

Fasting, What is it, and Why do we do it?

“Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.” (Ezra 8:21–23, ESV)

The setting is the Persian Empire, which in Ezra’s day had recently overthrown Babylon, the kingdom that destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC and took captive the people of God (2 Kings 25). As it did with other people groups, Persia allowed the Israelites to go back to their homeland, and Ezra went back to enact various religious reforms ([Ezra 7:1–8:20](#)). Traveling on the roads was not very safe back then. Thieves and bandits often waited to ambush caravans, and in the particular case of the Jews, there were neighbors who would have been all too happy to assault Ezra and his band of returning exiles (see [Neh. 4:7–8](#)). This put Ezra and his caravan in a precarious position, especially since no royal guard accompanied them back. So Ezra proclaimed a fast, and the Lord answered, giving the people a safe journey to Jerusalem

Other Scriptures on Fasting: *Judges 20:26; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Esther 4:15–16; Acts 13:1–3*

So, what so special about fasting?

- Fasting is a spiritual discipline associated with prayer
- Fasting is primarily going without food for a period of time, signifying helplessness and causing us to remember how we must rely on God’s grace in every situation
- Fasting acknowledges the desperate situation in which God’s people find themselves and our need to show our utter dependence on God’s kindness
- Fasting further aids us to implore the Lord for help with all our hearts, without the normal distractions of life.
- Fasting reminds us of our creatureliness and moves us to learn better what it means to depend on our Creator, thereby glorifying His name.

Note: This is not to say that fasting guarantees God would respond favorably, for fasting is not done in hopes of binding the Lord to a certain course of action. **John Piper** explains: “[Fasting] is not first offered to God that we might be paid back because of it. It is first given by God that we might benefit from it and that he might be glorified through it” (A Hunger for God, p. 177).

Remember: *“Fasting places no obligation upon the sovereign God to respond in a way we have asked. Yet He does take special delight in us when we show our helplessness in fasting, and He will respond by giving us a greater knowledge of Himself, a deep sense of our dependence on His grace, and maybe even the specific request we bring to Him. Perhaps we would see the Lord move more mightily in the church if we fasted more often.” (RC Sproul)*

Fasting Prayer Ideas:

- **Pray for the world:** repentance, healthcare, their leaders

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- **Pray for our country:** for our leaders/decision makers, for people to follow directives appropriately, for unification in the midst of this chaotic time, our economy, businesses forced to close, people who have been laid off
- **Pray for the coronavirus:** for those who are sick, for the reduced spread of it, for treatment to be effective, for the ability of our healthcare system to handle those become ill
- **Pray for healthcare workers/necessary supplies:** God would multiply workers, meds, ventilators, etc
- **Pray for the children:** while they are not the most at risk, they are greatly affected by school closures, quarantines, lack of socialization, and the fear and manic many adults are experiencing. Pray for parents in general to lead with wisdom.
- **Pray for the church:** Our staff, elders and deacons; wisdom in how to move forward
- **Pray that in all this God would be glorified:** that we believers can show his love and our faith in Him to all our neighbors, friends and co-workers. that people would come to know Him because of this
- **Praise:** that God is in control, that our country seems to be taking strides in getting ahead of this, that we have good healthcare

Fasting Practical Considerations:

- Fast from sunup to sundown every Monday until this is all over
- Keep hydrated especially if you children to run after
- This is not suggested for those pregnant or nursing, and in this case probably those immunocompromised and the elderly because they are already at greater risk
 - Fasting could also look differently for this group, encourage fasting in whatever way the Lord lays upon their heart. That sacrificing something and filling it with prayer is the goal.
 - Young kids could fast from snacks?
- Set a timer to stop and pray every hour no matter what you're doing
- Get the whole family/kids involved by taking turns praying

Meditate/pray on scriptures relevant to this situation (Psalm 121, Joel 2:12-14 and Psalm 46, but there is no end to the possibilities here)