

A Season of Opportunities

Casting Vision for 21-Day First Love Fast and Christmas Good News

Thesis: This season is full of opportunities for us.

Text: Luke 2:8-12; Matthew 6:16-18

This morning I want to cast vision for two opportunities.

1. The first opportunity regards our 21-Day First Love Fast from January 4 – 24.
2. The second opportunity revolves around this Christmas season.

Casting vision for the opportunity of our 21-Day First Love Fast, January 4 – 24.

“When you [fast to] practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don’t make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity but it won’t make you a saint. If you ‘go into training’ inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn’t require attention-getting devices. He won’t overlook what you are doing; he’ll reward you well” (Matthew 6:16–18 MSG).

Corporate fasting and prayer have been a significant part of our history at Calvary.

Throughout the 1990’s, we would fast and pray for long periods of time for particular assignments. For example, in 1993, we fasted and prayed for 30 days as a part of *Praying Through the 10/40 Window* where the majority of unreached peoples live. Churches were asked to pray about a nation to adopt for prayer and fasting. Then, we were to travel to that nation to pray with insight onsite-- prayerwalking. The Lord led us to adopt Nigeria. Calvary sent a team to Nigeria in October 1993. Because of a relationship which we had through Eddie Smith back in 1990, Rev. Mosy Madugba hosted our team as we traveled and prayed throughout the country of Nigeria. We took a prayer notebook of prophetic words, declaration, and promises which the youth put together from our time of corporate prayer and fasting. We gave that resource to Rev. Mosy. Our relationship with Ap. Mosy, Ministers Prayer Network, and Nigeria continues to this day.

For more than a decade, we took on times of fasting and prayer for revival and other emphases. We sometimes fasted for up to 40 days.

Through the years, some members of Calvary continued to fast and pray regularly through the Global Bridegroom Fast, or some engaged in fasting as a personal spiritual practice. But for the most part, we really didn't engage together in corporate times of focused prayer and fasting.

That all changed in 2019. The Lord spoke to us about returning to our first love. Our church responded to the Lord's leadership by fasting and praying once a week from August – December 2019, *Return to Our First Love: Remember. Repent. Renew.*

Earlier in 2019, the Lord spoke to our staff team about calling the church annually to a fast to start each new year. After the 5 months of focused prayer and fasting in 2019, Calvary entered into a *21-Day First Love Fast* for January 2020.

In praying about our focus for our 21 days of prayer and fasting to start 2021, your staff team at Calvary felt like the Lord is leading us in to another *21-Day First Love Fast*.

Why are we starting 2021 with 21 days of fasting and prayer?

1. Because we want to respond to the invitation of the Lord by starting the new year focused on Lord (Revelation 2:4-5; Jeremiah 29:11-14, esp. vs. 13).
2. Because we want to start the year off on the right foot by getting our perspective on the right place and on the right person: Jesus (Matthew 4:19, 6:33).
3. Because we want to posture ourselves in humility before the Lord (Isaiah 58:5; 2 Chronicles 7:14 James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-7).
4. Because we want to focus on the simplicity of loving Jesus first and of saying "no" to other things which vie for our attention and affection (Matthew 6:10; 2 Corinthians 11:3).
5. Because Jesus emphasized that the Father rewards fasting (Matthew 6:16-18).
6. Because we want to take everything that hit us in 2020 and lay it at the Lord's feet to begin 2021.
7. Because fasting with prayer is about surrendering and remembering.
 - a. Specifically, we want to begin the year by surrendering:
 - i. "Let thy kingdom come, let thy will be done in me and in earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).
 - ii. "Not my will but thine be done" (Matthew 26:39).
 - b. And, we want to remember the Lord by putting him first in our attention, affections, and activities (Matthew 22:37-39).

Actions:

1. In the coming weeks, we will post online some blogs, fasting resources, and devotionals to help us come together as one to seek the Lord.
2. We are asking each member of Calvary to fast as the Lord leads.

- a. There are different types of fasts.
 - b. The level at which a person engages in fasting from food should be determined according to age and physical limitations. Those with a physical disability, illness, or eating disorder should not fast, except under the supervision of a physician. Minors are discouraged from fasting food. Minors who desire to fast are encouraged to consider non-food abstentions, such as TV, movies, Internet, video games, and other entertainment. The Bible never calls children to fast food.
3. So, please mark your calendar for our *21-Day First Love Fast*, Jan. 4 – 24.
 4. **Prayer:** Let's take time right now to pray, asking God to give us a spirit of grace and supplication. We need his grace to pray, to fast, and to press into the Lord.

