



# REMOVING THE **HIGH PLACES**

**21 Days of Prayer & Fasting Guide**

Dear Partners,

In January 2010, Clearpoint Church embarked on a *21-Day Prayer and Fasting Journey* that profoundly changed our lives. We have continued to make corporate prayer and fasting a regular practice at the beginning of each year. We invite you to come along with us in January 2023, as we seek the Lord together through prayer, fasting, and personal devotion to Him.

Participating in the *21-Day Prayer and Fasting Journey* is a great way to reset your spiritual compass and experience a fresh and new commitment to God in every area of your life. To prepare and inform you for the fast, this guide will answer many questions about fasting and provides a 21-Day Calendar to follow for each day. The 21 Days begins Sunday, January 15th. We break the fast, Sunday, February 5th.

I believe a 21-Day commitment to Fasting and Prayer will provide a whole new experience for you in your walk with Christ and His Body.

May God continue to bless you and us as you seek Him!

In This Together!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Lambert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "L".

Brian Lambert  
Lead Pastor

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### MY FASTING NOTES

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## ALL ABOUT FASTING

As we begin this *21-Day Prayer and Fasting Journey* together, there are a few questions we must answer in order to understand fasting and why it is essential to our walk with God. These answers will also encourage us all to continue faithfully to the finish line....Day 21!

**QUESTION #1: WHAT IS FASTING? (WE DO THE DANIEL FAST.** *We recommend the following websites for more information: [Daniel-fast.com](http://Daniel-fast.com); [ultimatedanielfast.com](http://ultimatedanielfast.com))*

Fasting is setting aside a specific amount of time to go without food in order to pray. The purpose is not to starve yourself and the goal is not to lose weight. It is an intentional time of pursuing God to fill a spiritual hunger rather than eating food to fill a physical hunger. It is denying your physical desire for food in order to pray and connect with God to meet a spiritual need. It might not make a lot of sense, but it is a powerful! Jesus never commanded it, but it was certainly expected that His followers would fast and pray.

*Matthew 6:16-18 says, “when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (ESV)”*

### QUESTION #2: WHAT DOES FASTING DO?

#### 1. Fasting expresses our hunger for God

- We express to God “food is good, but you are better.”
- It helps restore our focus from ourselves and the good things God places in our lives to the giver of those good things.
- God remains greater than anything and everything else in our lives.

#### 2. Fasting makes our hearts tender toward God and helps us find our “satisfaction” in Him

- John Piper once said: “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him.”
- The discipline of fasting is something that can bring us to that place of satisfaction.

#### 3. Fasting exposes the heart

- Richard Foster says: “More than any other thing, fasting reveals the things that control us.”
- It reveals what is really inside.
- It can reveal to us the things that are holding us back.
- It can expose the one thing that is reinforcing that barrier between us and God.

Fasting can be extremely overwhelming. What can I eat? What can I not eat? Can I have this? Can I have that? These are questions that bombard our minds when we break from our normal eating routine. The struggle is ok. In fact, it’s good as long as our motivation for staying true to the fast isn’t rooted in guilt!

## WHAT FASTING DOES NOT DO

- 1. Fasting does not motivate God to love you any more than He already does.**
  - God says in I Peter 2:9 that we are chosen by Him and are already His treasured possession! He already loves you as much as He possibly can!
- 2. Fasting does not make God enjoy you any more or any less.**
  - God already enjoys you. In fact, He delights in you! In Zephaniah 3:17 God says that He already exalts over us with shouts of joy!
- 3. Fasting does not put you on a “fast track” plan to a righteousness and holiness.**
  - God has already made us righteous, holy, and blameless through Christ’s finished work on the Cross.
  - We don’t fast to get more of God, but that we would experience, in a more profound way, the reality of God’s presence in our lives.
- 4. Fasting is not a trade-off with God for His forgiveness.**
  - We fast because He has already forgiven us! The Apostle Paul said our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ! (Ephesians 1:7)
- 5. Fasting is not a replacement for obedience.**
  - Some people fast as penance believing their fasting will somehow balance out their disobedience. But our relationship with God is not based on law, it’s based on grace....not of works, lest we become boastful and prideful and rob God of His glory. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Sometimes, when we are not walking intimately with God, the inward reality of our faith begins to fade, and we retreat to the outward forms of the faith like fasting. It never works! The bottom line is that whenever we embrace a spiritual discipline in order to get God to love us, to find satisfaction in us, or to forgive us, we have completely missed the point! As you fast, set yourself free! Don’t fast under the belief that God is going to develop a greater approval of you because of your sacrifice. Fast in freedom, with a holy desire to give more of yourself to God!

### **PRAYER**

As you prepare for the next 21 days, it can be tempting to start thinking of a laundry list of prayers you would love to see answered. Fight that temptation and keep this simple. Think about two or three things most pressing on your heart and zone in on those with God. Write these down in the space provided below and be open to hearing what God wants to show you in those areas. The breakthroughs, miracles and answers to your prayers will be by-products of drawing closer to Jesus.

When praying, make your primary goal to know Jesus and experience His presence deeper than ever before. Pray prayers of total surrender and aim to glorify God with your life. Focus first on what is right about Him, such as His goodness and His greatness. Determine to see everything else through that filter. And, make time to pray daily. Do not overcomplicate this! Just talk to God. Have that place and time where you can seek Him every day. If you do not plan to pray, you won’t. If you find it a challenge to disconnect from the busyness of your day, engaging in worship music is a great way to prepare your heart for prayer.

**During this fast, we are corporately (together as a church body) praying for:**

- 1. Holiness:** High Places torn down, Strongholds broken, and broken places healed.
- 2. Empowerment:** Living in victory and being used by God for His Kingdom mission & purpose.
- 3. Community & Connection:** Actively connecting with others for accountability, strength, and impact.

**Others you are personally praying for:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## WHAT ABOUT KIDS?

### Should my children participate in the fast?

We believe it is a great idea for the **entire family** to set aside time each year to specifically and intensely focus on the most important thing in our lives, our relationship with Christ. Consider the information below as you pray and decide how your family, including your children, can participate as a collective part of the Clearpoint Church Fast.

### Why should children participate?

#### 1. To help children learn what is most important in life

Life can get very busy and if we don't purposefully slow down and set aside time to focus on strengthening our relationship with the Lord and modeling that importance for our children, they may believe other, more time-consuming things in our families' lives matter more. Be intentional about this. Set aside time to focus on what your relationship with Jesus means to you, in hopes that your devotion to Christ will become a part of your legacy for future generations. Learning the importance of Christ in our lives can serve as a firm foundation that will provide stability in your children's future.

#### 2. Self-control should be practiced.

It can be so easy to become super self-focused. We live in a society of convenience and can become frustrated if we have to wait too long for our fries at the drive thru. We can develop an attitude of expectation and of constant satisfaction if we are not careful. Our lives can be driven and consumed by our desires to get what we want. This is reflected in the pace and mindset of the culture in which we live and interact daily. Fasting can help our children learn to practice self-control, to say "no" to self, to slow down, to focus on pleasing Christ more than pleasing self. Self-control and delayed gratification are life skills that will serve our children well in their futures.

