

## 21 Days of Fasting January 2024

Devotionals & Prayer  
By Pastor Doyle Jackson

### **DAY 1 Why do some Christians fast?**

Fasting is actually healthier than most people believe. I remember when I was in college inviting a group to join me in prayer and fasting for God to help us as a leadership team and for help in our outreach to students. I got so much pushback that it was “not healthy” and “not safe”. The facts are clearer today for much of the general public that less food is actually more healthy. I watched a great “Ted Talk” last year on the benefits of fasting regularly, several meals or on particular days each week of the year. Sometime, just google “FASTING” and you will find that CNN, Fox and WebMD all seem to report that fasting can be a healthy part of a busy lifestyle.

The Bible encourages us to fast as a means of seeking God and showing our dependence on God. Jesus started his ministry with a supernatural 40 day fast. We don't recommend you make it your goal to do a “Messiah Fast” for your first fast. I would, however, say to try the “Daniel Fast.”

When Daniel was taken away to Babylon into captivity they were forced into the king's service. They asked for permission to eat a diet that honored God. That is the fast I want you to consider. Say, “God, I am giving up all ‘pleasing foods’ for a healthy, well-balanced, maybe low fat/low sugar diet to remind myself that my body is yours. Jesus you are even Lord of my body.”

Look what happened for Daniel and friends when fasting. It served as a reminder that they were God's servants firsts:

Daniel 1:11-15 (NIV) <sup>11</sup> Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, <sup>12</sup>“Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” <sup>14</sup> So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

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<sup>15</sup> At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

Join me in this fast because you want to let God know He is your King not the fast food world or even your hungry belly.

Pray: “Lord Help me to fast today like Daniel. I want my heart to have You on the throne. Keep my body and spirit strong as I seek You. I want my life to glorify the Kingdom of God. In Jesus’ Name. Amen”

### **DAY 2 Jesus said His disciples would fast.**

Who did you want to be like when you grew up when you were eight, nine or ten years old? I had a friend named Bill when I was an elementary student. We both attended Bellwood Elementary and we also had been in kindergarten at the Methodist church “up town” together. We spent a lot of time together and had many sleep-overs at one another’s houses. He was the youngest in his home and I the youngest at mine. One of the things we played as boys, besides football and “pretend army,” was Starskey and Hutch. We pretended to drive a cool red Ford Gran Torino. We loved “pretend tackling” and “capturing” bad guys. We wanted to be like these “larger than life” figures in whatever way possible.

This is a normal part of life. Hollywood and Madison Avenue have made millions off of this concept. Tell an attractive story and people will want to be like the story. This is the way we are designed. Jesus stepped into our world to give us a living story to live out. He drops His life in our world like crumbs, (sorry, I know you are hungry) for us to pick up and find a spiritual feast. One of the things Christians have gleaned from Jesus’ life is that He Fasted and prayed and it produced a powerful God encounter for all who came near Him.

The response is “I want to come near God so maybe fasting will help.” John the Baptist realized the same thing in the book of John and wanted to know if Jesus’ followers had a “short-cut” or if they could avoid the painful hunger of fasting.

Listen to their questions and Jesus’ answer:

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Matthew 9:14-15 (NIV) <sup>14</sup> Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

<sup>15</sup> Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."

Jesus said the cost is high if you follow me. Many will not pay the price. When you are tempted to say, "I know lots of good people who are Christians and they don't fast, I don't need it either." Don't do it. Fast anyway, because Jesus lets us in on something He did to be more sensitive to God's view on this world.

One of the things I ask myself based on Jesus' words is, "Can I really be a disciple and not fast?" I have always landed on the answer NO. I want to be like Jesus, even if I am a poor example, maybe someone will still see Him in me. By the way, Bill grew up and went to work with the FBI. His mom told me once when I was visiting how much he enjoys His job and the big cases he has solved. It is amazing what can happen when you really want to be like someone who inspires you.

Pray: "Lord, Help me to want to be like you. Forgive me for looking for a short cut. I trust you know that the habit and hard work of fasting is something I need. Help me be self-controlled. Help me to imagine my life following you. Teach me to fast and pray in this season. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

It could be said you aren't a disciple if you don't fast.

