriers. You and I can only speculate at the specifics of the petitions that we made on these two men’s behalf. We can be sure of one thing; the gospel was at the forefront of these prayers. Imagine a church praying with laser-like focus for the gospel to be heard and proclaimed. Men, lead your church to be that once again.

Think about the following:

1. When you pray for missionaries, do you pray for their safety or for their success?
2. What do you consider a missionary’s greatest need?
3. Prayer notwithstanding, what are some specifics needs that you and your group can help meet? Consider contacting IMB.org or NAMB.net to discover those needs.
The key passage we have been looking at is Acts 13:1-3. Many words and ideas can be shared about this passage but one thought that seems to be missing is the idea of thanksgiving. I am not referring to turkeys and parades but the simple idea of being thankful to God for our blessings. As you read the passage the word thanksgiving does not appear. How can we draw the idea of being thankful from a passage that does not even mention the thought?

Many of passages of scripture command us to be thankful. One particular passage is found in Colossians 3:15. Here Paul writes, as a reminder, that the peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts and that we are to live in peace. Easy enough to do, right? And then he adds the tag: and be thankful. Living in peace, being ruled by Christ, in all areas of life we are to first be thankful. In the good days and bad – thankfulness should beam from our lives like a floodlight.

What does this have to do with the missionary commissioning we read about in Acts 13? With all the work and planning that went on in setting up Barnabas and Saul (Paul who later wrote Colossians) we have to know that just because thankfulness was not mentioned, it was very much present in the minds of this group. It is very well possible that thanksgiving was present on two different fronts in Acts 13.

First, the whole group was thankful that the gospel was not stagnant. It is indeed active and alive and on the move. Those people who are closest to God and have experienced His mercy should be overcome with thankfulness that others are going to hear such good news. Only an unloving person would dare not want the good news of Jesus shared with any and all that have ears to hear it.

Secondly, Barnabas and Saul themselves probably felt many emotions as they were preparing for their journey. We can only imagine what it was like to get the call from the Holy Spirit Himself that they were being called up to the task. To be found worthy of the gospel in salvation is more than enough to be thankful for, but to be called to share that good news with others is beyond what any of us could hope for. Not only were these two men worthy of saving, now they were being set apart as worthy to be used by God.

We can clearly see that this is not an episode of being thankful for nothing. Even though it is an emotion not named in this passage, we know that in their hearts this entire group of men was overcome with thankfulness that their God (and ours) is a God that is active and moves on our behalf. Plus, He has gifted and chosen to use men like Barnabas, Saul, and the men in your group to do His bidding. For that, we should all feel thankful.

In your heart, right now, thank God for something that you have not thought to thank Him for before. Do not state the obvious. What is it in your life that you are overlooking that God provides?

Thankfulness for the gospel is easy when you think back to who shared it with you for the very first time. Go back in your memory bank and recall when, where, and who was involved in you hearing of the Savior’s love.

In your group, right now, share what just came to your mind. Chances are there are brothers sitting with you that are thinking along the same lines and this will spurn each of you to greater thankfulness.
As we finish looking at this section of scripture from Acts 13, we need to realize that there is a lot more to prayer than what we might know. We all know that talking takes one person. Open your mouth and have at it, right? But listening takes at least two people. One does the speaking while the other hears. Sounds simple but the practice of communication can get tricky. Yes, it takes two people to actually speak and hear but to get those two people to agree on what is being stated is another process altogether. It has been often said that if you have ten Baptists in a room, you are guaranteed twelve opinions.

Acts 13:1-3 is indeed a moment where a group of people are called together to communicate and agree on what is being said. We note that there are prayers prayed in this scene as well as the Holy Spirit Himself speaking. There is a good bit being said. So, what is having to be agreed upon? Simply put: God’s Word. No, scripture is not being debated here. This group is not attempting to prove the sufficiency of scripture or the validity of the miracles of Jesus. These guys are not arguing at all. They are agreeing with what has been, is being and will be said by God.

There is an unmentioned theme running through this passage from Acts that the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be spread beginning with the early church. These men mentioned in the text are all fairly new converts to this religion yet every one recognizes the great need for this news to spread. These men agreed with the idea that the gospel is too good to hoard amongst themselves. Others need to know that Jesus saves. There is a fancy word for such agreement: Confession.

The word confess makes us all think of cops and robbers. If you catch the bad guy, you want him to confess to his crimes. The same holds true for a sinner under conviction. The best way to appease God is to simply confess that you are a sinner and seek His mercy (1 John 1:9). We all are expected to agree with God’s Word on that point.

