

Celebrating Pentecost – 30 Days of Prayer in May

We all need God among us. After celebrating Easter morning, and hanging around for a while, Jesus left. Much like us now, the disciples sheltered in-place, waiting on something to change—waiting on God to move at Pentecost. So why don't we, like them, focus on prayer. Until this year's Pentecost on May 31, let's return to what makes us a community together in Jesus, ask to be empowered, waiting and listening. Who knows what might happen?

Crisis is always an opportunity. The word itself reflects a time in which we make important decisions, or at least our previous decisions are made clear. For the small group of Jesus' disciples, Jesus' trial, death and subsequent resurrection was that crisis. They all had to decide to continue as Jesus' community or not, and, ultimately, God's decision to save the world through his Son was made clear.

As the city around them continued to reel under corruption and violence—a city doomed to destruction a mere 40 years later—Jesus' community saw him come back from a corrupt trial and violent death. They weren't expecting it. Could they believe it? Could they walk into the future with new hope?

At first it was cool. Jesus stayed with them for 40 days, going back over what he had already taught them, but now in light of his death and resurrection. Then, another crisis: Jesus disappeared—back to his unseen home. But before he did, he told his disciples to, yes, shelter in-place. For 10 long days, they waited—Jesus' biological and spiritual communities all together focusing themselves on prayer (Acts 1:14). They were about to be empowered by the Spirit of God himself. The same energy that fueled everything Jesus did would energize them and propel them even further!

We have a similar opportunity. Like it or not, a crisis has been thrust upon us. What will we do? The biblical book of Acts is short for Acts of the Apostles. It is the story of Jesus' community, energized by his Spirit, and what they did in the midst of a world in crisis. How will they talk about the Acts of the Church in 2020? What will our story be?

As we wait for the world around us to recover, whether we're sheltering in-place or making our way back to normalcy, let's put ourselves back in that same frame-of-mind. In this month of May, leading up to Pentecost on May 31, our family is going to adopt a more intentional prayer focus for the empowering of God's Spirit. May 1st - May 20th we will reflect on Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. How was the community Jesus was founding supposed to operate? We want Jesus to teach us again. Then, May 21st thru the 30th, we will be focusing on prayer—listening to what the Spirit is saying to his Church and waiting for his empowering.

Would you join us?

20 Days Focused on the Teachings of Jesus

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| May 1 – <i>Mt. 5:1-12</i> | May 6 – <i>Mt. 5:31-37</i> | May 11 – <i>Mt. 6:9-15</i> | May 16 – <i>Mt. 7:7-11</i> |
| May 2 – <i>Mt. 5:13-16</i> | May 7 – <i>Mt. 5:38-42</i> | May 12 – <i>Mt. 6:16-18</i> | May 17 – <i>Mt. 7:12-14</i> |
| May 3 – <i>Mt. 5:17-20</i> | May 8 – <i>Mt. 5:43-48</i> | May 13 – <i>Mt. 6:19-24</i> | May 18 – <i>Mt. 7:15-20</i> |
| May 4 – <i>Mt. 5:21-26</i> | May 9 – <i>Mt. 6:1-4</i> | May 14 – <i>Mt. 6:25-34</i> | May 19 – <i>Mt. 7:21-23</i> |
| May 5 – <i>Mt. 5:27-30</i> | May 10 – <i>Mt. 6:5-8</i> | May 15 – <i>Mt. 7:1-6</i> | May 20 – <i>Mt. 7:24-29</i> |

10 Days Waiting on the Lord

By the time we get to these 10 days, there no telling what things will look like. Maybe for some of us stay-at-home orders have been lifted. Maybe some of us have gone back to work. Maybe it's all still the same.

Whatever it looks like, let's put ourselves back in that Jerusalem upper room praying for God's Spirit to come and change everything. If you're like me, this is going to be a challenge. I'm horrible at two things: listening and concentrating. But whether it's taking 5 minutes before you get out of the car at the grocery store, getting quiet during the kids' nap time, getting up earlier, or just stepping outside for a few minutes of concentration, how can we focus on crying out to God and taking the time to wait and listen for an answer?

I keep hearing Jesus' call in Revelation, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7). As much as it depends on us, let's give our ears the time and space they need to do their job. Let's see if we can hear what the Spirit is saying to his churches.

