

NEW

a week of prayer and fasting
Fall 2020

NEW

Morgantown Church family,

As we began 2020, we dedicated a season to seek after God through prayer and fasting. Over the course of a month at the beginning of the year, we let go of physical things like food, TV, or social media so that we might take hold of the deeper realities of the things of God. We saw God provide supernatural answers to prayer, we heard testimonies of transformation, and we saw God grow in us a deeper commitment to love God, love people, and to make disciples of Jesus. It was a challenging month, but we grew stronger through the challenge.

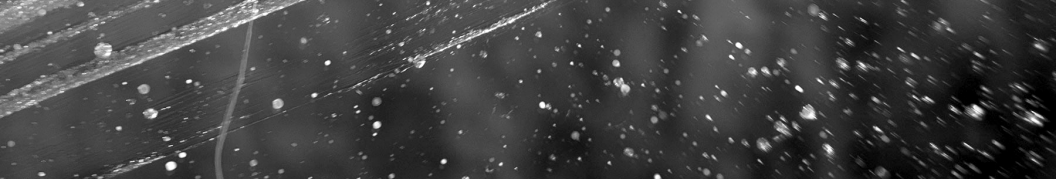
As we concluded that time of prayer and fasting, we knew it was something we wanted to do together again in the fall. Little did we know how much the world and our lives would change just a few weeks after we concluded our fast! We exchanged times of communal prayer in our gathering, holding hands and praying over each other for “social distance” and live-streamed worship. We grew together through our 30 days of prayer, and I believe God used it to strengthen us for what would lie ahead.

Now that we are over six months into this season, we feel called to spend a week together in prayer and fasting to prepare us for the rest of this year and to open us up to the work that God has been doing in the midst of all this.

Starting on Sunday, October 11 and concluding on Sunday, October 18, we will spend a week as a church family in prayer and fasting.

As autumn was approaching, I knew God had called us to pray and fast together again. It's the bed rock of a disciple making church and faithful discipleship. Like so much of “strategic planning” in a pandemic, though, we didn't know what it would look like. As I continued to wrestle and pray, God began to lay on my heart a passage of Scripture that will serve as a guide

In Isaiah 43, God brings a word to a people who had been scattered, exiled, and were longing for a return—a return to their homeland, their old way of life, the way things used to be. In our own unique moment of history, the prophet's words speak powerfully because we find ourselves in uncharted territory, longing for a return to what is familiar. This chapter speaks powerfully to our moment right now because its underlying current reminds us of the faithfulness and goodness of God *in the past*. It is honest about the trial of *the present moment*. Most of all, it calls the people of God to look ahead into *God's promised future*, to the new thing that God is doing in the midst of the disruption.



So I invite you to join me in a short time of prayer and fasting, to let go of physical things in order that we might hold more tightly to the spiritual realities of God. We have learned the futility of our own plans, but my prayer is that during this time of prayer, we might learn to trust in God's plan and anticipate the new thing he is doing among us. It seemed as if 2020 was a year that started so strongly — but so far it has been filled with more trials, struggles, and disruption than we could have ever imagined at the start. As we enter autumn and the end of the year, I want us to be open to the “new thing” that God is doing. I want to finish strong. I don't know what lies in the days ahead, but I want to know the God who holds the future in his hands. I may not know what is coming next, but I can know the one who promises to do a new thing. That's what these next 8 days are all about.

Wherever you are in your walk with God—whether you have been doing amazing during this pandemic, or you are in the midst of a valley—there is space for you to join us.

You can find resources for prayer and fasting on our website at morgantowncoc.org/fasting, including links to our teachings on fasting, audio and e-book versions of the fasting primer *Revival Starts Here* by Dave Clayton, and other resources. Pages 45-51 of *Revival Starts Here* are especially helpful for practical pointers to help you decide how you might fast. If you prayed with us at the beginning of the year, you may want to revisit the *Seek First* prayer guide as well.

So first, chose how God has called us to fast for this week. Grab a bible, create space for prayer in your life, and let's get after it, together!

I love you all so much, and I'm so glad we get to be on this journey together!

Peace,

Brad

*“Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.”*

— Isaiah 43v18-19

SAIAH 43

But now, this is what the Lord says—

he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers,

they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,

you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

³ For I am the Lord your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

I give Egypt for your ransom,

Cush and Seba in your stead.

⁴ Since you are precious and honored in my sight,

and because I love you,

I will give people in exchange for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

⁵ Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

I will bring your children from the east

and gather you from the west.

⁶ I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’

and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’

Bring my sons from afar

and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

⁷ everyone who is called by my name,

whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made.”

⁸ Lead out those who have eyes but are blind,

who have ears but are deaf.

⁹ All the nations gather together

and the peoples assemble.