Yet there is more to that word confess. There is also the simple sense of agreeing with what is already been rightly said. Who among us would say that missions are a bad thing? Who would say that the Holy Spirit cannot call out specific ones, like Barnabas and Saul, to a specific task? Who among us would say that when God’s Word claims it will not return to Him void, it is not telling the truth? Men, we must confess/agree that these truths are true and will come to pass. That is what it means to confess – that we simply agree with the truth that God has laid before us.

One more thought: God has promised to gift us for the tasks ahead and to also never leave our sides. Do you believe that to be true? Do you “confess” that such words from God’s Word are powerful and can be trusted? If so, what is then holding us back from being on mission to spread the gospel just as fervently as the men of Acts 13 were?

Look up just one promise of God found in scripture. There are many but just one will do. When you find this promise, does it come with an answer to either the person it is promised to in the Bible or in your own life?

Can you think of one promise from Scripture that God has yet to fulfill? Do you think He can be trusted to fulfill it? Can your group agree that this promise is worth holding on to?
In the Bible, fasting is the abstinence of food for a designated period of time for spiritual purposes. The Bible describes various fasts. A normal fast is abstaining from food for a designated period of time, though the person would drink water or juice. A partial fast is limiting the diet but not abstaining from all food (like Daniel and his three friends, Daniel 1:8-16). An absolute fast is fasting from all things, even water. Examples of this are Ezra (10:6) and Esther (4:16). An extraordinary fast is a supernatural fast that pushes the limits of the human body. Examples are Moses (Deut. 9:9), Elijah (1Kins 19:8), and Jesus (Mat. 4)—all 40 days.

Most fasts were private, like instructed here, but there are examples of corporate fasts. Some were commanded by God (Day of Atonement, Lev. 16:29-31). Some were specially called as a sign of corporate repentance (Joel 2:15-16) or as a means for setting apart leaders (church at Antioch, Acts 13:2). Jesus gives no command regarding the frequency or duration of fasts, because the focus is not the fast itself, but God. He is concerned with your heart, not waistline.

Jesus knows our hearts and tendency toward self-righteousness and so He graciously provides us with guidelines for fasting. We are tempted to present ourselves in a way to be noticed and praised by others. If we are having a bad day, we want others to know it. We may furrow our eyebrows, slam filing cabinet drawers, or keep to ourselves as a sort of self-pity protest. In Jesus’ day, since fasting must be closely associated with prayer (often symbolized by putting on sackcloth and ashes), some people would “accidently” leave a smudge of ash on their foreheads, so that people would see it, know they were fasting and be impressed with how religious they must be. Jesus says instead of looking miserable, present yourself so well that no one can tell by your appearance or actions that you are fasting. Wash the ashes off, iron your clothes, remove the gloomy expression, and quit telling everyone how hungry you are! Rather, “anoint” your head (a sign of rejoicing and celebration). Jesus is telling them to go out of their way to maintain a normal demeanor and appearance.

This does not mean that if someone finds out you are fasting, then you have failed—this is sometimes unavoidable. The issue here is your heart’s motivation. There is a difference in someone finding out you are fasting and acting in such a way so that people will find out.

Jesus teaches His disciples that there is a hunger and longing that can only be satisfied in God. We fast, not because we need less of the world, but because we need more of God. Fasting is a way of communicating to God, “This much I want you—more than food, more than this item, more than this activity.” What might you need to fast from for a designated period of time in order to rekindle your hunger for God? Perhaps a brief break from or reduced time with TV, social media, recreational activities, or sweets, soda. Choose something to fast from this month. Consider doing this as a group. Start small. And when you feel the urge to break the fast, devote yourself that moment in prayer, asking the Lord to cause you to hunger for Him more than stuff.
Fasting is not an attempt to manipulate God but a means of dedicating ourselves to Him and rekindling our hunger for Him. Here are a few practical (and Biblical) reasons why you should consider fasting.

1. To Strengthen Prayer: Fasting sharpens the edge of our prayers and intensifies our focus. We might be praying for a specific need or interceding over a lost or sick person. Fasting does not change God’s hearing—it changes our praying. The prophet Joel (1:14) called for a fast to remove distractions and focus on prayer in light of coming judgment.

2. To Seek Guidance: Fasting can be a means to more clearly discern the will of God. Paul and Barnabas would fast and pray before appointing elders in the churches (Acts 14:23). Fasting does not ensure the certainty of receiving clear guidance from God, but it makes us more receptive to the One who guides.