### **DAY 3 God watches and rewards fasting**

Fasting is designed by God to change us. It is like a "spiritual renovation" in the same way that when you watch HGTV and they take an old house and give it a complete remodel. In those shows, they start with an expert and a master craftsman.

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Have you seen the stories where they dive into a project and someone has just masked a huge structural problem or water damage with a false front? They call those a “flipper fail” or “The Landlord Special.” Religion is an attempt to make things look better without actually remodeling. Jesus accuses the religious people of his day for putting on a mask instead of getting a true heart for God.

Matthew 6:16-18 Jesus said, <sup>16</sup> “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jesus calls us to a fast and spiritual life that is honest and true before God. Share your true heart with God, not a false face for the world. Choose God in fasting and receive the reward - which is the Master Builder of your heart, and He will draw near.

Pray: “Lord, you are my reward. Help me today to be totally honest with You. Strip away any attempt by me to appear better than I am. Open my heart to your truth and spirit. Reward me with the changes You see best fit for my life. In Jesus’ name, Amen”

### **DAY 4 Fasting puts you in the seat to watch and assist God’s work**

When I was a boy, growing up in a veterinary clinic was exciting to me every day. I was able to watch my Father do things that were gross, gory and gooey. My dad was great about letting me participate. He always gave me objects to hold or carry: buckets, syringes, and a flashlight to “shine the light here.” What this did was build a growing feeling in me that my life mattered. I had an important role to play.

Our Heavenly Father has always had a dream of doing ministry with us as His children. From the beginning in the garden, He imagined us ruling and working alongside Him in creation. Now, as part of His family in Jesus, we

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get to re-engage this role. Fasting puts us back in a position to watch and assist God.

Listen to Isaiah's words:

<sup>6</sup>“Is not this the fast that I[God] have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?” -Isaiah 58:6 (KJV).

In this ministry, we get to reverse the impact of the fall. Jesus said, “the Spirit of God is on me to set the captive free... Luke 4:18.

Fasting is a means by connecting our heart and activities with God. Who do you know that is suffering under a yoke or burden? Lift them up in prayer soaked in a fasted heart. Maybe you have had something burdening you. Fasting allows us to come along with our heavenly Father, while He does the surgery that sets them free spirit, soul and body.

Pray: “Lord, Open my eyes today to what You want to do. Help me to hear your voice of freedom and how I can help. If there is an injustice or need, burden me with the prayer and fasting. Lord, give me a heart for assistance and service. Let your freedom go forth. In the name of Jesus.”

### **Day 5 To receive God's guidance and protection**

When I was in my early 20's I was struggling to know where I was going to school next or take a job. I didn't like school and would rather go to work. My mom challenged me to fast and pray for three days and ask God for wisdom and direction. I gave up food and only drank water and juice, set aside time for Bible reading, and prayed after work in the clinic. Mom and Dad fasted too and asked God to speak to me. After three days they said, what do you think? I still remember that morning in the clinic before our first clients of the day came in. “I believe God wants me to work on my education. He showed me the work I was doing as a volunteer with the youth group was in good hands - His hands.” That assurance in my heart helped me leave home, move to Boston, Massachusetts, and begin graduate school.

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Ezra had a big journey and responsibility: Lead some of God's people home to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. He was low on funds and couldn't afford an armed guard, so he looked to God.

Ezra 8:21-23 (TLB) <sup>21</sup> Then I declared a fast while we were at the Ahava River so that we would humble ourselves before our God; and we prayed that he would give us a good journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. <sup>22</sup> For I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and cavalry to accompany us and protect us from the enemies along the way. After all, we had told the king that our God would protect all those who worshiped him, and that disaster could come only to those who had forsaken him! <sup>23</sup> So we fasted and begged God to take care of us. And he did.

Today, is there anything you need God's guidance or protection over? Do you have a project or child that needs God's mighty hand? Add the resource of focused prayer and fasting. Try Ezra's words and Pray: "God take care of us."

### **DAY 6 Our not eating first, opens the door for God first**

I grew up in the old south. I was taught to say "yes sir" and "yes mam". The school I went to required me to wear a coat and tie to look like and feel like a gentleman of honor. When my teacher came in the room we stood next to our desks as a way of honoring them.

Fasting is a way of honoring God. In the same way, when you open a door and let someone else go first. The Bible tells of a widow in the ancient world of Elijah's time. God asked her to let "the man of God" eat first every day. This small act of trust and honor put her in a position to see God's supernatural provision.