Which of their gods foretold this

and proclaimed to us the former things?

Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right,

so that others may hear and say, “It is true.”

SAIAH 43

- ¹⁰ “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.
¹¹ I, even I, am the Lord,
and apart from me there is no savior.
¹² I have revealed and saved and proclaimed —
I, and not some foreign god among you.
You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “that I am God.
¹³ Yes, and from ancient days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?”
- ¹⁴ This is what the Lord says —
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
“For your sake I will send to Babylon
and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians,
in the ships in which they took pride.
¹⁵ I am the Lord, your Holy One,
Israel’s Creator, your King.”
- ¹⁶ This is what the Lord says —
he who made a way through the sea,
a path through the mighty waters,
¹⁷ who drew out the chariots and horses,
the army and reinforcements together,
and they lay there, never to rise again,
extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:
¹⁸ “Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.
²⁰ The wild animals honor me,
the jackals and the owls,
because I provide water in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland,
to give drink to my people, my chosen,
²¹ the people I formed for myself
that they may proclaim my praise.

Day 1

This message begins with the reminder that God is the one who has made and formed us. The image here is of a potter forming clay into something useful and beautiful. God has formed us and continues to shape us and reshape us, even in the midst of our mess! Being formed and shaped is not always an easy or comfortable process. It takes pressure. It most often happens in our moments of pain. But the good news is that God uses the pain and pressure we experience to work through us and in us.

Not only has God made and formed us, but he also speaks to us: “This is what the LORD says...”. The reminder that God has formed his people is preparation for God to speak to them, and to us.

Use your time in prayer today as a time of preparation for God to speak into your life. Think about the ways you have experienced God shaping you in the past, and then prepare your heart to allow God to continue to mold and shape you in this season.

Pray

- › God, help me to see how you have formed and shaped me, especially in my moments of pain and pressure.
- › God, help me to let go of my own plans so that I might better be formed by you and your plans for me.
- › God, please prepare my heart to hear from you. What do you have to say to me?

The first word God speaks in Isaiah 43 is a call to let go of fear. When we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory, like the Israelites in their exile and like our own modern day pandemic, fear is a natural response. God calls his people to be courage and to let go of fear, even in the unfamiliar!

We can be bold and brave, wherever we are and whatever we are facing, not because of external circumstance *but because of our eternal identity*. Our courage is grounded in our identity. God has made us his own; we belong to him. The same God who made the heavens and the earth, who knows the stars by name, who (in the words of the old song) “holds the germ within in his hand” and who will one day renew all things is the same God who has claimed us as his own. He holds all things in his hands, including us. Being in the possession and presence of God is the safest place to be. We have nothing to fear, because we belong to God. He has redeemed us. We are his.

Do not be afraid. You belong to the creator and savior of the universe.

- › God, please bring to light all the places of fear in my life.
- › God, I believe that I am yours. Will you help me know it more deeply?
- › God, when fear is pressing in, will you help my identity in you to overcome my fear?

Flood waters. Raging rivers. Fires. Flames. This sounds like it could be a description of the year we have had so far! So many of us have found ourselves in the midst of what feels like a fiery storm. God tells us that we should not be surprised when that happens. He assumes it will be part of life. “When you pass through the waters...when you walk through the fire...” Struggle and pain are not just 2020 experiences. They are human experiences, and we shouldn’t be surprised.

This verse also reminds us, however, that we also should not be surprised when we experience the presence of God with us in the midst of our pain. “I will be with you,” God says. It is in our most painful moments that God’s presence is most near to us. We may not always see it or feel it, but the truth the Scriptures proclaim again and again is that God’s presence is with us especially in our pain. So think about your struggles and pain (you likely don’t have to think very hard). How have you experienced the presence of God with you in the midst of those struggles? If you have not experienced the presence of God, what might be obscuring your view of him?

- God, thank you for my struggles and pain and the way you work through me.
- God, thank you for being with me in the midst of my struggles.
- God, will you help me to have a deeper sense of your presence with me, especially when life grows more challenging?

Again, God reminds us that we are his. Again, God calls us to not be afraid and to live in boldness. Again, God reminds us that he is present with us. Sometimes we need reminded, again. This is more than just a reminder though—it is a new hope! It is a hope grounded in our identity as children of God, and built on God's presence with us in our pain. It is a hope that calls us to no longer be afraid.

The hope and promise is that God will not allow the exile to last forever. He will not allow his people to be scattered and separated forever. One day, God will gather his people together again.

I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to the day when we can all be together again, with the pandemic in our rear view mirror. We don't know when that day will come, but one day God will bring an end to it. And more than that, we have the hope that one day God is going to bring an end to every disease, illness, and injustice and gather his people from every tribe, nation and tongue! So we live as the brave and bold people of God, trusting in his presence with us and longing for the day when God will gather us all together (both as a church family here in Morgantown) and with all our brothers and sisters spread across time and the continents.