#### 3. Develop life-long disciplines

Prayer, Bible Study, listening to God, giving, and fasting are spiritual disciplines which should be an ongoing part of the lives of all believers. Our children are not going to reach their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and begin to devote themselves to these disciplines. They must be trained along the way as a part of our investment in their spiritual lives. Just as we nurture our children by providing physical food, we must nurture our children by providing spiritual food. If we want our children to have a life-long commitment to prayer, we must lead them and teach them to pray. If we want them to have a life-long commitment to read, study, and depend on the Word of God, we must read the Word to them, allow them to see us reading and valuing scripture. We should quote, teach, and equip our children with scripture and lead them to meditate upon and memorize scripture. If we want to help our children depend upon Christ for leadership throughout life, we must teach and train them to listen to the voice of God. If we want our children to have the heart of *blessors*, we must allow them to see us bless others, and encourage them to be givers. We should provide opportunities for them to give sacrificially, to bless others and to give to those in need. If we want our children to devote their life to Christ and seek to know Him more, we must model and lead our children in the spiritual discipline of fasting. Our children should know what fasting is, why we participate, and how we expect God to move as we purposefully deny ourselves to give Him more of ourselves.



## How should children participate in the fast?

As parents, pray and listen to God as you contemplate how to participate in the fast. He will speak to you! Give your children options you feel are meaningful, safe, and appropriate. Allow children some ownership in the decision they make as they consider and pray thru how they should participate in the fast. Children can begin to participate as soon as they begin to have a concept of God, as early as age 4 to 5. Celebrate every move toward developing spiritual disciplines. Lead your children in this area with loving encouragement. If they set a goal, encourage them toward it. If the goal they set was too difficult, love them and help them consider what led to missing the goal and how they can participate differently. We encourage you to resist the temptation to quit and encourage your children not to quit! Make adjustments, if necessary, but deeply ponder and consider the ramifications of quitting the fast before the corporate dates are fulfilled. Not only is the surrender to the fast meaningful to you and your family, but also the corporate devotion as a church body is “something bigger” that God calls us to be a part of as the BODY of Christ. Provide guidance but allow for choice as your children consider God’s will for their lives. It may surprise you how spiritually mature they are becoming! Below is a list of ideas and testimonies. These are only suggestions to help you begin to think about how your children can participate. Please know we are praying for each of you and your families as we embark upon this important journey of faith, together. **We would never force or coerce our children to participate but offer ideas and allow them to choose within guidelines we feel are safe and age appropriate.**

1. Very young children (4-7) can give up TV and electronics time and/or a favorite toy. When the child asks to play with the toy set aside during the fast or to watch TV, (or during the day’s normal TV/electronic time) encourage them to pray and read their Bible and remind them about their commitment choice. Our family loves *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones (it is great for children and adults!) If Bible reading time is not a practice you have yet developed as a family, this may be a great time to begin! Let your children hear and see you praying and studying God’s word. Use your participation in the fast as a time to talk to them about the food you are eating and not eating and why. Share with them the story of Daniel. This can be a great time to teach children about the sacrifices we make, and the sacrifice God made on our behalf. Keep the time positive and encouraging, your children should not feel as if they are being punished, but rather choosing to make a sacrifice for something better! I bet they will LOVE Bible time with mom and/or dad as much or more than they loved their toy, device, or TV program. Begin planting the seeds of faith early and watch with amazement as they grow and blossom!
2. Children (8-14) can give up some food or food for one day under your leadership. Our children began giving up food for a day as early as 8 years of age and have changed their involvement each year. They decided how they wanted to participate, discussed their ideas with us and prayed about their involvement leading up to the fast. For example, Saturday may be a good day to fast all food, drink juice and have a glass of milk or a protein drink before bedtime. They may choose to fast from meat, sugar, or drink only water for 21 days. They may choose to make every Saturday a juice only day. Fasting can be scary! Teaching your children early can give them amazing confidence as they obey and dedicate themselves to the development of spiritual disciplines. You may wonder if it was hard as parents to witness our young children hungry and in need of food. It was very difficult, but also helped us better understand the heart of God as we fast as adults. It helped us admire our children for their strength, devotion, and determination to develop this spiritual discipline. It made our hearts move toward our children deeper than before as we wanted to bless them for their sacrifice and encourage them in their struggle. In all of this, we learned even better how God’s heart is moved toward us as we

fast. Children need to learn coping skills to deal with disappointment, discomfort, and struggle. Fasting is a great time to develop those skills.

3. Our children began participating FULLY in the fast as early as 14. It was very difficult to see our daughter going off to school for an entire day with nothing but a bottle of juice in her backpack knowing she had PE and other very difficult tasks to complete in the day as a growing, maturing young lady. It strengthened our prayer lives as we interceded hourly on her behalf. Literally, every time I struggled with hunger or weakness, I prayed for my daughter that her pain would be manageable. The interventions of God were nothing short of miraculous as she would come home and report the PE Coach was absent on the juice only days, so she did not have to work out or that the test had been postponed when she had been too tired and too weak to study as much as she wanted the night before. We began to realize how much it pleased God when we have a heart to deny ourselves to make more of Him in our lives! This is His plan, and he miraculously applauded and encouraged our child as she did the hard work of fasting. All of our faith grew as we celebrated the “wins” together and were amazed at how much God loved on us in the midst of our very real struggles.
4. Another great way to participate is by sacrificing something we want in order to bless others we feel led to bless or others we witness in need. For example, a child might donate their allowance or birthday money to the children’s ministry, give to their favorite mission project, purchase a gift for a single mother or give a gift to someone they have a heart to bless and encourage. The key to giving must be **sacrifice**. The child should give up something of personal value to bless someone else. This is also a great area in which we can lead our children. If God leads you to give a gift to someone, share that with your children as a step of obedience in your life and teach them about your struggles, victories, and the great blessing of being a vessel of giving that God can use to bless others.

We hope these thoughts and ideas will provide guidance and encouragement as you consider your family’s involvement in the fast. We believe we have been gifted to be a part of the family of God in the household of Clearpoint Church. It is our heart that all of God’s children would participate in some level during the fast this year. If you are new to Clearpoint, young in your faith, or just afraid of fasting, know we are praying for you and encourage you to start somewhere! If you need to start with some of the ideas for children and your entire family give up technology and/or TV, then begin there. If you are more mature in your faith, go ALL in and watch God supply all your needs and meet you in your want. He is faithful and will complete the work He is beginning in you this day. If you have particular needs or if you need encouragement, feel free to call, email, Facebook message, or stop by. We are in this together and look forward with eager anticipation to the amazing work God is going to do in His family of faith!

# Fasting Calendar

<b>Plan your fasting week</b>	<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
<i>Use this area of your fasting calendar to choose what days of the week you will fast and what each day will look like.</i>	<p><b>Day 1</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 3</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 4</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 5</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 6</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 7</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>
<i>This is a sample of what one variation of the Daniel Fast can look like and may include soy protein. You may also choose to exclude legumes &amp; whole grains altogether &amp; eat only fruits, vegetables &amp; water (&amp; soy protein)</i>	<p><b>Day 8</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 9</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 10</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 11</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 12</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 13</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 14</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>
<i>Some people also choose to modify their overall fasting plan to end with a special 3 day fast as indicated here. Again, these are just samples of what your fasting plan can look like.</i>	<p><b>Day 15</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 16</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 17</b> Fruits, Vegetables &amp; water/Day</p> <p>Dinner- include legumes &amp; whole grains</p>	<p><b>Day 18</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 19</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 20</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>	<p><b>Day 21</b> Juices &amp; Water/ All Day</p>



## FASTING INFORMATION & DEVOTIONS



Fasting Info: [www.clearpointchurch.org/fast](http://www.clearpointchurch.org/fast)



Devotions: [www.clearpointchurch.org/blog](http://www.clearpointchurch.org/blog)



[www.facebook.com/clearpointchurch](http://www.facebook.com/clearpointchurch)



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## FASTING QUESTIONS



Phone: 281.991.9700



Email: [fasting@clearpointchurch.org](mailto:fasting@clearpointchurch.org)

# Pre-Fast Lessons

## Pre-Fast Lesson #1: You Can't Fast and Eat!

Text: II Corinthians 10:5

By Heather Lambert

*“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (II Corinthians 10:5)*

For the past 13 years, I have committed to do the 21 day fast with the people of Clearpoint. Each year has revealed new and different struggles in my heart and life and produced new and different breakthroughs. I want to tell you about the huge breakthrough I experienced fasting in the very first year. When Brian approached me about the idea of the 21 day fast, I wish I could say I embraced the idea. I did not. (That resistant spirit should have been the first clue to me that God wanted to do a major work in my life through fasting and the enemy wanted to keep his strongholds.) I remember reluctantly committing to the fast saying, “Fine, it won’t even be hard for me, I don’t struggle with food.” Well, I was eating those words before the end of the first 24 hours!