1 Kings 17:8-16 (NIV) <sup>8</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to him: <sup>9</sup> "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food." <sup>10</sup> So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a

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drink?” <sup>11</sup> As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

<sup>12</sup> “As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

<sup>13</sup> Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup> For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’”

<sup>15</sup> She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. <sup>16</sup> For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

How can we trust a guy like this widow? When we don’t eat first but pray and give God first place, we are living like this faith-filled woman.

Pray: “Lord help us to open the door for your Holy Spirit. Please God, help us trust You. Let us see a miracle of your provision in our home. May this house be strengthened by Your mighty hand. In Jesus name, Amen”

### **DAY 7 Fasting breaks the hold of selfishness and helps others**

It is so easy to get caught up in “me, me, me.” As you are fasting make sure you get your kids involved too. You may not want to force them to not eat, but invite them to participate in some way. I always knew my parents were fasting and they invited me to participate. “No, we are not having any pop or sweets this week. We are praying for God to bring revival. We are going to ask God to show us someone in need that we can help.” Let them be a part of helping you choose something you can do to share Christ or help someone in need.

Isaiah 58 is all about fasting and how it changes our heart. Listen to verse 7: “Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor

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wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Today ask God to use the fast to give you an unselfish servant's heart.

Pray: “Lord during this second week of fasting and prayer help us all at The Church Next Door have a changed heart. Lord, may we have the desire to help the hungry physically and spiritually in our community. Help us see those in need and help them. Open our eyes to our own family that needs You. In Jesus' name.”

### **DAY 8 Fasting opens the door for healing and sharing the light of God. .**

The prophet Isaiah invited the people of God to come to God with fasting. He challenged them to come with a sincere loving heart for God. He knew from personal experience that we have flaws and faults that make us feel unworthy. Isaiah 6 describes his personal experience of feeling overwhelming guilt and remorse for his failings.

Verse 5 “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

If you are finding yourself experiencing difficulty with the fast that's ok. Some would even say normal. Learning to depend on God and not yourself, is a good thing. The unintended consequence is the feelings of inadequacy but the awesome outcome is honesty. In that honesty we find the power of God. God, I need your help, forgiveness and healing. God's promise to Isaiah and all honest fasters is healing and the light of God.

Isaiah 58:7 (NIV) <sup>7</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

As God's light shines in your dark areas, welcome His healing. I have seen God's change my co-workers during these January fasts in the past. Help

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me see things I needed to change in my leadership and parenting. Welling the power of God's light as you fast.

*“Pray: Lord, if there are dark places or places in my heart that need cleansing please cleanse me. Like Isaiah, I am a person with a need for clean-up on aisle “me” right now. Father, I can't be good on my own. Would you help me learn to walk in your ways? Today, shine on me. May you see Jesus in me. -Amen.”*

### **Day 9 Fasting humbly focuses our attention on God and His on us.**

When I was in college at UT Knoxville, I was dating a very nice Christian girl. She came from a wonderful family. Her dad and mom were key leaders in the church I attended near campus. Her father was a lot like Pastor Dan Patton at The Church Next Door. He was a great support to the pastor, did announcements, and would even preach and teach from time to time.

While I was dating her, I was studying and preparing for graduate school. I started fasting on Wednesday's lunch as my way of seeking God's direction. “Lord, help me be ready for life. God, I want you to speak to me.”

This is the kind of spirit we are to approach God with when we fast. “God give me your attention. God help me humbly bow my life before you, that I might hear Your voice.”

Isaiah 58:9 (NIV) <sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

IF YOU WANT GOD'S ATTENTION FAST. That is what happened for me as a college student. For me it was not a voice. I had no bad dreams. I just felt deep inside me an awareness that this wonderful young lady was not for me. I knew God had other plans for her and other plans for me. I went to meet her and said, “I think we need to just be friends.” It was a good experience. I was able to stay in church, and work with her on campus with the Intervarsity Christian Fellowship. I was not expecting that after breaking up, but I can say today, that choice was a blessing from God. When you fast and pray without an agenda, but to welcome God's leading, you can find God's best. Too often we pray, “God bless the mess I have created.”

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Whereas when you fast, instead pray, “God what is your best for my life? I will follow you straight into that plan.”

PRAY: “Lord, as I abstain from food I want You to fill every void in my life. I humble myself, forgive me for wanting my way. If there is something you want for me, lead me to that which pleases You. I want my life to come into Your purposes. God help me to hear Your voice. Let You be honored in my life Jesus, Amen.”

### **DAY 10 Fasting brings deliverance**

In 1822, Ohio experienced a terrible season of drought which caused low stagnant waters and increased insects. The outcome was a terrible case of the fever all up and down the Ohio and Muskingum rivers. It was an awful summer. By August in Washington County, one in sixteen people had died due to the fever. On September 15, the county created a commission to visit the sick and help supply them with needs to help curb the death toll. The secretary of the county reported that ALL of Marietta was sick. The committee proposed a resolution: “The distressed situation of our fellow citizens and friends calls for the utmost exertions and deepest humiliation,” that “looking beyond the sword of pestilence to Him who wields it, we humble ourselves before Almighty God, and recommend our fellow citizens a day of public fasting, humiliation and prayer, imploring the pardon of our sins... as those who have hope in the Lord.”

The ministers of the area gave public notice of services on Saturday, September 21st in accordance with the resolution. It was noted a few days later in the *American Friend* that with the exception of fifteen or twenty people who were “quite low,” people began recovering. The epidemic of 1822 was over.

What a powerful case of God’s deliverance through prayer and fasting! Like Matthew 17:14-21 (KJV) <sup>19</sup> Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

<sup>20</sup> And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

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<sup>21</sup> Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

There are times in our life when we are desperate for God. It is best to choose God before that point of desperation. While we are fasting, ask the Lord for freedom from any habits or recurring health or relational needs.

PRAY: "Lord, help me to humble myself today. I need freedom that can only come from You. Help my unbelief. Tell God the specifics of your situation. \_\_\_\_\_ In Jesus' Name, Amen."

### **DAY 11 Fasting brings healing and anointing for a promotion Acts 9:9-19 SAUL**

The Bible is filled with special days. Our lives are filled with special days. One of the great and Godly ways of "kicking it up a notch" is to fast. Fasting lets us know (and God know) that we realize that no anointing, no promotion comes without Him. In Psalm 2, it tells us that God is in charge and even every person in political authority must bow before God.

In Acts 9, Saul (who was a leader against the Church) gets turned around as God's people are seeking Him for protection. God's solution was to convert an evil man and promote him. God even changes his name from Saul to Paul. God has the ability to change the way a man sees the world.

"17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength."

Today, as we see the change in leadership and the political climate of the world, I encourage you to ask God to bring the change in heart we need as a nation, as a globe, and as all of humanity. We need a move of God in our governing officials and decision makers. We put our hope in God not me.

*PRAY: "God, we thank You, for You are the one of promotion and anointing. Father, we need a change in heart. Please have mercy on us.*

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*The Church has lost more believers in this past year than any other year. Have mercy on the Church and the use our nation at this critical time. Father, anoint our leaders and be with them. In Jesus Name, Amen.”*

### **DAY 12 Fasting brings supernatural power and wisdom for ministry and to overcome evil**

We are all special to God. He is the first one to know and love us. We were designed and called into being by Him and were chosen and planted in our mother's womb. Nature itself is not the full explanation for your life. The question is, when did you first realize there was something more to life?

When I was a child I loved life. There were glimmers at times growing up when I realized I could impact the lives of others. I remember my mother telling me there was a family that asked if I could come to their house for dinner. The father was struggling with alcoholism and when I came over it helped with the peace in their home. “Sure, I'll go. I like playing with their kids and he works on cars. I liked watching and helping in the garage.” We all see little glimpses of our God giftings in different opportunities as we grow and mature.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus was young, he stayed in Jerusalem talking in the temple courts. We don't know much about his adolescent life outside this account. Luke 2:49 states, “49 “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?”” He felt at home in His life. Just a little further in that Gospel we see he is launched into ministry through fasting. Luke 4:1-13 (NIV) <sup>2</sup> Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.

What if this year you really started feeling at home in your God-designed life? We have been talking of how God touches us and says, “Tag. You're It!” God has a ministry for all of us. We are set apart as His children and it does not matter if you are a pastor or priest, mother, father, in a relationship or single. God has called people of all shapes, skin colors, professions, and educational backgrounds to be HIS ambassadors of hope and freedom.

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Let's use this 21 day season as our testimony to God that we want to live under His authority and no other authority.

*PRAY: "Lord, today as I fast I want to bring to an end all the temptations. Lord I want to declare aloud my submission to Your word. I trust You for my daily bread. Father, I want Jesus to be glorified not me. Help me to live the life of Love, Jesus like life. Amen."*

### **DAY 13 Fasting is a resource for marriages and families to be self-controlled**

One of the most amazing things about fasting is how little self control I see in myself. The smells are so hard to avoid. I keep telling my belly, "you are not in charge." Aside from food, at times I realize I have had too much screen time. I have not tried to do a media fast this year, but probably should try that next too. It is refreshing to fast and recognize the things you may need to take a break from. The one many people never mention is sexual fast. Many of us think of it as something Christians advocate for between a man and a woman in marriage. They don't hear of the little discussed practice of abstinence sexually to honor God.

1 Corinthians 7:1-5 (NIV) Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." <sup>2</sup> But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. <sup>3</sup> The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup> The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

<sup>5</sup> Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

This is not a fast to do because you are fighting with your spouse, but to seek God. Sexuality is designed by God for the health of a married couple. We give ourselves much like we give ourselves to God. Consider talking about this as a married couple. If you are single it should challenge you to

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remain celibate until marriage as a testimony of faith in God and a gift to your future spouse. The Bible is an honest book that explains sexuality is one of Satan's biggest tools to entrap us in a life out of control. Fasting helps us practice that self-control by the strength and grace of God.

*PRAY: "Lord, help me to be self controlled and alert. I want to honor you with my Body and my spirit. Help me to avoid the worlds way of thinking about sexuality. Teach me how to live self-controlled in the areas of food and sexuality. In Jesus name I pray, amen."*

### **DAY 14 Fasting will lift your burdens to God's power and authority**

I spent my Junior year of college living in Jerusalem from August to May of that year. In January, my parents came to visit. My brothers, Allen and Phillip, were there with me as well after spending fall semester at the Hebrew University in school. For the first time in our lives, all five of us were in Israel. We had a great time together.

A few weeks after they had all departed for home, I called my mom to chat and she told me her dad was in the hospital. He had a heart issue and we were unsure if he would make it through. I was heartbroken. I loved my grandpa. I was left wondering if I too should come home. My mom told me I could come home or stay. The decision was mine. I took some time to fast and pray. I remember going to the roof of the building and sitting on the wall praying and crying. I poured my heart out to God.

The Bible tells us this is how Nehemiah prayed for Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 1:4-6 (NIV) <sup>4</sup>When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup>let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel.

God opened the door for Nehemiah to come home to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. What is cool is in the book of Nehemiah they mention the Broad wall of Hezekiah day (Neh. 3:8). I Got to see that wall not long after it

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was discovered. The God that answered his prayers in fasting answered mine while I sat on a wall in Jerusalem some 2400 years after Nehemiah had arrived there.

As I sat on the wall in the sunshine praying, I told the Lord I would go home or I would stay. "God, You are in charge. I give my grandfather over to You. His life is in your hands. I trust Him to You. I want to see Him again but if that is in Heaven. That is fine." As I released my Grandfather, a peace came over me. My grandpa lived for many years. He got to know my wife and both of our children when they were little. Your Heavenly Father lifts burdens. What do you need to share with Him while you fast today?

*PRAY: "Lord I cast my care on You. I'm fasting because I trust Your power, authority and wisdom. My family, my marriage, my children and parents. God I put everything at your feet. I TRUST YOU!"*

### **DAY 15 Fasting will increase your love for Israel, God's people and His plans for humanity**

When they first came to faith in God back in 1967, my mom and dad started fasting and praying for America and Israel. Someone they knew said, "Did you hear on the news? God is bringing the Bible to life!" "What do you mean?", they asked. Five nations had lined up to attack little Israel. "You need to fast and pray!!", they urged. My parents did just that, because their Christian leaders told them to.

It was June of 1967, and six days later less than two thousand Jewish people died and the five large Arab armies had lost some 20,000 soldiers in a border dispute. Israel took all of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, The West Bank, and the nation of Jordan taken from the Palestinian people in 1940. In a matter of six days, Israel got back the land merely by just defending themselves.

