

EZRA 8

PREPARATION GUIDE

Suggested Fast Time: Sundown Saturday, January 30th until 7pm on Sunday, January 31st

Suggested Prayer Time: Sunday, January 31 anywhere from 4-7pm (55 minute service)

View the service online at opcmilford.org/ezra8

There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

Ezra 8:21-23

The word FAST comes from a Hebrew word meaning to cover or shut the mouth. In addition to abstaining from eating food, it also implies a special silence a holy silence. In the Bible, fasting is almost always connected with prayer/worship.

FOCUS / PURPOSE:

- Personal and Corporate Confession - returning to Him, He is HOLY!
- Positioning our hearts in humility, recognizing our weakness.
- Exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spiritual.
- Be attentive and responsive to the prompting of the Spirit of God.
- Interceding for those on the front lines, leaders, families, the church, our Nation.
- Personal revival, revival in the community, and revival for the greater One Church throughout the World.
- Health and healing for all those suffering from COVID-19 and comfort for those who have lost loved ones.
- Provision, direction, unity, and God's presence this year for OPCM.

FASTING TIPS:

- To start, consecrate yourself to the Lord, ask for His help, and put on your spiritual armor. (Ephesians 6:10-18)
- Abstain from food, drink plenty of water throughout the day to stay hydrated.
- You could also fast from a meal or eat only fruits and vegetables.
- Unable to fast: Consider fasting from TV, social media, coffee, talking, etc...
- If the Holy Spirit convicts you of a sin-repent and ask forgiveness.
- If a scripture comes to mind, read it, meditate on it.
- If a person comes to mind, pray accordingly for them.

Special Note: If you are young, older, on medicine, pregnant, or have health issues, don't fast from food unless your doctor approves. Remember you are not more spiritual because you fast, it's always about the condition of the heart. We will posture our hearts together in humility and dependence upon the Lord through His Word, Prayer and Worship on January 31st and we know He will respond by meeting us!

A FEW TIPS FOR FAMILIES WITH KIDS

For families with pre-school or elementary age children:

We would LOVE for our kids to participate in this day of fasting and praying. Our kids are valuable prayer partners who can give their praise and love to God and ask for his help too! Here are a few recommendations for how to make this time effective for your family.

Fasting for Kids:

- Talk with your children in the days leading up to the fast about what fasting is: choosing not to eat or do an activity that you are used to doing (for a time), so that you can spend that time with God. Try the activity below to help them understand fasting.
- Fasting Activity:
 - Grab a cup and some sand/rice/dry beans (whatever you have at home).
 - Explain that our lives are like this cup, and we choose to fill them up with lots of things.
 - As you add sand/rice/beans to the cup (filling close to the top) talk about some of the things that we fill our lives with (school, work, sports, games, friends, toys etc.).
 - Ask the kids how much room they see in the cup for God.
 - Explain that sometimes life can become so busy and full that there is no room for God! So fasting is about taking some of the things out of our lives for a time, to make room for us to be with God and hear from him.
- Talk over some of these fasting options or brainstorm your own.
 - Fast from snacks-feed children three meals but skip snacks for the day.
 - Fast from sugary foods.
 - Fast from digital media for the day (no tv., video games, etc.)
 - Replace the activity or thing you are fasting from with reading God's word with your child that day.
- Decide together what your family's fast will look like.

Prayer time with Kids:

We are going to use the ACTS model to pray during the Ezra 8 event. You can talk to your kids ahead of time about what each letter in ACTS stands for.

Adoration: This is when we show a lot of love for God! We can do this in prayer by telling God just how awesome he is and why! *Example: "I praise God for..."*

Confession: When we tell God about the ways we have messed up or sinned. We also recognize that we will continue to mess up and sin, and that we need God and his forgiveness. *Example: "I'm sorry for..."*

Thanksgiving: When we say THANK YOU GOD for the ways we see you loving us and giving us good gifts in our lives. *Example: "I'm thankful for..."*

Supplication: When we ask God to be with us or help us in our lives in specific ways. *Example: "I ask God for..."*

Final Tips:

- Prayer with kids does not need to be long, and can happen many times throughout the day, reminding them that God is always there with them and for them.
- Consider praying with your child throughout the day of the fast, whenever they want a snack/tv/ whatever item you are fasting from.
- Show your child the activity page and talk them through how they can use it to write or draw what they are praying for during the Ezra 8 event.
- Encourage your child to be present during the event and to pray along with you as they use their activity page. They can expect to see a familiar face!