Go to our website for more information and equipping on fasting.

1. We have posted [resources](#) on our website about fasting.
2. [Fasting tips](#) from Mike Bickle.
3. [Practical Tips for Fasting from Luke 18](#).
4. Third, Mike Bickle has a free ebook called [The Rewards of Fasting](#).
5. By the way, Jay Kelly says that [A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer](#) by John Piper is a great resource on fasting.

Casting vision for the opportunity of this Christmas season.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:8–12 NIV).

The Lord has built into every culture a chance to encounter him. When missionaries go to an unreached culture, they find something in the culture that points to the Lord.

In our culture, our God has left a clear witness and testimony about Christ in the Christmas season and at Easter.

The Christmas season is a time of outreaches, special events, and expressions of love through distributions of food, gifts, and financial resources.

Because of the work of God, there are Spirit-led conversations as seekers and hungry hearts cry out to understand the true meaning of Christmas. **People are open to the good news right now.**

The holiday season can also be a difficult time for people. For some it is a time of loss, discouragement, depression, loneliness, and pain. In the midst of such trials, we have good news: the darkness cannot conquer the light (John 1:5).

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.... 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:2–7 NIV).

For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13–14 NIV).

At prayer last Thursday morning (12'10'20), Juan Ortiz prayed:

Lord, as I hear testimonies of people going through difficult times, we see your saving hand. You have come through before; you are coming through now; you are the help that we need. Would you be the help, refuge, and strength of our neighbors and friends?

At this Christmas season, there is something in our hearts to talk about-- the greatest gift of all: Jesus Christ.

When Juan prayed about the greatest gift of all, here is what that prompted me to consider. During the Christmas season, we stress over finding the right gift to give. We often wonder what someone needs, or what someone wants, or what someone likes. We wonder if they will need our gift or want what we give.

God gave us the gift of his Son. Jesus is exactly what we need, exactly what our hearts want and long for, and exactly what we will like more than any other gift we could ever get.

I am praying that God would help us to receive the gift he offers us in Jesus Christ.

I wonder if you would help prepare the way for the coming of the Lord in the lives of those around you.

1. Would you consider writing a short note, giving a small gift, sharing a kind word, or using whatever creativity you have to help people experience the light and love of Jesus this holiday season?
2. Let us consider using whatever means to communicate to our friends, family members, and neighbors that the Christmas season is an opportunity to come into the kingdom of light and of the Son whom God loves.
3. I wonder if you would consider praying for those who feel hopeless, sad, depressed, and lonely in this season.
 - a. Declare into the heavenlies that God is our hope and joy.
 - b. Ask the Lord to give others strength and grace in this season.

What Margaret prayed a couple of weeks ago on Thursday morning resonated with me. I want to share part of that prayer with you:

1. I pray that the revelation of Jesus in this season would be strong.
2. I ask that this One-- who is our shalom, our peace-- would be revealed.
3. O God: As you reset things, as you reset your church, give us eyes to see what you are doing. Help us not to focus on what we have lost; rather, help us to see the opportunities you are giving to us.
4. What we have been doing hasn't been working in the marketplace. You are retooling us for this day, for this hour, because you are active in this hour.
5. You are drawing others to yourself, O God. Longing hearts are open to you.
6. Anoint our conversations and our prayers, and grant us salvation and breakthrough for our families, our friends, our neighbors, our classmates, and our community.
7. We ask for your anointing on your people to be hope-bringers and joy-givers.
8. The world is in pain and darkness, and your light shines in the darkness and cannot be overcome by darkness.
9. We pray for that all that is in your heart would be accomplished in the name of Jesus.
10. May we pursue deep intimacy and full partnership with Jesus, especially in this season. May we serve your purposes, may we display your glory, may we go about doing good, and may we have eyes like Simeon and Ana to see what you are doing, even in the smallest ways.

Summary: The Christmas season is our opportunity to:

1. **Experience good news.** May we appreciate the good news of the kingdom of God and celebrate the King of Gory.
2. **Encounter hope.** Whatever your situation, God loves you and cares for you. He can help you with depression, sexual identity confusion, addiction, sin, unforgiveness, emotional scars, etc.
3. **Express a giving heart.** May we follow the example of Jesus who went about doing good and giving sacrificially for the sake of others.
4. **Engage others.** May we look for opportunities to partner with Jesus in this season in conversations, in acts of goodness and kindness, in actions of service, and in prayer.

Ministry Time: