

## A Verse to Live by

“So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.”

Ezra 8:23 (NIV)

### March Prayer Focus

This month, pray for God to give you a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit and to open your heart to a deeper understanding of His love for you. Pray also for a deeper understanding of what Jesus' sacrifice means for us. We were not worthy, but praise God, we were **worth** it to Him! Pray Ephesians 1:18 for yourself and those you love, “Open the eyes of their hearts, and let the light of Your truth flood in. Shine Your light on the hope You are calling them to embrace. Reveal to them the glorious riches You are preparing as their inheritance.”

### Life Application Challenge

Look up stories about fasting and see how God always answered His children in a mighty way after. Pray for God to increase

your understanding of the spiritual practice of fasting. If you need a breakthrough then seriously consider fasting. You have already been promised a reward if you fast; all you have to do is trust and obey.

### Recommended Scripture Reading

Matthew 6 - In this chapter Jesus gives instruction on praying, fasting and serving humbly, not seeking to glorify ourselves.

2 Chronicles 20 - This is an awesome chapter to read about a miraculous answer to prayer that led to victory after King Jehoshaphat called a fast for all of Judah.

Isaiah 58 - This chapter teaches us the type of fasting that is pleasing to God. Also warns us if we have unrepentant hearts, God will not reward our fasting.

# Church On Fire!

Eleventh Street Church of God | March 2021 Prayer Newsletter



Season of  
**LENT**



## Fasting God-ward

It is hard to believe I have been writing this newsletter for a little over a year now. I hope it continues to bless and encourage you. Thank you for the support and encouragement I have received from so many of you. Now is a good time to tell you, in case you haven't heard it lately; I love you.

We are heading toward one of the most meaningful holidays for Christians: Easter. Lent is the 40 day period of time leading up to Easter, which started on February 17 and ends April 3. The purpose of these 40 days is to reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus and what that means to us, so we can deepen our relationship with Him. Many Christians will fast during Lent. You do not have to, and in no way does that make you less of a Christian, but there are blessings from fasting that deserve our attention. Typically in the Bible, fasting was from food, but now some Christians choose to fast from other things such as social media, tv, and other activities. My intent with this newsletter is not to pressure you into fasting but to explain the reasons we should fast and how to do it. I can tell you from personal experience, the rewards of fasting far outweigh the discomfort you may experience during.

First and foremost, fasting should always be done with a God centered focus. The heroes of the faith fasted for various reasons: Moses fasted before God gave him the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:28), Nehemiah fasted before he petitioned King Artaxerxes and built the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 1:4), Paul fasted before he went on to minister (Ac. 9:9), and Jesus fasted before being tempted by Satan (Mtt.4:1-11). Fasting is something believers have done for 1000s of years because there is a benefit to it. Think of it as an intensifier to prayer, an exclamation point on our prayer to God. Fasting removes distractions so we more intentionally pray. If your spiritual life feels dry, if you don't feel the joy of the Lord, if you need to overcome a recurring sin, or you just want to grow spiritually, then it's time to take a closer look into the purpose of fasting.

There are many ways to fast. It can simply be from one meal a day, skipping one meal on certain days, or a full day of fasting. Fasting is temporarily giving up something that is in itself good, like food, in order to replace it with something greater - God and His work in our lives. The idea is to use the time that

you would normally dedicate to something else and give it to prayer. Fasting and prayer should always be done together. Jesus gave some specific instructions about fasting, "And 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." (Mtt. 6:16-18) Basically, don't intentionally broadcast that you are fasting to gain the approval of others. God's rewards are always far greater than the praise of men. Our focus must be God-ward.

But what is the purpose of fasting? In Matthew 6:16 Jesus states "And when you fast", so obviously He intends His followers to fast; in this sense it is a matter of obedience. But fasting is so much more than just an act of obedience. It is a way to give God your undivided attention and intimately connect with Him, as well as a way to show your longing for Him and your desperate need for His intervention. If you have a problem or concern so big only God can fix it, such as healing from disease or addiction, financial restoration, repentance, salvation of a loved one, or God's guidance in a decision, then these are good reasons to fast. Fast and pray when you need a breakthrough. Prayer is what tunes us into God and fasting removes the interference and strengthens the signal. Let me be clear, I am not implying fasting is a means to manipulate God, but a way to commune with and glorify Him. We are not praying to get God in alignment with our wishes, but to get ourselves in line with His will. And God hears and answers our heartfelt prayers, "And whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." (1 Jn. 3:22) God loves blessing His children, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Mtt. 6:33)

Jesus assures us in Matthew 6:18 that our fasting will be rewarded by God, "And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." If we seek God and obey Him we will always be blessed. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Mtt. 5:6)

Watching God Work,

Carolyn Abel