

Fast Friends Bible Study

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FAST FRIENDS 12-WEEK BIBLE STUDY
ON FASTING AND PRAYER

By Suzanne Niles and Wendy Simpson Little

We fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

—Ezra 8:23

God answers prayer. Amazing, isn't it, that we can have intimacy with the God of the universe? We can listen for and hear the voice of our shepherd and Savior, Jesus. We can have our requests led in prayer by the prompting of the Holy Spirit! Are we grasping this invitation, this truth? Wendy and I didn't fully, not until we began our commitment to fast and pray together one day a week, 13 years ago. To say God has grown us would be a vast understatement. He has completely transformed our lives, and we would not be the Christ followers we are today without having drawn close to Him through this spiritual discipline.

We share our journey, our ups and downs, our failures and victories in our book *Fast Friends: The Amazing Power of Friendship, Fasting, and Prayer*. For your partner or church group study purposes, start by reading *Fast Friends* and completing the 10-week book study in the back of the book. This will be the catalyst and guide for helping you start on your own "Fast Friends" commitment. After that, we suggest you go directly into this free downloadable E-Book, *Fast Friends 12-Week Bible Study on Fasting and Prayer*, with your partner or group. This will further lead you as you learn about those in the Bible who sacrificed and benefited greatly from fasting and prayer. Although there is no biblical command to fast and pray, there are certainly reports in Scripture showing God's people engaged in these spiritual disciplines, and the outcome was nothing short of miraculous and life altering!

Wendy and I have shared in our book *Fast Friends: The Amazing Power of Friendship, Fasting, and Prayer* that the spiritual discipline of fasting with prayer has caused us to hear the Lord's voice much clearer. That still, small voice we hear in our heads has brought us infinitely closer to Jesus in ways we would have never imagined. We guarantee that God wants to communicate with you as is witnessed in His word.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14).

Jesus knows all those that are His.

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

He knows when we listen and if we are surrendered to and will follow Him.

The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10).

When we hear the Lord whispering in our thoughts, Wendy and I have learned to say, “Speak, Lord.” When God asks us to do something, we have also learned it is best to say, “Yes, Lord” and act on what He asks us to do. Do you hear the voice of God calling you to fast and pray?

We want you to see the critical link between fasting and prayer through what we share in our book *Fast Friends: The Amazing Power of Friendship, Fasting, and Prayer* and a personal study of God’s Word. While we are not theologians, we are students of the Bible and followers of Jesus Christ, and as such we are all charged with this message from Scripture:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

If you are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit to guide you into the truth of God’s Word. For that reason, we will share the Bible accounts with their location in Scripture and a few questions to spur you on through the study. We will leave you to wrestle with your own findings and seek the Lord for answers. If you will commit to this process, you will be fulfilling 2 Timothy 2:15, becoming a student of the truth.

Denying ourselves through fasting and prayer and focusing on what God has to say to us through His Word has revolutionized our lives. We urge you to step out in faith and begin your investigation into fasting and prayer. God says:

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

Your lives will truly never be the same again!

We are praying for you.

Love in Christ,
Suzanne and Wendy

***Fast Friends: The Amazing Power of Friendship, Fasting, and Prayer* is available at several retail locations and online (<http://ow.ly/2bvzuL>).**

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Week 1

Jesus and the “Whens”

Matthew 6

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting.”

—Jesus speaking in Matthew 6:16

One of the most well-known and well-loved chapters of the New Testament, Matthew 6 is part of Jesus’s pivotal Sermon on the Mount, which is found in Matthew 5-7. Much of Christ’s most important teachings on living are contained in these three chapters.

In preparation for the questions below, turn to Matthew 6 and read it through. Now consider the following questions:

1. What three Christian disciplines are highlighted in the following verses?
 - The discipline of _____ (vv. 2-3).
 - The discipline of _____ (vv. 5-15).
 - The discipline of _____ (vv. 16-18).
2. Each of these sections begins with the words “When you” What does this tell you about Jesus’ expectation for His followers? What does this indicate to you when Jesus uses these words to preface His remarks about fasting?
3. What was a warning Jesus gave in verse 16 to those practicing fasting?
4. It was common in His day for the Pharisees to fast and put ashes on their heads to publicly signify their suffering and sacrifice. In what ways do Christians today try to make their “holiness” known before others?
5. What instruction does Jesus give in verse 17 for the way He would like you to fast?

6. Who is to notice your fast?

7. What is the promise in verse 18 that accompanies this kind of fast, and how does this help or encourage you?

8. Verses 19-34 deal with prioritizing God as the first love in our lives. There are four “do not” commands given by Jesus. What are they?
 - Do not _____ (v. 19).
 - Do not _____ (v. 25).
 - Do not _____ (v. 31).
 - Do not _____ (v. 34).

9. Do you try to keep a regular appointment to pray, worship, and read the Word? If not, what can you do to change that?

10. How could giving, praying, and fasting help you grow in your ability to seek Him first (v. 33) and to trust Him more for your daily needs?