Fasting is hard! Harder than I ever imagined. It takes discipline, commitment, and mental strength. It takes constantly taking every single thought and hunger pain captive and beating it into subjection to Christ and his desire for us to develop as spiritual warriors with great strength. II Corinthians 10:5 is a scripture I held to and recited numerous times daily. It teaches, *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*

I had to admit it, I was struggling. I was afraid this just wasn’t going to work for me. My mind began to grow weaker and weaker. I justified the idea of quitting. People who fasted in Biblical times did not have the demands of current life schedules, I thought. I had lost over 20 pounds and my thoughts were starting to get very foggy. I was working over 40 hours a week, going to grad school, parenting, and fulfilling obligations. I needed my strength! In my desperation, I found myself sitting on a stool in my pantry. Reasoning with myself turned into prayer and justifying myself to God.

One of the greatest things about fasting is creating space and developing the discipline to listen to God. Creflo Dollar says, “Prayer is simply communicating with God. It is not a monologue where you’re the only one talking. It is a dialog where you’re talking to God and he’s talking back to you.” In that pantry, in my time of weakness and desperation, I had a great conversation with God. I was trying to devise a way to satisfy the letter of the law and continue the fast and to eat. I remember asking God if I put some crackers in the blender and added some water and blended them up finely, made them liquid, then would I still be keeping to the fast? (I told you I was desperate for food.) I remember the Lord clearly saying to me, “Eat. I will love you no more if you continue the fast and no less if you break the fast.” That moment, that revelation unlocked some performance-based idea of love of Christ and set me free. God loves me completely no matter my actions! His love is not dependent on my goodness, but His. Then, the Lord said, “But you can’t eat and fast.” I was instantly reminded of Matthew 6:24, “No one can **serve two masters**, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You **cannot serve** God and money.” In my case, I could not serve God and my comfort or my food. For the first time in my walk with Christ, I wanted to serve him out of LOVE, not out of obligation or expectancy. I cried out to him for strength, left the place of temptation in the pantry and fellowshiped in my new understanding of a God who loves me, perfectly!



## Pre-Fast Lesson #2: Return to Me

Text: Joel 2:12

By Brian Lambert

*Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (Joel 2:12, NKJV)*

If we look at the kind of fasting that took place in the Old Testament, it would be easy to assume that the reason we fast is to prove our repentance to God in order to obtain His mercy. Under the Old Covenant, a fast of repentance is seen time and time again. But now, because of the complete work of Jesus on the cross, things have changed.

Fasting is not something we do to obtain favor or forgiveness. Under the New Covenant, every wrong thing we have done and will do was forgiven at the Cross, and when we accept Christ as our Savior, we get to celebrate the mercy freely given to us through our relationship with Him. Fasting is about drawing closer to God and surrendering at a deeper level.

As we walk with God, there are times that we feel far from Him or disconnected. Joel's words resonate with us even if we live in the context of grace: "Return to me with all your heart." There are times we realize that though we have chosen to follow Jesus, the flame of our love for Him has grown cold.

Your time spent in prayer each day of the fast can result in a rich and rewarding connection with the Father. No matter where you are on your journey with Jesus, you can always take a step closer to Him.

***Quote: I believe the power of fasting as it relates to prayer is the spiritual atomic bomb that our Lord has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil and usher in a great revival and spiritual harvest around the world. – Bill Bright***

**Prayer Focus:** As we begin this time of prayer and fasting, let's turn our hearts toward God. Make a commitment to seek Him daily. Pray that your love for Christ will be increased and your passion for Him will be reignited over the next twenty- one days.

### **Pre-Fast Lesson #3: False Beliefs about Fasting**

*Text: Philippians 4:11-13; Mark 2:18-20*

*By Heather Lambert*

Two great lies can keep you from committing to begin and complete the 21 days of prayer and fasting.

#### **1. It is too hard; I can't do it.**

**In Philippians 4:11-13 Paul teaches about the attitude of an overcomer, he says, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."**

Through beatings, imprisonments, and all kinds of difficulty, Paul had found contentment. Even in times of hunger he learned how to depend on the strength given by Christ. I believe we can especially learn to depend on Christ in the difficult times, including the times of hunger. It creates space for God to do a great work in you. Romans 8:35-37 teaches that we don't just have spiritual strength through Christ, but that we can do more than overcome. God intends for us to live a blessed fulfilled life as victors. The scriptures teach, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." This important passage is not teaching us that life will be easy, in fact it is teaching us to expect difficulty. However, those difficult times don't rule us, they don't steal our joy, nor do they overtake us. Fasting helps us develop and flex that faith muscle that leads us to trust the deep, abiding love of Christ. Through his love we have strength and the ability to live life as victors!

#### **2. Fasting doesn't matter. God doesn't call me to fasting.**

When reading Mark 2:18-20, you can see Jesus expects his followers to fast. "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day." Two great life applications can be found from Jesus' response to the Pharisees. First, being in the presence of Christ is a celebration. The disciples had no need to fast when they were physically in the presence of the Lord. Second, Jesus understood the need to fast for strength and direction. Jesus communicated the expectation of fasting for strength and clarity. He knew his disciples would need to fast to draw from his strength when he was no longer physically present.

We have access to that same strength as we commit to fast and boldly seek the presence of the Lord.

## Pre-Fast Lesson #4: Fasting Removes Unbelief

**Text: Matthew 17:18-21**

*By Brian Lambert*

*And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.*

*<sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>20</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

*<sup>21</sup> "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:18-21, NKJV)*

When we pray and fast, we don't do so to change God or His will; instead, by praying and fasting, we are the ones being changed. Aligning ourselves with God helps us curb our doubts and fears. When we pray and fast, the thing that leaves us is our unbelief. It is when we have faith to believe that we can pray with confidence and know that "nothing will be impossible."

Ask God to strengthen your heart to fully believe Him and His Word. It is okay to acknowledge that you struggle with unbelief. That's the first step in allowing God to strengthen your faith and bring you into alignment with His plan for your life.

What do you need faith to believe God for right now? Align yourself with God's Word and will during this fast. Release your unbelief. Pray with confidence knowing "nothing will be impossible" for you.

## Pre-Fast Lesson #5: Bootcamp

Text: Matthew 6:21

By Heather Lambert

Brian and I have spent a lot of time talking about our desire to be physically fit. We have several DVD packages whose infomercials promise to give us the fit bodies we desire. We had an elliptical. We have weights and workout equipment to rival any gym. We even bought a Groupon for a boot camp a few years ago. Five days a week for six weeks at 5 am promised the result of a fit, healthy body. I will never forget how excited we were about the FIRST day of the camp. After about 10 minutes, Brian was kneeling by the fence praying he would not be sick. I thought I was going to have to call in sick to work, because I physically could not stand on my wobbly legs. But we pushed through and went back the next day. It was not better, it was worse. We were so sick and so weak. This was killing us! We liked the idea of fit, sculpted, healthy bodies, but the truth was it was just too hard for us. We quit. We didn't decide to quit, we just skipped one day, then two, then a week, then the whole month had passed, and we had gone to boot camp 4 times, not 24. We were not transformed; we were the same. Our desire to be fit proved to be weaker than our desire for comfort.

