

EZRA 8

PREPARATION GUIDE

Suggested Fast Time: Sundown Saturday, February 4th until 5:30 pm on Sunday, February 5th

Suggested Prayer Time: Sunday, February 5 from 4:00-5:30 pm (90 minutes) in person at the OPCM Auditorium, or online at opcilmilford.org/live

Ezra 8:21-23 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.

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

FOCUS:

- Personal and corporate confession - returning to Him, He is HOLY!
- Positioning our hearts in humility, recognizing our weakness.
- Allowing our physical needs to highlight our spiritual needs.
- Be attentive and responsive to the prompting of the Spirit of God.
- Interceding for the spiritual health of our church, community, nation, and world.
- Encouragement and healing for all of those physically suffering in our midst.
- Provision, direction, unity, and God's presence this year for OPC|M.

FASTING TIPS:

- Fasting can look a lot of different ways, for example you could: refrain from food entirely, refrain from just one meal, or refrain from anything else that is significant to you - Just make sure to drink plenty of water to stay hydrated during this time. If you're unable to fast from food, consider fasting from TV, social media, coffee, talking, etc. If you have any health issues, please consult your doctor before fasting. Remember you are not more spiritual because you fast, it's always about the condition of the heart.
- As you begin, present yourself to the Lord and ask for His help as you pray.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and mind, and simply confess any known sin to the Lord. He is faithful and just to forgive us (1John 1:9).
- If a particular scripture comes to mind, read it and pray over it.
- If a particular person comes to mind, pray for them.

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.

- **A**doration: 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..."
- **C**onfession: 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..."
- **T**hanksgiving: 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..."
- **S**upplication: 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.