

EZRA 8

A GUIDE TO PRAYER & FASTING

TIPS FOR PRAYER & FASTING

Suggested Fast Time:

From sundown on Saturday, February 1st until 5:00 pm on Sunday, February 2nd

Suggested Prayer Time:

Anytime Sunday, February 2nd

About Ezra 8

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 for prayer and fasting:

- 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 OPCIM.

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 PRAYER & FASTING

PRAYER TIME: This guide will use the ACTS model to guide your time in prayer. We encourage you to gather with your family (tips for families with kids are below), LifeGroup, or with a smaller group of people to pray together.

- 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..."

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.

Final Tips for praying and fasting with Kids:

- 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.

GUIDED PRAYER USING A.C.T.S MODEL

ADORATION: Spend 8-10 minutes praising God for who He is according to his attributes.

- Start by reading Psalm 145 together
- Then move into a time of prayer praising God. Choose an attribute of God from Psalm 145, or use the list of attributes provided to you at the end of this guide.
- **For example:** “God, we praise you that you are the Good Shepherd who takes such good care of us. You watch over us and guide us.”

CONFESSION: Spend 3-5 minutes silently (or out loud) confessing personal and corporate sin to the God who forgives.

- Confession to God reminds us of our need of the gospel and reminds others that they are not alone as we battle against sin.
- Start by someone reading: “Holy Spirit, search our hearts and help us to repent of anything that is displeasing to You.”
- **Examples of confession:** Forgive us for worrying and not trusting you. Forgive us for listening too lightly and judging too quickly. Forgive us for being quick to complain and slow to worship. Forgive us for when we are not wise with our time. Forgive us when we are selfish and petty. Forgive us for when we are not generous to others with our time, talent, treasure....

THANKSGIVING: Spend 5-8 minutes giving thanks to God for what He has done.

- Start by someone praying: “Father, we thank You for the forgiveness of our sins, and now we want to thank You for answered prayers and for ways you have provided for us.”
- Be specific. Thank him for how he has been at work in your life and for how he has provided for you, your family, and our church.

SUPPLICATION: Spend 30-40 minutes presenting our needs to God and asking him for help. We have provided a list of things you can pray through for our church, our community, our nation, and our world. This is not an exhaustive list, so pray as God leads you! Finish by praying for yourselves.

Philippians 4:6-7

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God”

Ephesians 3:20

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us”

Pray for Our Church

- Kids: Ask God to help our kids know him and trust him with their lives, and for deepening faith for those that already know him.
- Students: Pray for our students to know God deeply and personally. There are so many things around them that try to pull their affections and attentions away from the God who loves them and has a plan for them. Pray that God would protect them from those false idols and fill them with joy in Him alone.
- Men: Pray for men to accept their responsibility to lead their homes, for them not to be afraid of accountability, and for God to bless their obedience. Pray for leaders to follow the Lord and make decisions based on his will.
- Women: Pray that each woman would grow in knowing, believing, and living in God's deep, all-satisfying, never wavering love for them. Pray that women would be intentional to build friendships with others pursuing Christ. Pray that OPCM women would be salt and light to the people around them at home, work, and in the community.
- Timothy's: Pray for endurance, steadfastness, and that we would continue to have a great burden for the lost. Pray for us to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit and for us to trust in his power to change people. The workers for the harvest are found in the harvest, so would God lead us to those people. Pray that we would step into all opportunities with great boldness and faith showing the love of Christ.
- Young Adults: That they would seek the Lord in all areas of their lives (school, career, relationships, identity etc.), and that as they do so, their faith and trust in the Lord would deepen.
- Elders: Pray for OPCM Elders to care well for our church family-with hearts in step with the Lord/Spirit and capacity and wisdom provided by the Lord.
- Church Staff: Pray for church staff to be filled by the Lord and to serve from an overflow of what he provides.
- Pastors: Pray for rest, wisdom, and that they would continue to abide in the Lord and grow in their knowledge and love of God.
- Pastors' wives and family: Pray for health, protection from the enemy, and encouragement from the Lord as they walk alongside their spouse/parent.
- Church Family: Ask God to grow our faith as a community-that we would have unity together as we put our trust solely in the Lord, and that he would make our path straight. Would we be quick to give grace and forgive one another as we ourselves have been forgiven.
- Church Addition: Pray for our building project to go smoothly, that God would provide for the needs that come up, and that God would bless those from the community who work on this project through relationships here at OPCM.

Pray for Our Community

- Pray that God would lead us in our engagement with the community-that we would bring joy in all of our interactions because of the hope we have in Jesus.
- The Vulnerable: Pray for protection for those who are struggling against abuse, neglect, and mistreatment in this broken world, specifically in our community. Pray for protection, care, and for us to have the eyes to see people who are hurting the way God sees them.
- Pray for the schools in our community. Pray they are a safe place for children to grow and learn. And pray for those making decisions and leading within our schools.
- Pray for those struggling with depression and anxiety in our community. We pray you would bring freedom, hope, and peace.
- Neighbors: Pray for good relationships with those who live around you. Ask God for opportunities to be a blessing to them and to get to know them. Be specific and pray for your neighbors!