Fasting is definitely spiritual bootcamp. It is hard, very hard. Many people will quit, many people will not even start. Our desire to be spiritually fit must be stronger than our desire for comfort *if* we want change and spiritual maturity. Jesus teaches some things in our life can only come about by the practice of prayer and fasting. Life requires great spiritual strength which comes only from a commitment to the spiritual practices of prayer and fasting. In Mark 9 the disciples tried to heal a man's son who was demon possessed. They were unable, so Jesus comes on the scene, speaking to the father:

*Jesus said to him, If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help you my unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying to him, You dumb and deaf spirit, I charge you, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; so that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said to them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. (Mark 9:23-29, AKJV)*

You can see that prayer and fasting were a commitment of Christ. They gave him spiritual strength. Our desire to be used mightily by God for His work, must be greater than our desire for food and comfort. I am convinced this spiritual discipline can unlock so many areas of our life where sin and the enemy have held us trapped. That is why it is such a struggle! The enemy wants to steal our opportunity for a breakthrough to walk in spiritual strength. I know the battle that will be waging in your mind as you consider beginning the fast and struggle to honor the commitment to stay true to it for 21 days! I believe there is a work God wants to do in your life, in the life of our church that will only come about as we commit to push through and pray and fast collectively for 21 days. We cannot quit, only God knows what great breakthrough lies on the other side of our commitment to pray and fast. This can't be about us! Someone needs us to stick with it, their very life may depend on our spiritual breakthrough, our spiritual strength and power! We can, we must do it!

# **Fasting Devotions**

## Fast Devotional - Day One

Text: Leviticus 26:1-30

Written by: Brian Lambert

### Thoughts

From the very beginning of scripture, one thing is clear: We were made to worship! God created humanity to walk with Him in a close intimate relationship. He wired into our DNA a deep desire and a passionate need to connect with Him, to worship Him – Him alone! But...there are other options. The people of Israel discovered that while in slavery in Egypt for 400 years. Egypt was different. They worshiped a pantheon of gods and goddesses and would offer prayers, sacrifices, and perform rituals on behalf of the people to appease the gods and seek their favor. Israel was different, they served one God - Yahweh. However, while they were in Egypt, Egyptian culture seeped into them. Since they were exposed to Egyptian religious tradition, it is probable that they incorporated some of the beliefs and practices into their own worship. Their worship practices after deliverance from Egypt would indicate that to be so. In Leviticus 26, God had given Moses a clear and strong message for Israel for how they were to WORSHIP when they came into the promised land. A way of Worship for blessing and another way of worship that would be a curse and bring destruction.

In verse 27-32 God says: *“If you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols; and My soul shall abhor you. I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas. I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it.”* (Lev 26:27-32 NKJ)

God warned of the discipline and the destruction of The High Places. "High Places" (the technical name for a cultic platform) were often man-made hills where worshippers would build altars, often surrounded by trees, pillars, or standing stones as an identified location for worship – as a place for burnt offerings, incense, feasts, and festivals, cult prostitution, and even child sacrifice. While God’s promise of blessing was directly connected to faithful worship, having no other Gods before Him, God’s people (Israel & Judah) continually forsook the covenant, worshipped idols, false gods, and experienced years of God’s judgment in the form of fighting, famine, and fierce oppression by surrounding nations.

Pure worship was always a struggle for God's people. As the people blended with the cultural current of the day, The High Places took up sacred space that God alone was meant to occupy. Not much has changed! The issue was cultural then and it’s cultural now. Think about it – We are still fighting the cultural tide! We have our own High Places...ideals, rules, laws, traditions, practices, and sacred cows that interrupt and interfere with pure, authentic worship.

### Challenge

High places war against the level of devotion the Lord desires. As a church, we must stop equating church attendance and activities with affection and devotion to Christ. We must tear down every high place, every lofty thing that we prioritize above our God and commit ourselves fully to Him!

### Prayer

God, show me where I have set up “High Places” in my life. Help me worship you with a pure heart and with complete devotion. I long to serve you only! In Jesus’ name, Amen!

## **Fast Devotional – Day Two**

Text: Numbers 33:50-56

Written by: Haley Christopherson

### **Thoughts**

In this passage, the Israelites are given instructions that when they enter the promised land, they are to drive out all of the current inhabitants and destroy all of their idols used for worship. Those who do not consider God's eternal decrees will see this as a harsh command from God. But who are human beings to answer back to God (Rom. 9:20)? The truth is, God chose Israel to be His people (Exod. 19:3-6). God's command to Israel is not to be harsh to the Canaanites, but rather to prevent Israel from breaking his commandments. If Israel were to ignore God's command and not drive out everyone, it would be easy for them to be persuaded into ungodly practices. Like many times in the Bible, God warns the Israelites that if they do not obey, they will suffer the consequences. Judges 1-2 show us that they did not fully obey God.

Purging the evil from among them was not a command unique to the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 5:13, Paul applies the Old Testament principle into the church. We must not approve of seemingly small sins without appropriately addressing them within the church. Likewise, we must examine ourselves to ensure that we are not allowing certain evils to remain in us. It is easy to grow comfortable with certain sins if they seem harmless. God has called us to a greater level of holiness than that. We must take God's Word seriously and not allow a hint of evil to remain in us.

### **Challenge**

Is there any area of life where you're allowing small sins to go under the rug so to speak? Bring the darkness to light. Get in life group and discipleship and confess your sins to one another. There is great freedom waiting on the other side of the acknowledgment of sin.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, help us to delight in your commands and to trust that they are for our good. Bring to light any sins or evil that we have allowed to dwell in our lives and give us the boldness to bring them to light. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fast Devotional – Day Three**

Text: Deuteronomy 12:1-14

Written by: Lynn Smith

### **Thoughts**

In today's passage, we find God's commands to the children of Israel for worship. Before we can worship God, there must be places where we no longer worship. In the ancient world it was common practice to repurpose buildings because there was always a shortage of buildings. They might take a nice building like a temple where another god had been worshiped, and simply turn it into a place where they would worship their god. God commanded them to stop this practice. He demanded the children of Israel to completely destroy these places. This destruction must not only be physical (tearing down the old building) but also spiritual (also destroying the pagan places in their hearts).

God gave specific commands as to how and where to worship. Worship was not left to opinions or whims. They must worship God in the place where he commanded and, in the method, He commanded, which included bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes and such. Worship was to be a place of atonement, confession, giving, and joyful fellowship – both with God and others.

### **Challenge**

How does this apply to us today? As children of God, like the Israelites, God commands and expects us to worship him. We are to have no other gods. Other gods and places of worship must be destroyed as God is a jealous God and will tolerate no person or thing coming before him.

What or where do you worship that you need to destroy? While we may no longer pray to idols, there are many things which can become idols. Even good things can become idols, like our children, family, sports, money, or many other things.

### **Prayer**

Dear God, forgive us when we have allowed other things to surpass you in our hearts. Convict us and lead us to put aside anything which will prevent complete and utter devotion to you. Thank you for your sacrifice of your son and let us show our thankfulness by continued and undivided worship of you. In Jesus' name, Amen!



## Fast Devotional – Day Four

Text: Deuteronomy 16:21-22

Written by: Evan Christopherson

### Thoughts

God's prohibition of planting a tree or setting up a pillar in Deuteronomy 16 commands the Israelites to avoid the practice of syncretism. Syncretism is a very dangerous and despicable practice that the Israelites repeatedly participated in. Biblically speaking, syncretism is the mixture of the worship of the living and true God with pagan gods, goddesses, or practices. *Asherah*, who is mentioned in the passage, is a fictional Canaanite goddess. To mix the worship of the holy God with false gods is abominable. In our passage today, God says that he hates it and commands his people to avoid it.