In Nehemiah's day he called the people to fasting and prayer and God brought them home. Every time you and I see the Middle East move, it is connected to God's heart for humanity. God is trying to help us see our heart. Nehemiah knew God wanted a pure heart.

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Listen to him: Nehemiah 1:6-7 (NIV) I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

When we fast it gets our heart in line with God. I believe as we align with God we see our world more clearly from His perspective. Israel is just one lens to see God's heart, but that is a long lens of History. His faithfulness to His promise to them is a testimony that he will be faithful to you. That is why Christians pray for Israel and the Church around the world. When we see Christians persecuted they are part of God's plan of redemption just like the Jews. Redemption is for all who call on the name of Jesus, King of the Jews.

*PRAY: "Lord help me to see the big picture of Your redemption plan. Help me to hear Your voice over the world's affairs today. I want to be apart of Your work. In Israel, Columbus and the uttermost parts of the Earth. May Jesus' Name be praised, Amen."*

### **DAY 16 Fasting will increase our love for Jesus, intimacy with God**

In graduate school, I had a class on marriage counseling. They gave us a stack of books to read. At the time, I was not engaged to Jennifer, (my now wife) but I was very interested. That helped keep my single mind interested on one of the books I remember reading by Gary Smalley. He wrote about "opening and closing" a person's heart. He said a harsh word could close a person's heart, while a listening ear and a kind smile could open a heart. He taught us that as husbands we could influence our spouse's heart by understanding the "emotional banking system" and learning to invest in the love of our life.

The Bible tells us that God has made a big investment in our lives. Jesus came and built a relationship with humanity. In much the same way Dr. Gary Smalley invites us to listen, value and love our spouses and invest in those relationships - as God has already done that for us. The Gospel of Luke tells us of an elderly Jewish Woman who understood this principle and chose to invest her heart in God's word and ways. She gave her time

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to prayer and fasting. God saw her heart and invested insight, a spiritual gift of seeing what He was going to do when she read the Bible. God revealed to her His plan of salvation, Jesus, before he was born. Listen to this:

Luke 2:36-38 (NIV) <sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. <sup>38</sup> Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When you and I understand relational investing, we begin to see that time with our child or spouse is like planting seed. You love and value them and later there is a harvest of a deeper relationship. When I was first learning this I tested this out on Jennifer. I wrote her love letters and talked on the phone. Anna of the Bible was in love with God. She fell in love with His heart and plan for humanity as outlined in scripture. She saw God in the words of the prophets. Her prayers and fasting were rewarded very literally by seeing God in her hands.

How would your life change if God's word came to life in your hands today? I hope and pray, your fasting has deepened your love for God, but also those around you. Do you see how fasting is part of falling in love with God? I also hope you get a little "love sick" just as I was when I wrote letters to Jennifer and want to spend more days hungry for the love of your Heavenly Father. Who knows, you might even be inspired to write someone you love a love letter. Just a thought!

*PRAY: "Lord, teach me how to lean into relational investments. God, who are the people in my life who need a deposit of love and hope? Lord, how can I invest my heart in You? Jesus said, where my treasure is my heart will follow. As I fast today, I am treasuring You. Grow my love for Your ways and You. In Jesus' name. Amen"*

**DAY 17 Fasting is key to growth of the Church and it's leadership**

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Several years ago, our church had just completed our begging-of-the-year 21 Day of Fast. The day after the fast ended, one of our staff members quit. I felt devastated. I said, "God I thought you were going to bless me because I fasted, now this?" It took a couple months, but the way we ended up replacing that person actually helped to grow the church. The new person's experience and leadership were even more suited for our needs. Even the person that left was happier and more fulfilled in their new job.

Ever since that time I have learned to ask God's blessing and hand on the leadership of our church. I learned HE is the one who picks the leaders and puts them in place. I have been praying that God would set apart for us exactly what He wants that would fit our needs for His future. Look how it worked in Antioch of the Bible:

Acts 13:1-4 (NIV) <sup>1</sup> Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. <sup>4</sup> The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

Would you do the Church Next Door a favor and ask God to anoint who we need as leaders? I believe that God will reposition and appoint new leaders if we ask and His goals will be accomplished. It excites me to think God would care enough to direct our church.

