

## A Guide to Fasting and Prayer

Please take time to read and pray through this by Saturday or Sunday morning.

### Start by preparing yourself in prayer:

Jesus said in *John 15:10* *If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love.*

We can't earn God's ear by our good behaviour. But nor should we expect God to ignore our disobedience in one area, just because of our sacrifice in another area. As a disobedient child approaching a father with a request, we can expect God to ask us about what we have left undone or uncorrected.

King David put it this way: *Psalms 66:18* *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. (ESV)*

Sin hardens our heart towards God, and toward his plan for us (Hebrews 3:7-13). So we should ask God to search our hearts, and we must confess and repent of whatever sin He reveals.

*Psalms 139:23-24 (ESV)*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!*

*And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*

### Fasting and Prayer

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel would proclaim a day of fasting and prayer when they faced a terrible problem.

1 Samuel 7:6

When they gathered at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out in the LORD's presence. They fasted that day, and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel began to lead the Israelites at Mizpah as their judge.

2 Chronicles 20:1-4

1 After this, the Moabites and Ammonites, together with some of the Meunites, came to fight against Jehoshaphat. 2 People came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast multitude from beyond the Dead Sea and from Edom has come [to fight] against you; they are already in Hazazon-tamar" (that is, En-gedi). 3 Jehoshaphat was afraid, so he resolved to seek the LORD. So he proclaimed a fast for all Judah, 4 who gathered to seek the LORD. They even came from all the cities of Judah to seek Him.

Ezra 8:21-23

I proclaimed a fast by the Ahava River, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask Him for a safe journey for us, our children, and all our possessions...

### Instructions:

The point of fasting is to show the intensity of our request to God. Let the hunger pains drive you on in prayer.

When Israel would have a day of fasting, they would not do any work: they would devote the day to prayer. So when you fast, you shouldn't expect to be able to do a day's work, especially if your work is physical in nature.

Most fasting is refraining from eating food. It is best to drink water only. If you have a medical condition that makes it dangerous for you to go that length of time without eating, you can choose something else to give up. We are not asking anyone to do anything dangerous, but rather to seriously devote yourself to prayer. Instead of a complete fast, young children might be given very simple meals, so they can take part at their level of ability.

Remember, a fast is to the Lord, and not to impress people. Jesus said in *Matthew 6:16-18*

*"Whenever you fast, don't be sad-faced like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so their fasting is obvious to people. I assure you: They've got their reward! 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head, and wash your face, 18 so that you don't show your fasting to people but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

### Some thoughts on Prayer:

*James 4:2d-3*

*You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and don't receive because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend it on your desires for pleasure.*

We don't have to have just the right words or know exactly what to ask: *Romans 8:26* *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

We find a special motivation in prayer in the story of Dorcas - Acts 9:36-43.