It's easy to look down on the Israelites with judgmental eyes and wonder how they could be so sinful to participate in syncretism. The reality is, we are susceptible to doing the same thing. People often ask for prayers and good vibes. This is an example of syncretism today. It is mixing prayer to the true God with good luck.

Another aspect that we must recognize is that we are without excuse for improper worship of God. Had the Israelites set up a pillar out of good intentions, it would not excuse them from the sin they committed. It could be argued that Uzzah's heart was in the right place when he tried to save the Ark of the Covenant from falling. In doing so, he violated God's command. Using the excuse for "our hearts being in the right place," is not acceptable when God has plainly revealed how we are to worship. The point is, we must be familiar with God's Word to know what pleases him.

### Challenge

Do whatever it takes to make time in God's Word a daily thing for you. God has spoken with clarity. We must know his word in order to properly honor him with our lives and worship.

### Prayer

Father God, we humbly come before you and ask for forgiveness for every time we have mixed you in with our pagan practices. Please forgive us for looking at the Israelites with judgmental eyes while falling into the same sins. As you said in Ezekiel 36:27, put your Spirit in us and cause us to walk in your statutes and be careful to obey your decrees. In 2023, we pray that you plant a desire to know your Word inside of us and cause us to become more like you as we read. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Five**

Text: Joshua 4:14-24

Written by: Shayne Gatlin

### **Thoughts**

In Exodus, leading up to this passage, God had delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians and led them to the Promised Land. The problem was the Israelites doubted God and His goodness repeatedly. The Israelites had many doubts and fears and complained that the path was too hard and wanted to go back to Egypt where they were slaves. Our passage in Joshua 4:14-24: God has chosen Joshua to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land. God parted the sea and allowed all of Israel to cross over. God had them gather 12 stones from the Jordan River (vs 5) and piled them up at Gilgal as a memorial to remind all the nations of the earth that the Lord's hand is powerful, and they might fear the Lord (vs 24). A reminder that God fulfilled His promise to Israel.

I can relate to the Israelites. My family is a foster family, and the journey has been challenging and there have been days that I've said this path is too hard. I have questioned and doubted God's plan and wanted to go back to when things were easier. Our first placement, Noah, came to us at 6 months old. We cared for him for almost a year and made a Christmas ornament for him in 2017. We found out later in December of 2017 that he would be going back to his biological mom. It was a hard transition and I thought about no longer fostering after he left. We kept that ornament and continued to pray for Noah and his journey, and we've hung it on our tree for the past 5 years. Fast forward to today and Noah is now 6 years old, and he came back to live with us in March of last year. This Christmas Noah was able to hang his ornament on our tree. Noah's decoration "Stone" is something we will be able to continue to look at every year and be reminded of God's promises and his goodness.

### **Challenge**

When God shows you his faithfulness and goodness, find your "Stone" that you can keep and be reminded of God's love for you and that He is Good!

### **Prayer**

I thank you for your reminders, "Stones", that you are a good, good Father. That I'm loved and you're always with me. I pray that I will continue to gather "Stones" throughout my life to help me continue to praise you along this journey. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Six**

Text: Joshua 6:15-27 & Joshua 7

Written by: Taylor Jaramillo

### **Thoughts**

After the death of Moses, Joshua was appointed by God to lead the Israelites to the promised land. In chapter 6, we see that right before the fall of Jericho, Joshua warns the Israelites in verse 18 to “keep away from the devoted things.” In Chapter 7, Achan was unfaithful by greedily taking what was banned by God. Joshua sent 3,000 men to go up against Ai but they chased the Israelites from the city gate and struck them down. Joshua then fell to his face in despair asking God why he brought them across the Jordan into the hands of the Amorites.

Most of us can relate to Joshua in this moment because he did everything he was told, but tragedy still struck. It’s hard to understand the “why” in the midst of tragedy, but we have to trust in God’s greater plans. In this situation, since Achan sinned, God said that the Israelites couldn’t stand against their enemies, and He would not be with them unless they destroyed whoever was devoted to destruction. Achan confessed what he stole in verse 21, but this was followed by his destruction in verses 25-26. Achan confessed his sin, but he was destroyed because of it.

In reflecting on this text, I am grateful for God’s perfect plan and the sacrifice He made by sending Jesus to the cross so that we are able to freely confess our sins, repent, and receive his mercy and grace. Can you imagine the destruction we would face if we didn’t have Jesus as our Savior? We can see the relationship between obedience and blessing in this chapter. Israel would have no further successes until the sin was uncovered. The same rings true today, we cannot receive the abundant kingdom life God has for us if we hide our sins. We must remember to enter his presence with praise and thanksgiving followed by confession of our sins and repentance.

### **Challenge**

I challenge you to think about what unconfessed sin may be standing in the way of God’s blessing. Ask Him to reveal to you any strongholds you may be harboring and repent. Praise Him that we are able to confess our sins and receive forgiveness.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for your steadfast love and endless mercy. Please reveal to us what is distasteful to you and remove it from us. May we be cleansed and renewed from head to toe so that we may fully receive the abundant life you have for us. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Seven**

Text: Judges 6:24-34

Written by: Justin Jaramillo

### **Thoughts**

In Judges 6:24-34 we witness Gideon being faithful to God's command not only to build the altar Yahweh Shalom (Lord is Peace) but also to tear down the altar to the false god Baal. God is showing Gideon that he is with him affirming that God is peace, and he will not be struck down for this, although Gideon is still skeptical, still searching for confirmation.

Gideon tears down the altar at night under the cover of Darkness while the people sleep. When the mob comes looking for Gideon the next morning. His actions are affirmed by God, and he is unharmed by the mob. The mob mentality exists today in a very strong way. With a simple message - conform or be removed.

Perhaps more importantly when Gideon's father challenges the people in his city for their false god, it reminds me of how often we can build these same structures in our mind without realizing that a barrier has been put between us and God. It could be a stronghold in a relationship creating that space. It can be our own desires to be in the driver seat that continues to steer us down a road to nowhere. It could be cultural acceptance of sins that we no longer choose to stand against, to join the mob. How many people today would see a sin as Gideon did and stand fully against it to tear it down? Remember God calls us to be warriors!

### **Challenge**

Ask God where are barriers creating space not only for yourself but for those in your family or even those who God could be waiting on you to deliver His good word.

Write them down and decide is the barrier of my own creation? Is it cultural? Is it fear?

Hold yourself accountable to be real, to be humble, to be thankful for your time with the father to grow.

### **Prayer**

Father, thank you for opening my heart. Allow your light to fill my whole self so that barriers cannot hide in the shadows. Call them out in me so that I can see them and call them out for others so that all of your followers can grow stronger. I pray that in a world where group think is celebrated and conformity is the norm, you remind us that we do not conform to these patterns. It is your pattern your standards your grace and love that we must follow. Allow me to be a bold warrior standing against those who would see you forgotten and defeated. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Eight**

Text: 1 Kings 3:1-14

Written by: Cindy Dickerson

### **Thoughts**

I learned from a past mentor to personalize scripture by inserting my name in place of pronouns or persons addressed in the passage, and I especially like to practice this with Ephesians 1:3-14. I have never applied this tool to 1 Kings 3:3 “Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, *except that* he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.” If I did personalize this passage, it would read something like “Cindy showed her love for the Lord by loving others *except that*, she could have a hardened heart.” I notice it usually starts with busyness, my eyes move from Christ and get fixed on my agenda. My heart gets hurried, and I start treating life and those I love like one big to-do list, focusing on what I want to accomplish and losing heart for God’s kingdom. What a gift it is to have the opportunity to get right with God and those I love in the midst of my “except that.”