11. How would your life or demeanor change if you were free from worry, and who would be impacted by such a change?

Suzanne and I have said repeatedly that it was the *when* that got us. Jesus did not say *if* you pray, but *when* you pray. Jesus did not say *if* you give, but *when* you give. And Jesus did not say *if* you fast, but *when* you fast. This passage and what we believe Jesus is saying here has impacted our lives in profound ways. The act of the *when you fast* has altered our lives for now and eternity because of the depth of relationship it has created with our Savior. I am sure you have heard it said, “You will never know until you try it.” Whether it is food, the Internet or TV, or a partial fast as when Daniel fasted pleasurable foods and lotions, we highly encourage you to give it a try. If you seek Him, you will find Him and He is the greatest treasure of all!

Memory Verse: Matthew 6:16-18

“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 their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face 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.” (Matthew 6:16-18)

Week 2

Moses: The First Fast

Exodus 33-34

So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.

—Exodus 34:28

The very first recorded fast in the Bible takes place in Exodus 34 with Moses. Occasion? His return to Mt. Sinai to meet with God once again...to receive a second chance for the Israelites. In this fast we see several incredible elements at play: intercession, encounter, revelation, and transformation. We will give an overview of each and invite you to spend some time in greater depth in your own study time for any of these aspects especially speaking to you in this season.

Background: Exodus 31 and 32. Moses had already been the recipient of an incredible set of God-carved tablets with the Ten Commandments etched into them. After God delayed him on Mt. Sinai, he returned to discover that in his absence, his own brother had led the people to throw their jewelry into a fire and create an idol, a golden calf to worship. How quickly we fail. How quickly we grow impatient and turn to our own devices. Moses's heart is moved to anger and he throws down the tablets, shattering them. God, also angry at their idolatry, says He will no longer go before them Himself on their journey to the Promised Land.

Intercession and Encounter

After interceding and pleading with the Lord to forgive the Israelites, God says He will send an angel to go before them from now on. Moses asks God for three things. Bold requests spring from a bold faith.

1. What does Moses request in Exodus 33:13, and what was God's response?
2. In verses 15 and 16, Moses asks for God to keep His presence with the Israelites for a specific reason. What is it?

3. Write out verse 17.
4. What do these words from the Lord mean to you personally right now?
5. Moses's last request is very bold. Read verses 18-23. What does he ask of God?
6. What will pass before Moses?
7. What will be proclaimed to him?
8. Why do you think no one on earth can see the face of God?
9. How do you see God's tenderness and love for Moses in His response (vv. 21-23)?
10. Read Exodus 34:1-8. What was Moses's immediate response to his encounter with God's glory?
11. Fasting can focus our hearts and awareness on Him. Pray specifically that God will show you something of His kindness, goodness, or glory today! What is it you would like to experience with God in this season?

12. Moses again makes an intercession for the people as a result of this encounter. Write out his plea found in verse 9.

Revelation and Transformation

Following Moses's time of personal experience and intercession, God goes on to reestablish His covenant with the Israelites and give details about His expectations of them.

13. Read verses 10-28. Why do you think it was so necessary to destroy the idols and altars of the foreign gods (v. 13)?

14. What areas of your life might be considered idols that take your time or worship away from God?

15. How will you take steps this week to rid your heart, mind, or home of that which takes your eyes and worship off God?

16. Read Exodus 34:29. What was the outward, visible result of the time Moses spent with God on Mt. Sinai?

17. How does your time with God, spent in prayer and fasting, change you?

18. Will you ask God to make His glory evident through you today?

19. Reflect back over the study on Moses. What specifically stands out to you as a way God might be inviting you into a deeper relationship with Him?

20. Will you spend some time fasting and praying for Him to be able to lead you and accomplish this in your life this week?

Memory Verse: Exodus 34:6-7

He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” (Exodus 34:6-7)

Week 3

David's Fast for His Son

2 Samuel 12

“God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’”

—Paul speaking in Acts 13:33

In preparation for this study, first read 2 Samuel 12:1-22.

Read 2 Samuel 2:2-4. What title was David given and over whom did he rule?

Read 2 Samuel 5:1-5. Who was David ultimately king over, and how long did he rule and from where?

In Acts 13:22, how does God refer to David, and what does God say David will do for Him?

God called David a man after God's own heart. What an amazing legacy! His backstory was rich. He is remembered as a young shepherd, a giant slayer, and the one whose lyre playing chased away the evil spirit from King Saul. David also became the object of Saul's hatred when he received praise for slaying more people than Saul (2 Samuel 18:7-11). David ends up having to evade Saul's attempts to murder him. After Saul's death, David replaces him as king.

Although David had a heart that sought after God, his heart also fell prey to dark, murderous sin. This sin, once brought to light in David's life, moved him to repent and then fast and pray, pleading with God for the life of his newborn son. This part of David's life is recorded in 2 Samuel 11. It's the story of David's sin with Bathsheba and its fallout. Take a few minutes to read it through.