3. To Mourn Over Sin: Those who mourn over their sin are considered blessed by God (Mt. 5:4). Fasting can be a means of expressing this repentant sorrow over sin (Joel 2:12) on behalf of yourself, church, or nation. It can also be a plea for strength to overcome recurring temptation.

4. To Identify with Those Who are Suffering: Many around the world experience hunger, oppression, enslavement and persecution. Fasting can be a means of identifying with such people, devoting extra time in prayer for them, and generating greater thankfulness to God.

5. To Discipline Self: Believers are to discipline themselves for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). Man was created to exercise dominion over the world, but often we find that jobs, habits, leisure activities, and food exercise dominion over us. Fasting has a way of unmasking our attachments to the world and revealing our true priorities and desires.

6. To Express Love and Worship to God: Fasting can be an expression of love, thanksgiving, and praise to God. It might be that you fast in preparation for the Lord’s Supper, with the bread and juice being the first food of the day. You might consider fasting from breakfast or TV on Sundays as a means to devote yourself more fully to the Lord.

7. To Long for a Work of God: Fasting is a means of submission to God, longing for revival or renewal, in yourself, church, community, country, or world. Daniel was so burdened for the return from exile and the restoration of Jerusalem that he expressed this through fasting (9:3).

How might a Biblical fast rekindle a hunger for God in you or heighten an awareness of your need for Him? Perhaps one of these seven examples has sparked an interest to implement a fast this very week. Consider fasting together as a group. God would not have given us instructions to fast unless it brings about significant benefit.
We are instructed to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread”, because we need food to sustain our bodies. But due to the Fall, hunger for food (and the world in general) competes with our hunger for God. In our culture of abundance, food often becomes a means of indulgence, along with other idols like sports, sex, possessions, status, acceptance, success, entertainments, social media, etc. Our hearts are a constant battleground over these. Jesus teaches us how to fight these idols that compete for our affections for Him—fasting.

Fasting is the voluntary abstinence from normal activities for spiritual purposes. The Bible typically associates fasting with food, but one can fast from any normal activity, habit, thing or entertainment for spiritual purposes that competes with one’s hunger for God.

We fast to show that we have a spiritual hunger that exceeds our hunger for food. By denying our stomach what it aches for and our mind what it longs for, our soul’s appetite for God might increase. This is the goal. We fast to reduce our hunger for this world and increase our hunger for God.

The problem is not that we are never satisfied, but that we are too easily satisfied. If our stomachs growl, we do not wait until supper to eat—we grab a candy bar or some chips to tie us over. We do the same with our spiritual lives. We snack on trivial, insignificant things, attempting to satisfy what we really need, God. In other words, a believer’s lack of hunger for God may be because he is satiated with lesser things. If your affections for God and your desire to know Him and experience His work in you and the lives around you is lacking, it is not because you have tasted of Him and were not satisfied. For if you tasted of Him, you would see He is good (Vs. 8). And you would have no want (Vs. 9). And you would hunger for nothing in addition to God (Vs. 10). Your lack of hunger for God is because you have snacked on the empty offerings of the world. Your soul is filled with worldly appetizers, leaving little room for the main meal, God.

Oftentimes, it is good gifts that satisfy our appetite. Pastor John Piper clarifies, “The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for Heaven, but mindless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime time dribble of triviality we drink in every night” (Hunger for God, 14). We fail to recognize how we have satiated our appetite with trivial things of this world because the bites are so small and the grazing is so common.

Fasting is a means of unmasking ways in which we feast on the world more than the Word. It unveils our cheap, mindless substitutes for God. If you cut out caffeine, you will likely be grumpy and short with people. If you lessen Fox News time, you might spend the day anxious over what you are missing. These demonstrate how tied to the world we really are. Try it. Take one small common activity and refrain from it this week. When you feel your stomach groan for that which you are fasting, ask the Lord, “make me hunger like this for You.”
Finding Strength in Our Weakness Through Fasting
Matthew 4:1 -11

Jesus begins His ministry with a 40 day extraordinary fast (food and water). This seems counter intuitive. If you were about to start a new job or take an important test, you would get plenty of sleep and eat a healthy breakfast. Jesus does the opposite. During the most significant period of temptation, He fasts. Jesus is teaching us that the strength He needs, and we need, is not obtained through food, possessions, or anything of this earth—it is from the Father. Strength is gathered, not through accumulating, but emptying, through fasting and prayer. After 40 days, Jesus is “hungry” (and rightly so), but hunger does not control Him. Jesus is tempted to turn the stone into bread—to satisfy Himself outside of God’s provision, but He refuses. He successfully overcomes the temptation, turning to the Father to satisfy Him (Vs. 4).