Throughout the passages in 1 Kings 3:1-15, a glimpse of God’s infinite grace is displayed in how He loves Solomon through his “except that.” When God said to Solomon, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you (vs 5).” Solomon’s response is pleasing to God (10). He does not request commodities to build his own kingdom (11), Solomon desire’s God’s will for God’s kingdom. Through Solomon’s response to God, I see some actions to follow that can help me get rid of my “except thats” and guide my heart back to God, such as below:

- Solomon honors God immediately, acknowledging God’s kindness and acknowledging his God given calling as King. He takes no personal credit for this prestigious role (6).
- Next, Solomon humbles himself and confesses his weakness (7).
- Then, he asks God for help with the purest intentions—so that he may serve God’s people best (8-9).
- Ultimately, Solomon makes a change, his next sacrifice is not in the high places (15).

### **Challenge**

What is your “except that”? Unconfessed “except thats” moves us away from God and others. Take action with what we learn from Solomon:

- Honor God and acknowledge His calling for you—if you feel you don’t know your calling, we’re all called to love (see Mark 12:29-31).
- Confess shortcomings, weaknesses, sin, pride... If you don’t know, ask someone close to you and ask God to show you.
- Make a change and choose your next God honoring action.

### **PRAYER**

Father, show me my “except that” so I can be aware of what could be holding me back from loving you and loving others with my whole heart. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Nine**

Text: 1 Kings 11:1-12

Written by: Greg Dickerson

### **Thoughts**

The cumulation of Solomon's life could be summarized as a brilliant light that faded into darkness. He had so many great and inspiring moments, but slowly, over time, his heart turned away from God to worship detestable idols. Solomon's ultimate downfall didn't happen in one instant; it started in subtle ways. Reading Deuteronomy 17:14-20, we find the requirements and expectations of the Kings of Israel, and of all of them, Solomon failed to obey. It started with an alliance with Egypt through marriage (1 Kings 3:1), then progressed to the accumulation of horses and such wealth, making Elon Musk look poor (1 Kings 10:26-28). His ultimate downfall, which led his heart to worship idols, started with each marriage to his many foreign wives. An astonishing 1,000 wives, which is crazy!

No one wakes up and immediately becomes an alcoholic, drug addict, adulterer, gossip, abuser, or idol worshiper. It takes root with one tiny seed of sin that grows until it's a huge tree that is taking over our entire garden. Sin can be like the Lays potato chip commercial, "you can't eat just one." Everyone (pastors, laypersons, missionaries, or everyday people) is susceptible to a lifestyle of sin and huge mistakes. Even after being warned by God, Solomon still chose to disobey. We have to be on guard for the tiny "except that" sins that slowly creep into our lives that can eventually progress into destruction and darkness.

### **Challenge**

What micro-sins are you still holding on to or not giving up? What enormous sins are lurking around the corner that, if you don't get help now, could destroy your life, marriage, career, or family? Confess, seek help, and ask God to destroy the idols you have placed in the "high places" that keep you from knowing Jesus in a closer relationship.

### **Prayer**

God, please help us heed your warnings that we may obey your commands. Please give us the strength and courage to get the help we need to overcome and be free from the sins that so easily entangle us. May we walk in your love and know that no matter what sin we have committed, your arms are open to receive us again. Help me continue to praise you along this journey. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Ten**

Text: I Kings 12:1-33; 13:1-34

Written by: Ryan Clay

### **Thoughts**

In today's passage, we see a few examples of disobedience to God's word. After Jeroboam becomes king of the northern kingdom, he makes idols for the Israelites and completely abandons the way God has commanded his people to worship Him. Remember that God even told Jeroboam (in chapter 11) that if he followed God's commands and walked in obedience, he would rule over all that his heart desired. Jeroboam instead put his own fear and selfishness above God's word. Then, we see the man of God come to Bethel and prophesy at the altar. God tears down the altar, warning Jeroboam to turn from his evil ways, but Jeroboam refuses. As the man of God is returning to Judah, he eats and drinks with another prophet in his home, despite God explicitly commanding him not to do this.

God speaks to us too. It may not look like it did in the Old Testament, but He speaks through scripture, circumstances in our lives, other people, desires in our hearts, and more. And just like we see in this passage, we too can fall short and disobey God's commands. Areas of sin, fear, unforgiveness, pride, traditions, ways of thought, and other "high places" in our hearts will only separate us from God and prevent us from worshiping Him the way He intended.

### **Challenge**

Let's be intentional during this time of prayer and fasting to think about the high places in our lives that get in the way of fully devoting ourselves to God.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, you are worthy of all our worship. Thank you for what you have shown us in today's passage. Help us to clearly see the high places in our hearts that are holding us back from the worship that you have designed us for. Thank you that, even when we are unfaithful and turn away from you, you remain faithful, you still love us and long for us to repent and come back to you. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Eleven**

Text: I Kings 14:1-31

Written by: LeChelle Smith

### **Thoughts**

While the author of 1 Kings cannot be known for certain, the scripture in Chapter 14 speaks for itself about the relationship God desires with us. The scripture uses King Jeroboam's and King Rehoboam's reigns to bring to light the rebellious nature of Israel and Judah. We know that God is a jealous God, and by building metal altars and sacred pillars, there will be consequences. In this case, the consequences were Jeroboam's son's death along with the destruction of King Jeroboam's and King Rehoboam's kingdoms. This is why it is so important to be aware of our current "high places". While they may not be "altars", they can be things of today such as television or social media.

Another thing that spoke to me is how Jeroboam instructed his wife to disguise herself. When Ahijah asked her "Why are you pretending to be someone else?" It made me think how many times we have done that ourselves. Just as Jeroboam's wife could not hide her identity from Ahijah we cannot disguise ourselves to God either. We owe it to God and ourselves to be authentic and "real" with God, for he already knows. In the end, the Kings actively took part in or tolerated false idols or false selves (i.e., High places) and God's anger was shown as a result.

### **Challenge**

What "high places" are you "taking part in or tolerating" today? What can you do to begin to remove those "high places" and be your authentic self?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I humbly come before you and thank you for your wisdom and guidance. Please open my eyes to the "high places" I have put before you and forgive me for not being intentional and actively removing the "high places". I ask for your wisdom, discernment, and boldness to take action to be my authentic self and focus on you and what you have called me to do. In Jesus' name, Amen!



## **Fasting Devotional – Day Twelve**

Text: I Kings 15:8-15

Written by: Bill Brod

### **Thoughts**

Change can be difficult. Regarding spiritual improvements in your own life, how far are you willing to go and at what cost? As King of Judah, Asa was dedicated to getting rid of the idol worship afflicting his people and his commitment to the task did not discriminate. When Asa heard his grandmother had made a repulsive Asherah pole, he had her deposed (removed) as Judah's Queen Mother! The first time I read this passage, I couldn't help but think of the silly song, *Grandma Got Run Over By A Reign Dear* (slightly modified). But in all seriousness, would you be willing to forego a loving relationship or incur some other hardship if that's what it took to remove a stumbling block to draw closer to God? In verse 11 it says, "Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord."

### **Challenge**

In my own life, I have had to distance myself from people and things that negatively impact my walk with the Lord, all in an effort to do *what is right in His eyes*. What obstacles can you identify in your life today that hinder your walk with God? What changes need to be made? Are you willing and able to make those changes now?