Pray for Our Nation

- Pray against fear for our country (leaders and residents) regardless of political affiliation, for God to reveal himself to each person, and for us to walk in his ways.
- Pray for those affected by the California wildfires. Pray for provision and care in their physical and emotional needs. May the God of compassion shower them with his grace and provide in abundance for their needs.
- Pray for those leading our country. Pray God will lead them, sustain them, and give them the ability to make wise decisions that lead to the good of all people.
- Service men and women: Pray for protection and encouragement as they serve our country.

Pray for Our World

- Missionaries abroad: Pray for missionaries as well as those persecuted for their faith in other parts of the world to experience God's provision and encouragement.
- Peace: Pray for our world-that God would bring peace to the many conflicts going on and would transform our human hearts to desire his peace. Pray for those who are suffering due to war and conflict, that God would be near to them as they walk through what feels impossible.
- Those around the world who don't know God: Pray for God to draw people's hearts to him. Pray for each of us to walk in step with the spirit and to share God's light with those God has placed in our daily lives.

Revival: God, we ask you would bring revival in our hearts, church, community, and world. May we walk forward into 2025 with You at the center of our lives.

Not sure what to say to God in prayer?

Sometimes the hardest part of praying is thinking of something to say when our minds feel shut and confused, and that's okay! Sometimes using the words of other brothers and sisters in the faith can be a great way to process through our prayer time with God. Here are just a couple prayers given by some of God's people through the years, you can make the words your own and pray them back to God. Let them be a supplemental resource for you to have in your personal or group prayer time with the Lord.

Prepare Me to Seek You

(A prayer of preparation and confession)

O Lord, teach me to pray, that I may call upon your name. Prepare my heart to seek, and open your ears mercifully to hear me.

Almighty and eternal Lord God, you are the Creator and Continual Preserver of all things, both in heaven and earth. By our gracious providence I was at first fearfully and wonderfully made, and even now you keep me and preserve me.

I am the workmanship of your hands, and I desire to humble both soul and body before your heavenly majesty.

So here in your presence, Lord, I confess my own unworthiness to come before you, to call upon you, or to perform the least duty that will concern your worship and glory.

Because my heart is polluted and unclean, I beg you to be gracious to me for Jesus Christ your Son's sake. For the sake of His promise, truth and mercy, have mercy upon me.

Pardon and forgive all the sins, iniquities, and trespasses I have ever committed against you, in what I have said or what I have done. Amen.

-Robert Parker (Around 1600 AD)

We Set Our Hope in Your Name

(A Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving)

Help us to set our hope on your name, Lord. You are the origin and source of all creation. You open the eyes of our hearts so we can know you.

You alone abide highest in the lofty place. You are holy in the holy. You lay low the insolence of the proud, set the lowly on high, and bring down the lofty. You make rich and poor, give life and death. You alone are the benefactor of spirits and the God of all flesh.

You look into the deepest places and see all our works. You help and relieve those who are in peril, and you are the savior of those in despair. You are the creator and overseer of every spirit.

You multiply the nations and have chosen out all who love you through Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, through whom you taught us, honored us, and set us apart. Amen.

-Clement of Rome (Around 96 AD, widely regarded as the earliest recorded Christian prayer outside of Scripture)

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Attentive: God hears and responds to the needs of His children.

Compassionate: God cares for His children and acts on their behalf.

Creator: God made everything. He is uncreated.

Deliverer: God rescues and saves His children.

Eternal: God is not limited by and exists outside of time.

Faithful: God always keeps His promises.

Generous: God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

Glorious: God displays His greatness and worth.

Good: God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

Holy: God is perfect, pure and without sin.

Incomprehensible: God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

Infinite: God has no limits in His person or on His power.

Immutable/Unchanging: God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Jealous: God will not share His glory with another. All glory rightfully belongs to Him.

Just: God is fair in all His actions and judgments. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

Loving: God feels and displays infinite unconditional affection toward His children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD (Continued)

Merciful: God does not give His children the punishment they deserve.

Omnipotent/Almighty: God holds all power. Nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.

Omnipresent: God is fully present everywhere.

Omniscient: God knows everything, past, present and future, all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

Patient/Long-suffering: God is untiring and bears with His children.

Provider: God meets the needs of His children.

Refuge: God is a place of safety and protection for His children.

Righteous: God is always good and right.

Self-existent: God depends on nothing and no one to give Him life or existence.

Self-sufficient: God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

Sovereign: God does everything according to His plan and pleasure. He controls all things.

Transcendent: God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

Truthful: Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

Wrathful: God hates all unrighteousness.

Wise: God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

Worthy: God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

**This list of attributes and their definitions is a resource provided by The Village Church in Texas.*