

A 40 Day Journey into the New Year

Welcome back. Hey, this is Mary Ethel Eckard with Drawing Near.

I am on a journey to discover my voice through writing, speaking and living out loud. I have nothing new to say, just a new way to say things, weaving in understanding and experiences from my relationship with God and the perspective gained by walking with Him.

Though I did complete a Bible studies degree, I do not and will not sound like those who are seminary trained. That's not my background or style. I am on a journey to understand my faith, to know what I believe, and why. To be able to express my thoughts and theology in a way that clears the path for those who view Christianity as a stumbling block, an outdated religion.

For the first forty days of 2019, we will journey through the first three chapters of Genesis, learning of God's attributes and character and see how scriptures throughout the Bible confirm what we read in the first three chapters from the beginning of time.

Each day, I will add a prayer to my blog for the day, that will include the attributes or characteristics of God we discuss in this podcast. Each week, we will cover more scripture, discover more about God, and dig deeper into the Bible – both Old and New Testaments – to see how the themes are woven throughout.

Journey with me and allow the words spoken and written to saturate your heart and spirit and prepare you for the year ahead with great faith and belief in the power of God to create, change, and improve your life.

Stay with me.

Why 40 days of prayer?

In the Bible, 40 is a number used for spiritual preparation. We want to step into 2019, prepared for what the year will bring. In starting this prayer journey at the beginning of the year, we are opening our heart and spirit to God, inviting Him to prepare us for the days ahead. Here are a few examples of how the Bible shows the 40 days and nights of training and preparation.

When the earth flooded during Noah's time, the rains fell for 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7:4). God protected Noah and his family from the flood rains, while also using the time to bring judgement on the depravity of mankind. During this 40 days and nights of rainfall, God prepared Noah for the days ahead by building his faith in and understanding of who God is, His ways, and His faithfulness.

As a side note, we find in Genesis 6:3 that God gave a 120-year warning that he was going to bring judgement, and in 6:13, God instructed Noah to build an ark. We don't know exactly how long it took to construct the ark, but based on scripture, we can estimate it was between 75 and 120 years.

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He worked a long time on a project that brought on ridicule from his community, and he persevered. During the days of rainfall, I imagine He worshipped God and was in awe that – though at times he probably doubted God, he continued to work in obedience in constructing and filling the ark as God directed. As the rains poured down, his faith was solidified that God spoke, God protected, and God provided.

Moses spent 40 days with God on Mt. Sinai in receiving the ten commandments. (Exodus 34:28) These commandments were to teach the Israelites how to walk with God, revere and respect God's holiness, and live in community with one another in peace, love and safety.

After his baptism, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. (Luke 4:2) This was in preparation for Him to overcome the temptations of the world and, once victorious, step into ministry. Each of us have our time of preparation for things to come. Once the preparation period is over, the promise is delivered. In hindsight of the many things God has promised, He has often given me more than a 40-day period of waiting because it took longer to prepare me for the journey ahead.

After the death of Jesus, he returned to earth for 40 days to teach, encourage and prepare His disciples for their journey ahead.

In years past, God has called me to 40 days of prayer for certain individuals. The call was to lift them, encourage them, and prayerfully prepare the road before them. Most of the time, the individuals were unaware of this call to prayer. In these season, I journaled the prayers, as given by God. At the end of the 40 days, I sent the journals to the individuals prayed for, as an encouragement to them so they could see how God had led the prayers and how God was preparing the pathway ahead for them.

Our prayers are used by God to prepare the way forward – both for ourselves and for others. Our prayers don't always see active results but are oftentimes "stored" until the right time to be released and answered. In his book, "Intercessory Prayer", Dutch Sheets puts it like this: "Our prayers do more than just petition the Father. I've become convinced that in some situations, they actually release cumulative amounts of God's power until enough has been released to accomplish His will."

So, we pray as God prompts and leads our hearts to pray. And as we pray, we center our heart and mind on God. We do this by praise and adoration of who He is, which sets our mind on Him, takes the gaze off self. We invite Him into our midst by focusing on Him and even breathing the words, "Come Holy Spirit." We tune out the noise of life and recognize His presence that waits for us to "step in."

Let me break this down a little for the listener. Before we can praise and adore God for who He is, we first need to understand who He is. So in our 40 days of prayer, we will look through the first three chapters of Genesis and pull out some of His attributes and characteristics that we learn about at the very beginning of the earth.

For each of the 40 days, I will post a prayer on my blog that includes one or more of the attributes we cover weekly. This will help center our heart and mind on who God truly is. Not only will this impact our

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40 days of prayer but will reach through the remainder of our days if we allow this understanding to penetrate our hearts, minds and spirits.

When we invite the Holy Spirit into our prayer life, we are essentially putting our own thoughts and desires aside, and inviting Him to lead our thoughts, our words, our desires. We don't have to verbally invite Him in, but I find it helpful in opening my spirit to voice to words of invitation. God is always present, always available or us, but we are not always available to Him – our minds are busy and our spirits are closed. So I have found that, in voicing the invitation, I am reminded that He is with me.

When I say we step in to His presence, I acknowledge that it takes a mindset and certain amount of time set aside to draw near to God and to be with Him. We have to be willing to devote that time to Him and to the pursuit of Him. Again, He is always available for us – but we are not always available to Him. How do we step in? I imagine it's different for each person. For me, I tell Him how wonderful He is, I thank Him for ALL the blessings of each day, often naming them. From the smallest detail to the greatest. For example, I may begin with, "Thank you Lord that I am alive and have breath this day. You are the sustainer of life, you know the number of my days, and you have given me another day to exist on earth." In that brief prayer, I gave thanksgiving and praise to God, reminding myself that everything I am and have comes through His love and grace.