PRAY: "Lord as we start this new year give us the leaders we need. Set aside men and women well prepared and anointed to lead, teach and serve. God help us to be willing to see You speaking to us. In Jesus' name, Amen."

### **DAY 18 Fasting for Justice**

In today's world, folks march for justice, but I remember a time when folks *fasted* for justice. When I was in high school, there were several folks who fasted to get attention. The day I graduated from high school, I went to see

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the movie Gandhi. The movie retells the amazing times of fasting Gandhi did and called others to to highlight the needs in India. I realize he was not a Christian, but he did tap into a “spiritual law” of God’s Kingdom. God appreciates a fast for the cause of justice. I wonder if anyone who is worried about bullying today has considered fasting and prayer? Listen again to Isaiah teaching on fasting.

Isaiah 58:6 (NIV) “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”

I believe that America needs a heart change. I believe that the injustices we see in the area of race, bullying and poverty would be adjusted by God’s hand quickly if we fasted regularly. This year I plan on spending Wednesdays until sundown fasting for the Church and injustice in our nation. I would like to ask you to consider if God might lead you to join in that. I believe that revival and repentance will cure our nation's needs faster than anything devised by man.

*PRAY: “Lord, give us heart for healing injustice through prayer and fasting. Help me, In Jesus Name. Amen.”*

### **DAY 19 Fasting for opens our heart to Revival**

Charles Finney was one of America’s greatest revival preachers. He was an Attorney-turned-preacher who became one of the key leaders of what we now call “The Second Great Awakening” in American history. He taught at a school that still remains in northern Ohio, Oberlin College. Unfortunately, it is an evangelical school today. In 1835, Oberlin College was the first to accept all genders and races when other schools did not.

Finney was known for his innovations in preaching and the conduct of religious meetings. These included having women pray out loud in public meetings of mixed sexes; development of the “anxious seat”, a place where those considering becoming Christians could sit to receive prayer and extemporaneous preaching.

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One of the keys to his revivals was the preparation beforehand of prayer and fasting. Charles Finney, in speaking of the beginning of his revival work, says, "I had been in the habit of rising early in the morning, and spending a season of prayer alone in the Meeting House. I used to spend a great deal of time in prayer; sometimes I thought, literally praying without ceasing. I also found it very profitable, and felt very much inclined to hold frequent days of private fasting. On these days I would seek to be entirely alone with God, and would generally wander off into the woods, or get into the Meeting House, or somewhere away entirely by myself."

He declares that, "When he detected a lessening of the Spirit's wonderful presence in him and through him, he would fast for three days and three nights, and after doing so, he testified that he would invariably be again filled with the Holy Spirit's marvelous power." Finney's teaching recognized what Joel spoke of "returning to the Lord."

Joel 2:12-25 (NIV) "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."

*PRAY: "Lord help us to return to You as we fast and pray. May our actions lead to others coming home to You. Lord bring our hearts home to You. In Jesus Name, Amen"*

### **DAY 20 Fasting is part of the price one pays for a godly mate and spouse**

The Bible tells us again and again that to have a Godly marriage we have to be prepared to lay down our lives. In Ephesians, it says that as Christ laid down His life so should we for our spouse. It says that we are to love them more than our own bodies. Fasting and prayer is great preparation for those asking for a Godly spouse as well as seeking God's blessing on our marriage/future marriage. I know some couples who fast on their anniversary and celebrate with a special meal after sundown in the evening.

David's first wife, Saul's daughter, loved and wanted David as a husband. Saul agreed with it, because he thought he would set such a high price that

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David would die in battle bringing back the evidence of 200 dead Philistines.

“26 When the attendants told David these things, he was pleased to become the king’s son-in-law. So before the allotted time elapsed, 27 David took his men with him and went out and killed two hundred Philistines... 1 Samuel 18:26-27”

David *literally* risked his life for his bride. When you and I fast and pray for our marriages/future marriages and homes, we are laying down our lives for a spiritual purpose.

When Abraham wanted a wife for his son, Isaac, he sent the servant to the home country. The servant prayed asking God for wisdom. He came bringing gifts.

Genesis 24:32-49 (NIV) “Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, <sup>48</sup> and I bowed down and worshiped the Lord. I praised the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master’s brother for his son. <sup>49</sup> Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn.”