### **Prayer**

Father, I prayerfully ask for your direction and strength to draw closer to you in 2023 and to remove whatever it is (or who it is) that has become an idol or that is holding me back from drawing close to you. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Thirteen**

Text: 1 Kings 22:42-46

Written by: Angie Brod

### **Thoughts**

Don't give up! Don't quit! You can do this! You started strong! You tackled this Daniel Fast with great enthusiasm. You sought God, you did the research, purchased the food, and tackled the cooking. (So much cooking!!!) You have devoted more time to prayer and reading the Bible. But this is Day 13 and you may find yourself becoming weary and distracted. It's a lot of work and you miss the foods that you have always enjoyed. Good heavens! The temptation to quite is real!

King Jehoshaphat started strong. We read briefly about him in 1 Kings but can read more detail about his reign in 2 Chronicles chapters 17-20. 2 Chronicles records that King Jehoshaphat "was deeply committed to the ways of the LORD." He sent teachers into all the towns of Judah to teach the Book of the Law, he destroyed places of idol worship, he appointed faithful judges, and he kept peace in the land. But as we continue to read we see that King Jehoshaphat compromised. He made alliances with God's enemies, "He failed to remove all the pagan shrines and the people never fully committed to follow God." He lost focus.

### **Challenge**

The challenge for us is to keep going, to finish strong! Don't give in to the temptation to compromise. Let's renew our commitment to walk by faith each step of the way in the Lord's power. Seek His face and receive all the blessings of the Holy Spirit. As we focus on the Lord, feasting on His Word, and trusting Him with the most basic area of what we eat and drink, God will show up! Hang in there!

### **Prayer**

Father, give me the strength to keep going and the resolve to not give in to the temptation to quit or compromise, but to stay committed to you each step of the way. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Fourteen**

Text: II Kings 12:1-5

Written by: Chris Hall

### **Thoughts**

In today's passage, we get another "but the high places..." which is then followed by a passage on collecting funds for repairing the temple. Why the quick transition to money? Money is a high place for a lot of people, and they will get absolutely furious when anything threatens it. After all, isn't it nice to see a large number in your bank account? I, with pride, stated that my emergency fund would cover anything that could happen. I also prayed that if there was something God wanted me to learn that I was being foolish in, that He should show me a billboard. Apparently, I was so foolishly keeping money in a high place that I deserved a thorough beating with said billboard. The emergency fund became the plea to God for the bills to stop coming.

Do you want to remove money from a high place? Give it to God. It's impossible for something truly given to God to be used for anything other than His Good. We are called to support and fix problems within the Church. Yes, the church building should be well kept, but that isn't *the* Church. Every believer is part of the Church and *is* the Church. We are to take care of not only our needs, but the needs of the Church.

### **Challenge**

1. Redo your budget. Put giving to God on the first line (on the highest place!). It's so much easier to give when you make it your financial high place.
2. Pray to have someone to financially bless, bless them, and let the Lord take credit. It may not be a lot, but five dollars is a lot when you have nothing and need five dollars.
3. Is your faith in money or God?

### **Prayer**

Our Heavenly Father, we recognize your Holy Glory and the beauty of your Kingdom. We ask you to open our eyes to the high places money may reside in our life and teach us how to give with joy to bring your Earthly Church closer to you. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Fifteen**

Text: II Kings 14:1-4; 15:1-5

Written by: Shannon Hall

### **Thoughts**

Amaziah was generally a good king: “He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.” He did this by following the example of his father, King Joash. But like his father, he did not remove the high places, and people continued to offer sacrifices there. The thing that strikes me the most here is that Amaziah had a pretty good example to follow in his father, but Joash was not perfect, and Amaziah found himself repeating his mistake.

How often do we model our Christian walk after the people closest to us rather than seeking what the Lord wants? By watching people instead of seeking the Lord, we can find ourselves unconsciously repeating their mistakes and having the same high places remaining in our own lives. And because the people we’re following appear to be “good Christians”, those high places are often more subtle and difficult to identify as barriers to our relationship with God.

### **Challenge**

What are some high places in your life that are so subtle you didn’t even notice them? One that I’m already aware of is watching TV. It’s not something that’s obvious to everyone, but I know when it’s starting to become too important in my life – a sort of high place where I worship at the altar of entertainment and distraction. That’s why my husband and I always fast from screens during these 21 days. It helps us to refocus our hearts on the One who deserves our time, attention, and devotion. I challenge you to ask God to help you identify those subtle high places in your life and ask Him how He wants you to eliminate them.

### **Prayer**

Father, thank you for giving us great examples and mentors in the faith that we can look up to. They are a wonderful blessing from you. Help us to remember, though, that *you* are our guide and perfect example. May we seek your will always and open our eyes to those subtle high places we don’t even know are there. We want nothing to get in the way of our total devotion to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Sixteen**

Text: II Kings 15:1-7

Written by: Todd Houston

### **Thoughts**

As we start to read 2 Kings 15, we see Uzziah is named King of Judah at age 16. I immediately reflect on the idea of one of our four sons taking on that responsibility at such a young age. Maybe Uzziah was confident having seen his dad in action or in his training having known he would be King after his dad, Amaziah; or maybe he was nervous since his dad had been assassinated. That part is not revealed in the scriptures but what we can see was that he followed in his father's footsteps as one that was pleasing in the Lord's sight.

So, what would that look like to be pleasing to God? Based on other parts of the Bible I see that meaning Uzziah personally obeyed God's commands, he acknowledged God as in control, and he worshiped the Lord as the one true God. Unfortunately, the next word indicates that Uzziah fell short of God's ultimate plan because the next phrase starts with the conjunction BUT. Uzziah was pleased with God, BUT he did not destroy the pagan shrines which allowed the people of Judah to continue with divided worship. Don't let this conjunction be in the middle of your eulogy that you served God with your talents, BUT you never talked to your neighbor about Jesus.

### **Challenge**

Make it your goal to be an AND person. Be that person that was known for loving God's Word AND encouraging others to follow Him. Be the one that leaves no hint of impurity in your life, in your family, or to tempt those around you. It is your story, your testimony; so, with God's help let your ultimate declaration be to have God say, "Well done good AND faithful servant."

### **Prayer**

Lord, I pray that I will be one that follows you whole-heartedly. That I lead those in my family and those around me to worship you, and you alone. May I be willing to come alongside others and show them how to live for Christ while demonstrating what it means to die to self and forsake all worldly idols. Help me to be an AND person to accomplish your plan! In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Seventeen**

Text: II Kings 15:32-38

Written by: Dawn Houston

### **Thoughts**

Jotham became King at the age of 25 and reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. Verses 34-35 sum up his reign. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord. However, the high places were not removed so the people continued to sacrifice and burn incense to pagan gods. King Jotham was a godly man and King, but were lives changed under his influence? Did he draw others to the One True God? His God?

### **Challenge**

God impressed upon me two things I need to look at in my life after reading about King Jotham.

- One: Do I have any high places in my life that need to be torn down? Anything I am putting above or in place of the Lord? Ps. 144:2 The Lord is my High Tower. The only one worthy of my attention, devotion, and time.
- Two: Do I lead others to the One True God and help them recognize the high towers that need to be torn down in their lives?

Our goal should always be restoration for ourselves and other believers. Love must be our guide. Prayerfully seek the Lord in how to help others.

### **Prayer**

Lord, I pray that you show us the areas we need to tear down in our own lives. Help us be a people that does what is right in your sight so that we may lead others to reconciliation with you. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Eighteen**

Text: II Kings 16:1-20

Written by: Steve Christopherson

### **Thoughts**

It is believed by tradition that Jeremiah wrote II Kings. This chapter deals with young 20-year-old Ahaz becoming King of Jerusalem. He knew what God wanted but chose to follow the crowd and took silver and gold from the temple of the Lord and made idols and offered it as a gift to the King of Assyria. He started having his people worship idols and other gods like his counterparts and he strayed away from true worship of the Lord. He offered incense in high places and sacrifices. He even offered his son as a burnt sacrifice. God never called for child sacrifices. He wanted to be accepted and respected by his counterparts, so he turned his back on God and built altars to other gods. So, what good came out of Ahaz? It's interesting how God can take evil and turn it into good. Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah! So, keep reading in II Kings!