Pray

- God, thank you for once again reminding me of who I am, of who you are, and calling me to let go of my fear.
- God, will you bring peace and blessing to our scattered church family? (Pray for individuals or families the Spirit may call to mind.)
- God, will you help me long for the day when you gather us together again? Will you bring it about soon?

Reflect

Our world has been caught off guard by what has happened over the last six months. I know I have! I don't think any of this is what we expected when we prayed for God to do what only God can do earlier this year during *Seek First*. And yet God doing what only he can do is exactly what has happened! God has been working in ways you and I could never imagine. We may not always see it, but the prophet reminds us that God is at work, and there is nothing that stands in the way of his plans. We may have been caught off guard by what has transpired this year, but Isaiah 43 reminds us that God was not. He is LORD, savior, and the ancient of days. He has all knowledge and all power, and he is at work in our midst.

Pray

- God, you are the only true and all-powerful God. Please reveal anything else in which I have placed my trust, and me help to trust only in you.
- God, help me to know you more fully and deeply.
- God, we need you to do what only you can do now more than ever. Would you work powerfully in my life, our church, and our community for your glory and our good? (Consider specific areas where you need God's power and pray for God to be at work).

Day 6

Reflect

God remind us that we can trust him to make a way for us *in the future* because he has made a way *in the past*.

Pause for a few moments right now to remember the defining moments of your life with God.

Pray

- › God, you have always made a way for me. I'm sorry for the times I have not trusted you to do it again in the face of my struggles.
- › God, will you increase my faith as I walk into an uncertain future by helping me to remember your faithfulness in the past? (Spend time thanking him for all the ways he has provided for you in your life, in both big and small ways).

Reflect

What if God has something more for us than simply going back to the good ol' days? What if he has something new for us? Something better? Something deeper, something more fulfilling, more authentic? What if God has more of himself to share with us? What if God is using this disruption to make a way for us out of the wilderness and into his promised future for us?

In Isaiah 43, the people of God were longing to go back to the life they knew before their exile. They longed for their homeland. In their exile, God assures his people that he has not forgotten them, that he has loved and will continue to love them. He reminds them of his faithfulness in the past, and calls them to not be afraid. God powerfully proclaims that he is making a way for them out of their exile and that it will not last forever. They will be gathered together again. Those are all encouraging words for us right now, but they are not the greatest promise of Isaiah 43.

The greatest promise of Isaiah 43 is the way-making God isn't just making a way *back*. Instead, the way making God is doing a *new thing*. He is calling us *forward*, pulling us ahead. In the dry and parched land of scattering and suffering, a fresh spring of God's redeeming love and infinite power is bubbling up, bringing life, joy, and peace. When God moves, it is not just to restore things to what they used to be but to renew things to become what God always intended. In the words of King Jesus in Revelation 21, he is "making everything new."

Do you perceive it? Have you experienced God moving and working? How has God been making a way for you in this wilderness? How have you seen him working in your family? In our church? In Morgantown?

- God, thank you for making a way for us out of this wilderness into the future you have prepared for us!
- God, will you help me to see, to know, and to experience the new thing you are doing in our midst?
- God, please help me to trust you enough to surrender to the work you are doing in me, in our church, and in our community (even if I don't see it right now).

Day 8

Reflect

This passage ends with another reminder of who we are. We are the people God has formed for himself. In the same image that begins chapter 43, we are given a glimpse of a God who is forming his people like a potter forms clay. And just like a potter takes the raw material to make something useful and beautiful, God forms his people for a purpose. That purpose is that we may know him and proclaim his praise in every season.

We were made for relationship and worship.

There are times when relationship with God and a praise filled response of worship flows naturally. In other seasons, it is a struggle. As we conclude this short time of prayer and fasting together, each of us find ourselves in a different place on that spectrum. Maybe it is easy to praise. Maybe you feel closer to God than you ever have before. Or perhaps you have been feeling the burden of a long season in the wilderness. Maybe you find yourself struggling to experience friendship with God.

Where ever you are and whatever your experience has been, God remains the same, yesterday, today, and forever. He is worthy of praise, and he has made a way through Jesus for us to know him, to love him, and to become like him. May we—together—as the family of God in Morgantown and beyond come to know him more deeply and praise him as does new things among us!

Pray

- God, thank you for how you have been working over this past week in me and our church.
- God, I praise you for the ways you have been working during this season, and for the work you have promised to do as you invite us into the future!
- God, will you help me to praise you with all I am and to know you more deeply?

SPACE TO REFLECT

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