Sometimes I go through the alphabet, praying through His attributes and characteristics, to remind me of who He is. It's not to try and conjure up His presence. It's that we need to allow our spirit to open to Him, so we know we are in His presence – the presence of our Creator – the presence of the One who breathes life into us daily. As we come into His presence, our hearts are open, and we commune with Him. And we know we are in His will. How do we know this?

Prayer is God's will for us. In Luke 11, Jesus teaches us to pray the Lord's Prayer. In John 17, Jesus prays for Himself, for His disciples, and for us. He models that we are to pray for Self and others. He models we are to pray for God's will.

God desires our presence. As we step into His will in praying, our heart is open and soft toward Him and He leads us in how to pray for self and others. The Holy Spirit works our prayers out, in God's timing, and according to God's will. Our role is to continue to meet with God and seek His leading in how to pray. For self and for others.

As we begin this 40 day journey of prayer, to step into God's presence daily, let's allow Him to use these next 40 days to prepare us for 2019. I will share one prayer each week on the podcast, and post daily prayers on my blog, "40 days of prayer". You can find these at www.maryetheleckard.com. I also encourage you to start your own 40 day prayer journal so you can document how you are led to pray for this new year.

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This week we will look at God's attributes from the first four verses of Genesis 1. Let me read these verses to you.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."

Now, let me read them and point out the attributes and characteristics our prayers will cover this week:

In the beginning God.

This tells us that God is **ETERNAL**.

We find this same attribute explained further in Revelation 1:8, "I am the **Alpha and the Omega**", says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the **Almighty**." Not only is He from the beginning, the Alpha, He is also the end, the Omega. He rules the past, present and future.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It's like us saying He is our A to Z. He is our everything, from beginning to end, and our in-between.

Let's continue.

In the beginning God created.

This word, "created" tells us that God works with **PURPOSE**. He had the vision to see the earth, formed and filled, in order to display His unconditional love to people created in His image. We are each here by HIS design. No one is here by accident. Maybe by human accident, but no life is a surprise to God, and no one has ever been born who did not come without a divine purpose, plan or calling, or without unconditional love of Creator God. His vision is larger than we can universally imagine and His vision for each life rolls into the larger universal vision. We each have a part to play in God's creative vision, from before the Genesis 1:1 time began and our life extends past the new heaven and new earth in Revelations 22:21.

We are each a part of God's vision and plan – we need only lean into and inquire of Him to find and fulfill our life purpose that rolls into His grand vision and plan for all eternity. **HE IS ETERNAL GOD WITH PURPOSE**

Let's move on.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

God is **PRESENT**. His Spirit hovered over the waters, waiting to bring God's spoken word to life. We will see in verse 3 that as God spoke, the Spirit fulfilled the word.

The Holy Spirit hovers over our lives as well, waiting for God's word to be released so He can fulfill God's plan. He leads us in our daily walk and in our prayer life. When we pray in accordance with God's will, the Holy Spirit brings about the answer by creating, breathing life, and bringing God's will to pass.

He hovers over your life circumstances, over your formless, empty, dark circumstances, ready to create light out of your darkness. He does not always “fix” what is broken in accordance with our wishes, but He does intervene in our circumstances to show Himself faithful in all things. Romans 8:28 reassures us that “God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” He hovers, He stirs our lives, He waits, and He works. He creates light in our darkness and brings purpose to our emptiness. **HE IS OUR ETERNAL AND PRESENT GOD WHO WORKS WITH PURPOSE**

And finally,

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.

GOD SETS BOUNDARIES

God separated the darkness from the light, good from evil. He put boundaries in place to keep the universe in motion and guarded. We see this separation all through the Bible and in our own lives.

In the book of Job, Chapter 38, God reveals some of the complexities of the creation of the earth, raising questions for our considering of how the earth truly exists in the axis of God’s vision to separate and provide boundaries. For example, in verse 19, God asks, “What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings?”

Or another of my favorites from verse 8. “Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?’”

God set boundaries in the creation of the earth – on darkness and light, on the waters and in the earths foundations. Scripture says that as much as He cares for these things, He cares even more for us – those created in His image. (Luke 12:24)

From just these four verses in Genesis, we can easily recognize God in these six ways:

HE IS THE ALPHA AND OMEGA, OUR ETERNAL AND PRESENT GOD WHO WORKS WITH PURPOSE AND ESTABLISHS BOUNDARIES.

These six characteristics of God will be the focus of our first seven days of prayer on this 40-day journey. The first prayer is below, and can also be found on my website, www.maryetheleckard.com. I encourage to visit the website daily during these next 40 days, to pray for 2019 for both yourself and others.

Father,

As we move into 2019, may our vision be on You. Take me from self-centered living to God-centered living. Teach me to follow your ways, to see you through fresh eyes, and to know you for who you are rather than preconceived ideas established over the years. Open my understanding, increase my faith, and restore my vision. Amen.

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Remember, God's word brings hope, freedom, and peace to those who hear it. Send this podcast to someone who needs a word of encouragement today.

If you would like to support my ministry, you can do that in two ways. Order my book for yourself or for a friend. It is entitled "The making of a dragonfly, following Christ through the winds of change." It is available on Amazon, Walmart.com or barnes&noble.com. Or you can become a monthly subscriber to the podcast by tapping the link in this episode's description or visit anchor.fm/mary-ethel-eckard.

Thank you for tuning in to the show. This is Mary Ethel Eckard, signing off.