The Bible paints such a wonderful picture. It appears the servant was going without food and water until he found the woman God had for Isaac. When the servant returns with Rebecca, Isaac is in the field seeking the Lord. Genesis 25:63 says, “He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching.”

I want to challenge you to make a sacrifice of prayer and fasting for your marriage. Sit back and trust God. Meditate on His faithfulness and watch to see what God does.

*PRAYER: “Lord, while I am fasting I am asking you to bless my marriage. Lord, I’m asking you to give my children and grandchildren Godly mates. Lord, fill our church community with healthy families with strong marriages. For the sake of Your kingdom purposes. Amen.”*

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### **DAY 21 Fasting opens the heavens to deliver a message to your door**

I have asked God for wisdom while fasting over jobs, I have fasted for my children, Grandma Godbey when she moved from the farm to a small apartment and when I needed to sell her house, and more. Honestly, Jennifer and I have fasted about every major and many minor parts of our lives together. We have even fasted when we were not sure what we were asking God to do. One year, we even fasted and prayed for our dog Boaz when he was sick. Within 24 hours he was miraculously better and our vet could not explain what had happened. Daniel fasted 21 days when God's people were in a foreign land.

Daniel 10:2-4 (NIV) <sup>2</sup> At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. <sup>3</sup> I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. <sup>4</sup> On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, <sup>5</sup> I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist.

God's response was to send a word from heaven. God's messenger indicated that he start the journey on day one of prayer and fasting. Unfortunately, the Angel was resisted and had to fight a spiritual battle. I know today is day 21, but don't stop if you are still seeking a victory. Don't stop short. Also, don't wait until next January to fast again or for me to invite you to fast. Be like Daniel, listen to your heart and community/family needs and fast and pray. That is what disciples of Jesus do.

*PRAY: "Lord, don't let me stop short of your best and victory. Continue to teach me about fasting. Invite me to fast whenever you want and I need to humble myself for your purposes. For Jesus to live in me. AMEN."*

**BONUS LESSON Fasting for favor and protection of a nation or people**

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I know you were not expecting this. I like to give folks more than they expect. I also believe there are many more than 21 reasons for Christians to fast. I would be remiss if I didn't tell you about the fasting that brings protection over a nation - one of my favorite lessons of the Bible.

Some folks don't know how much God loves orphans and women. The story of Ester is such a life lesson. God takes His little girl and raises her up to save the nation of Israel from a man more evil than Hitler. Hamen attempts to kill every Jew in the world by government decree, but God uses this hidden gem of a young lady, Queen Esther. His secret power is to increase our faith by demonstrating a nation's trust in God by prayer and fasting.

Esther 4:8-16 (NIV) <sup>15</sup> Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: <sup>16</sup> "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Next time you see a need amplify your trust in God by going without food and water. It reminds your body and soul there is someone bigger than you in charge of life. When you fast you take a hold on earth and a hold on heaven at the same time. Grab hold and believe God is able.

### **BONUS LESSON 2 He/She is no fool who trusts God with Prayer and Fasting**

Over the years of my life I have noticed that some people take God more seriously than others. Some folks believe that God and His ways are optional. I don't believe that at all. I have never wondered if gravity was optional. I know I can fly on a plane, but I realize that I have to have more force and lift with the wings to overcome the power of gravity. Physics tells me that it is reasonable to fly. In our world, there are spiritual forces trying to hold us back and there is a forcefulness that will overcome. I believe that prayer and fasting to be one of those spiritual tools that can provide us the "lift" we need to move forward spiritually.

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Jesus tells us John the Baptist was a special man, not just a man, but a prophet along the lines of Elijah. Elijah was able to do a mighty battle for God and His people. He won against the occult leaders who worshiped Baal. When we look at John, he was known for living a fasted, nazirite life. He is also known for a limited diet that some would consider a fast. Listen to Jesus' message about John and people who approach life with a forceful approach:

Matthew 11:11-12 (New English Translation) <sup>11</sup> "I tell you the truth, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is. <sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and forceful people lay hold of it."

If you want God's best for your life it will take a spiritual and mental focus and strength. I believe the self control and determination that fasting brings helps us win spiritually. Make fasting a common part of your spiritual habits. Develop the Christian approach that says God's kingdom is valuable, "I will give life completely to His purposes."