May 21 – *Acts 1:1-14*

Without Jesus for the first time, his community of biological and spiritual family gathered in a room together for focused prayer, waiting for Jesus to send the Spirit. Whoever we are with, whether church or nuclear family, let's pray like we desperately need the Spirit to energize and move us out of the room. Because we do.

May 22 – *Ezekiel 37:1-14*

In exile, after the obliteration of their former way of life, God shows Ezekiel how he will reanimate his people by breathing his Spirit into them. Let's ask God to breathe into us again. In a time of sickness and death, how is God reinvigorating his Church?

May 23 – *Psalms 13*

For years, David lived ostracized in the wilderness. Later, this song was sung by those exiled in Babylon. How long, O Lord? This is what David, exiles, and all of us are asking. How long will this last? How long until it's over? How long will I or the ones I care about be sick? Let's ask God, and listen to what he might be saying.

May 24 – *Jeremiah 23*

Some say, "It's all good! We're gonna be fine." But what if it's not all good? Jeremiah was surrounded by prophets in exile telling people what they wanted to hear—that exile was a short-term deal. Many around us are only telling us what we want to hear. Some may even do it as if they're speaking for God. Are we being fed empty promises? What voices should we stop listening to? Let's pay attention to God's Word and listen to him.

May 25 – *Psalms 131*

There is endless speculation. We all want to know how to move forward. But this is really beyond all of us. David was a king; he was used to complex decisions. Still, he knew some things were too difficult for him. He trained himself to be like a child before his mother in respect to God. He rested in God's competency and control. How are you trying to regain control? Let's take some time to rest in God, instead of figuring it all out.

May 26 – *Isaiah 55*

Do you feel empty? In a time of exile, when if anything people feel farther away from God, God reminds them they he still makes himself available. We spend our resources on so many things that don't bring us any more life. God is offering full satisfaction of ultimate value that is given, not bought. His economy, his *modus operandi*, is fundamentally different (i.e. better) than ours. Bend your ear to God. Come to him. "Listen, then you may live."

May 27 – *Isaiah 58*

God does not care if we fast, pray, and busy ourselves with "religious activity," all the while ignoring injustice and suffering around us. Do we really care about others? Our efforts now to draw close to God mean nothing if we ignore the needs of those around us. In fact, we see by the end of this chapter, we will not find satisfaction in God until we stop working so hard for our own satisfaction. As we meet as churches, either virtually or face-to-face, how do we need to "pivot" from religious activity to loving God by loving others? In the midst of, or coming out of, this crisis, how can we "fast from injustice and oppression" as God says?

May 28 – *Psalms 4*

In the middle of crisis, relying on God—begging him to answer us—relieves our stress. David reminds us here that instead of relying on worthless and deceptive information and techniques (which refers to our propensity for idolatry), he has turned to the living God. Only God has answers. Not only does this empower David to give actual sound advice to others (vv. 4 – 5), he can sleep in peace. Are you able to be angry without lashing out right now? Let's search our hearts in silence and stop speculating. Let's bring everything we have before God and trust him by waiting on him to answer.

May 29 – *2 Thessalonians 3*

People were expecting Jesus to come any day. Some leaders were saying it was the end. But Paul reminds us to not worry when the end will come; we wait while being productive until it does. Work, feed your family, make some money so you can help those who cannot. This is not frantically working to get ahead. We can work hard without worry because God is faithful and our future is secure in Jesus. What are we filling our time with that doesn't matter? How can we make ourselves more useful to those in need?

May 30 – *Habakkuk 3:12-19*

When Habakkuk asks God what's going to happen to his nation, God tells him he wouldn't believe him if he told him—it's going to be that bad! But after back and forth questioning, Habakkuk sees that even in the face of disaster—even if the economy absolutely fails (v. 17)—God can still be trusted. In fact, he rejoices that God is a God who can not only save us in the midst of a broken economy, but he will actually transform us so we can walk through the hard times (vv. 18 – 19)! What's God doing in our nation? Let's ask and trust God to steel us and transform us—whatever happens next.

May 31 – *Acts 2:1-47* – **The Celebration of Pentecost!**