When we fast, our bodies grow weak and that reminds us that we do not live by our own strength, provision, or planning. We do not prosper by diet, exercise, and hard work—but by God’s blessing. We pray for daily bread and God gives daily bread, but man cannot live by bread alone. When we fast, we are saying with Jesus, “Lord You are my strength. Not by bread alone, but by You, Lord do I live and thrive.”

Food is not bad—neither is caffeine, hunting, or college football. These are normal activities we are free to enjoy. But it may be that our desire for these has satiated our appetite for God. Jesus was known to enjoy a good meal, so much so that he was called by some a glutton and drunkard (Luke 7:34). At the feeding of the 5,000 they all ate until full—not just a snack to tie them over. God gives good gifts for us to enjoy and savor, but they are not an end unto themselves. The good gifts of life (children, vacations, successful business) are to lead us to the Giver of all things good. God created you to have an appetite for Him and a passion for His glory. He created you to find satisfaction in Him alone, and this desire can be awakened and rekindled through fasting. By fasting we say to God, “This much, Oh God, I want You.”

On one occasion the disciples were urging Jesus to eat. Jesus responds, “I have food to eat that you do not know about” (Jn. 4:31-34). They were confused, asking each other if anyone saw Him eating or gave Him anything. Jesus continued, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” There is food to eat and sustenance that the world does not know about. There is a means of strength and satisfaction that is infinitely deeper than this world knows. Fasting says, that is what I want—food this world does not know about. I want God. I want His strength. I want His sustenance.

We all are inclined to boast of our successes, but fasting is a way of reminding ourselves of our weakness, need and dependence. Fasting humbles us to the reality that God is our Sustainer and Provider. Consider how you boast in your strength or are prideful of accomplishments as a parent, employee or certain talents. Consider how a fast could awaken you to your weakness and open the door to better understand your dependence upon God. While fasting, use Psalm 63:1-5 as a prayer.
Take a moment to gauge your prayer life. I would say that, most of us, when we pray, we pray for things, people, places that are extremely close us. It's natural for you to pray for your spouse, children, health, friends, finances, church, men's ministry, etc. It is one thing to pray for family and friends, those for whom you have natural affections, but God wants you to pray for all people (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

As you are gauging your prayer life, allow me to ask you a personal question, when was the last time you prayed for the lost? When was the last time you pleaded with God to bring salvation to those that are destined to spend eternity separated from our Holy God?

Do you have a heart to pray for the lost like Jesus did on the cross when he said, “Father, forgive them”? Do you have the passion that inspired John Knox to plead, “Give me Scotland or I die”? Is your attitude that of George Whitefield, who prayed, “O Lord, give me souls or take my soul”?

God used those faithful men as powerful tools to bring salvation to dying people. Each of them had a clear and vivid understanding of what is at stake in the gospel — it’s an issue of life or death, an eternity in heaven or hell. Do you realize that your unbelieving family members, your co-workers, and your neighbors will spend forever suffering in torment away from the presence of God if they don’t embrace Christ? That realization should drive you to your knees to plead, not only with them to believe the gospel, but with God to save their souls.

God honored those men’s prayers for the souls of the lost; He’ll honor yours too. Whether friend or foe; whether moral or immoral; whether you know them or not — pray for the lost.

Practical ways to pray for the lost: (Read and discuss each text). Take time to pray for each listed below.

- That they seek to know God – Acts 17:27
- That they believe the Scriptures – 1 Corinthians 1:18
- That God will draw them to Himself – John 6:44
- That the Holy Spirit will work in them to turn from their sins and follow Jesus – Acts 3:19
- That God will send someone to lead them to Christ – Matthew 9:37-38
- That they believe in and confess Christ as Savior and Lord – Romans 10:9-10
The Gospel came to you because it was headed to someone else. You are a link in the chain of 2 Timothy 2:2. 

Robby Gallaty, pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church, Hendersonville, TN.

Jesus gave His followers the great task of making and multiplying disciples until His return, but how many Christians you know are actually doing that?

I’m fully convinced the future of the world depends on the average believer being able to proclaim the message of the gospel. We believe that the gospel has enough power to change a heart and that dedicated believers are the conduit that God will use to take it to our communities.