### **Challenge**

How can we use the story of Ahaz? I think we can look at how we try to fit in with the world. Do you strive to achieve the things of this world, or the things that please God? Remember, money is not the root of all evil. It is the LOVE of money that is the root of all evil. It's okay to have great things but don't turn your back on God's desires for your life in order to have them. Just like in Matthew 6:33 - Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things will be added unto you.

### **Prayer**

Father, help us to seek the things that you want for us. Open our eyes to how we can so easily be led astray by things of the world and help us refocus on your will and desire for our lives. Let us show our appreciation for everything you've done for us through our words, actions, thoughts, and deeds. We thank you so much for the lessons that we learn from your Word and the guidance we receive. Let this be a time of not just fasting from food but fasting from our unhealthy habits and thought lives to gain insight into the trap of chasing success. We want to chase after you, and not anything else. We thank you for your grace, mercy, and compassion. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Nineteen**

Text: II Kings 17:1-41

Written by: Sarah Hale

### **Thoughts**

In II Kings 17, Hoshea is the 20<sup>th</sup> and final king in the history of Israel before they were taken into exile by Assyria. Israel (northern kingdom) came to an end more than a century before Judah (southern kingdom) ended. The main reason for this early destruction is that Israel never had any kings that 'did right in the eyes of the Lord'. God allowed Israel to be taken captive because Israel would 'not listen'. In fact, 'not listening' is basically the theme for Israel. Each new king and the people as well had a chance to follow God and change the course of the nation by doing 'right in the eyes of the Lord'. Why would they not listen? God even sent a long line of prophets and seers to warn the people. (v 13) Still they would not listen.

When Israel first conquered the land years before, they were told to completely destroy the pagan influences that could lead them away from God. This 'not listening' to God had been going on for years and years. The Assyrian resettlement plan happening in this chapter, had the Israelites scattered among people from all different nations. The Israelites' unfaithful hearts tended to worship the pagan gods of their neighbor's even though God had commanded them, "Do not worship any other gods or bow down to them, serve them or sacrifice to them." (v 35)

### **Challenge**

What are you tempted by that you see others doing? What attitudes or actions are holding you captive? Each of us has the chance to listen to and follow God wholeheartedly and 'do what is right in the eyes of the Lord'. As we move into Freedom Weekend, I challenge each of us to have malleable hearts that are open to listening to God's teaching.

### **Prayer**

Lord, help us to listen to you and to follow you with all my heart, that I might do what is right in your eyes. In Jesus' name, Amen!



## **Fasting Devotional – Day Twenty**

Text: II Kings 21:1-16

Written by: Wayne Hale

### **Thoughts**

Prior to King Manasseh's fifty-five-year reign, his father, King Hezekiah, reigned for twenty-nine years.

II Kings 18:3–4: "Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stone, and cut down the Asherah poles."

II Kings 21:2–3: "King Manasseh did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole..."

What a contrast from King Hezekiah who followed and worshiped the Lord, to King Manasseh who despised the Lord and worshiped idols. Manasseh's evil deeds such as Baal worship, worshiping other gods, and sacrificing his son in a fire, provoked God to anger. Because the people of Judah followed King Manasseh's example and did not worship God, God said in v. 12 - 15: "I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant...and hand them over to their enemies. They will be looted and plundered .....;they have done evil in my eyes and provoked me to anger ...".

I might think, I have never done evil things or built high places like King Manasseh did to make God angry with me.

I'm reminded in scripture, there are serious consequences for having high places in my life ahead of God. i.e.. family, personal priorities, selfishness, work, money, etc. Can you imagine living in a time when the culture changed from one extreme to another like in Judah? I believe we are currently living in a time like this. The USA was founded on Godly and Biblical principles. Since the declaration of our independence, the culture of this country has changed dramatically. So much that the people of this country might also be provoking God to anger because of our own high places.

### **Challenge**

Could your high places be provoking God to anger? Is there anything in your life that is a higher priority than your relationship with God? As you fast, search for high places in your life to remove and commit yourself fully to the Lord!

### **Prayer**

Father, what in me pleases you? What in me provokes you to anger? I want my whole life to honor and glorify you and you alone. Give me eyes to see what you see. Give me ears to hear what you say, and give me a heart to understand, follow, and obey your will. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Twenty-One**

Text: II Kings 22:1-23:1-25

Written by: Heather Lambert

### **Thoughts**

Throughout the books of Kings, each new ruler is introduced with a summary of their reign. In II Kings 22, we are introduced to Josiah who began his reign at the age of 8 and reigned for 31 years. His summary is found in chapter 22 vs 2, saying “He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” As we reflect on the testimony of Josiah, it would be a good practice to reflect upon our own testimony. If our lives were summed up in a few quick sentences, what would be said of us? This should create a moment of quiet reflection in our hearts.

As followers of Christ, we should earnestly desire to have a testimony like that of Josiah. But how can we build that reputation and influence? Let’s reflect on what Josiah did:

- He prioritized worship and the care of the house of the Lord. (22:9)
- He entrusted and empowered others. (22:7)
- He truly believed the word of the Lord. (22: 13, 23:1)
- He was humble, submitting to the authority of God. (22:19, 23:3)
- He tore down ALL the high places (23:4-20,24)
- He kept God’s commandments and laws (23:21,22)
- He followed the Lord with all his heart, soul, and might. (23:25)

### **Challenge**

What a testimony! What a challenge! How can we, too, build a legacy that pleases the King of all Kings? We can follow Josiah’s example.

#### **How do we prioritize worship and the care of the house of the Lord?**

- Do we spend time with Him and other believers, daily?
- Do we proclaim His truth and abide in His ways?
- Do we care about the people and things He cares about? Do we love His church (the saints)?

#### **How do we entrust and empower others?**

- Do we submit ourselves to mentorship, learning, and following those who have gone before, who have demonstrated their faithfulness?
- Do we empower others through mentorship, encouragement, and accountability?

#### **Do we truly believe the word of God?**

- What decisions are impacted by our faith in the truthfulness of his words?
- Do we hold on to worry and fear? Can we trust His goodness?
- Do we hold on to pain and shame? Can we trust His justice and forgiveness?

**Continued on next page...**

## **Fasting Devotional – Day Twenty-One**

Text: II Kings 22:1-23:1-25

Written by: Heather Lambert

### **Are we humble and submissive to the authority of God?**

- Do we release “our way” choosing to believe His way is better?
- Do we confess our sins to Him and to one another for accountability?
- Do we daily come into His presence to ensure our submission to His authority?

### **Do we tear down the high places?**

- What separates us from living the life God called us to?
- Can we destroy those stumbling blocks?
- What do we really worship? Not sure, consider how you spend your time, money, and energy. Reflect on your calendar, bank account, and passions. What matters most to you?
- Do you need to re-adjust your priorities to ensure the King comes first?

### **Do we keep the commandments and the law?**

- Do we hide His word in our heart?
- Are we faithful and obedient to learn and grow in His ways?
- Do we avoid making excuses for our behavior and choices that miss God’s mark?
- Do we follow the Lord with all our heart, soul, and might?
- Is He the first thought in the morning and the final thought at night?
- Do we walk in reckless abandon, fully surrendered to Him?
- Are His passions our passions and our lives show it?

### **Prayer**

Father, show me the truth as I examine each area of my life. Help me align my character, my life with your truth so that I am walking in your ways faithfully. In Jesus’ name, Amen!