It’s not difficult to be enthusiastic about sharing your faith—until you realize that those conversations don’t start themselves. At some point, sharing the gospel means that you’re going to have to start a specific sort of discussion, and that can feel incredibly awkward and intimidating.

But there’s no way around it. Hearing the gospel is the first step in accepting it. Paul communicates this clearly in his letter to the Romans: “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17). Eventually you need to share the reason for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15).

Discuss how each of you may have daily gospel opportunities. Pray that God would give you opportunity to turn every day casual conversations into gospel conversations. Pray that you begin to view the backyard BBQs, the frequent little league sports practices, and normal daily interactions as gospel opportunities.

Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter. — Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Check out these Practical Resources for Gospel Conversations:

- *The Gospel Conversation* by Sam Greer (book)
- *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversation* by Jimmy Scroggins (book)
- *Tell Someone* by Greg Laurie (book)
What does it mean, to be “gospel-centered”?

In its most basic sense it means to view all of life in light of the gospel. This is called a gospel-centered worldview. To be gospel-centered does not mean that social action, marital matters, ethical issues, political agendas, our jobs, our diet, and all the rest of daily life are irrelevant. Rather, it means all of life is viewed in light of the gospel. Everything passes through the filter of the gospel. What Jesus has done and is doing to restore our brokenness trumps everything else and prioritizes all our other loves accordingly.

Scripture teaches that sin ruined our ability to relate to each other. Often those in authority might lean towards dominance or abandonment. Those under authority lean toward rebellion or disrespect. We need reorientation from Christ on how to interact with each other.

Paul teaches for the believers in Christ to “submit to one another in the fear of Christ.” Ephesians 5:21

When we relate to each other and with those outside of the body, we do so as new people who have been made alive with Christ. The gospel demands and transforms our interactions with each other. Fundamentally, we live out our relationships with God as the center of our lives, expressing respect and care in appropriate ways.

Let’s look at how this might look practically by observing a few Gospel-centered principles of healthy relationships.

- Express words of encouragement
- Communicate sincere affection
- Pray for one another
- Live together in a manner worthy of the gospel
- Work side by side together as a team for the gospel advancement
- Draw upon the resources of Christ to have Christ-like relationships
- Be proactive in seeking unity
- Resisting selfishness or prideful ambition
- Humbly serve one another by looking out for the other’s interests
- Have the mindset of Christ who put others before Himself
- Work out your conflicts humbly and help others work out theirs

Take some time to discuss how each of you could implement these Gospel-centered principles in your lives.
For many years I honestly thought that evangelism and discipleship were two different things. Evangelism meant sharing the gospel with an unbeliever so that he or she could become a Christian. The very word “evangelism” brought to my mind things like handing out gospel tracts, going door-to-door, or creatively communicating the gospel on the streets of a foreign country.

Discipleship, on the other hand, meant helping someone who was already a believer walk out the life of faith. The word “discipleship” brought to my mind a small group Bible study, a conversation across the table drinking coffee, or an accountability group.

The New Testament paints a picture in which every disciple of Christ is normally and naturally involved in evangelism as much as in Bible study, prayer, and corporate worship. From the brand-new Christian to the seasoned saint, sharing the gospel is necessary and integral to a growing life in Christ.

Many of us have heard and some even preached sermons that rightly focused on the Great Commission’s theme of “make disciples” (Matt. 28:18-20). And we’ve taught those around us that they should be disciple-makers themselves. But we also need to be clear that “making disciples” necessarily involves helping people who are not yet disciples to become disciples—that is, evangelism. Jesus modeled it (Mk. 1:14, 15; Matt. 9:35) and trained his apostles to do the same (Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 10:1-12). Only a few days later Jesus said that they would be his “witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Part of the apostles’ teaching that the newly Spirit-filled church devoted themselves to (Acts 2:42) must have been the normal and regular sharing of the gospel with family, friends, and strangers. From those very first weeks and months after the Pentecost, people were being saved every day (Acts 2:47). Evangelism was immediately a part of their new life of discipleship to the risen Lord Jesus.

Jesus told his apostles in the Great Commission, “Make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). As we make disciples, let’s be sure to model and teach them all that he commanded—including the great joy and blessing of a life of evangelism.

Make a commitment to be a disciple and to make disciples. Discuss with the group how you will be accountable and help each other be accountable to be faithful to God’s call.
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board
Men’s Ministry Department
Shane McGivney, Director
PO Box 530
Jackson, MS 39205-0530