Now let's move ahead to 2 Samuel 12. Read the first 22 verses. For personal application, ask yourself these questions: *How often do I truly search my heart for any hidden sin? If another believer confronted me with my known sin, how would I hope to respond? Knowing there can be consequences to sin, will this help me avoid giving into temptation?*

1. Look back over 2 Samuel 12:1-6. As a prophet, part of Nathan's responsibility to God was to speak the truth about sin. How did David react to the story of the rich man and the poor man?

2. In 2 Samuel 12:7-14, what did Nathan reveal to David about the truth of the story? How will God deal with David's sin?
3. Does David accept the truth of this confrontation (v. 13)? What does he say?
4. What judgment will David's sin bring (v. 14)?
5. In 2 Samuel 12:15-22, we see that David's infant son became ill. What does David do as a result of this news?
6. David's attendants pleaded with him to eat, but he refused. On the seventh day when the child dies, does David continue to fast? What does he do?
7. After David washed and changed his clothes, what did he do before he ate?
8. David's attendants were perplexed by his actions. When they questioned him, what reason did David give them for his behavior? Who had a stronger faith in the Lord, David or his attendants? Do you get an understanding for how sincerely David truly trusted and loved the Lord, accepting with worship whatever came from God's hand?

David felt compelled to fast and pray, pleading with the Lord for his son's life, even though God had already pronounced judgment. He thought maybe God would be gracious to him and let the child live. David acknowledged his sin, yet he knew the forgiveness and goodness of God and hoped God might change His mind.

What is so powerful is that even though David fasted and prayed and received a no to his request from God, the first thing he does in response is to make himself presentable to go worship the Lord: *David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went in to the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate* (2 Samuel 12:20).

When we receive a heartbreak instead of a rescue, how do we respond to God?

You may fast and pray, but there is no guarantee God will send you the answer you desire. On the other hand, there is the guarantee that in His sovereignty, He will do what is just and right. His ways are higher than ours; His thoughts are higher than ours.

Regardless of the answer you receive, will you respond like David, with praise and worship in your heart to God? May we all become Christ followers who seek after God's own heart, in prayer, in faith, in trust—living a life that testifies to the magnificent wisdom of our heavenly Father.

Determine to spend some extra time in worship this week. Praising and worshiping God not only honors Him, but it gives you a heavenly perspective and draws you closer into His presence!

Memory Verse: 2 Samuel 12:20

David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went in to the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. (2 Samuel 12:20)

Week 4

The Fast of Jehoshaphat and Judah

2 Chronicles 20:1-30

The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the ways of his father David before him. He did not consult the Baals but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel.

—2 Chronicles 17:3

Read 1 Kings 22:41-44. Who was Jehoshaphat?

Now read 2 Chronicles 17:3-6. What did Jehoshaphat do that pleased the Lord?

When Jehoshaphat became king, he honored God. In his early years he removed the high places dedicated to the worship of false gods and the Asherah poles from Judah. (Asherah was a Canaanite goddess associated with passion and the sea. The pagan gods Baal and Asherah were commonly worshipped together. The Asherah poles were symbols of the goddess Asherah.)

In the third year of his reign, he sent out his officials to teach the Book of the Law of the Lord in all the towns of Judah. Jehoshaphat's rule started out great, but in later years he made some poor choices outside of God's will. You can study further in 2 Chronicles to learn about that period of his life. For now we will focus on 2 Chronicles 20 and how he called all of Judah to fast and pray together in community.

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-30. Before you move on to the questions numbered below, ask yourself: *When times get tough, what is my first response? Do I worry? Do I plan my course of action to remedy the negative situation? Or do I inquire of the Lord (as in the case of Jehoshaphat)?*

1. What was foretold to Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:1-2?
2. In 2 Chronicles 20:3-4, what emotion does Jehoshaphat experienced? How does he decide to deal with this emotion?

3. Study Jehoshaphat's prayer (vv. 5-12). Before Jehoshaphat presents the problem and asks for help, what does he recount about the Lord? Note, too, the progression of the prayer:
 - Acknowledging God and who He is
 - Proclaiming their trust in Him even if they should face calamity
 - Proclaiming their faith in Him that he will hear and save them
 - Presenting the problem and who the perpetrators are
 - Acknowledging they have no idea what to do, but their eyes are on the Lord
 - Declaring their complete dependence on God and His goodness

4. Who spoke the answer from the Lord and what did the Lord say (vv. 14-17)?

5. What was their response to God for this answer (vv. 18-19)?

6. Look over verses 20-24. When it came time to march into war, what did Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah do as they traveled? What did God set in motion as a result of their actions?

7. Now consider verses 25-30. What is a recurring theme that resonates from the mouth of Judah to the Lord?

8. Jehoshaphat and the people were faithful to worship God before they knew the outcome and after they saw His deliverance. Let us be faithful to follow their example and live in constant communion with praise and worship to our King. How could you offer God more commitment and gratitude?

Scripture doesn't tell us why Jehoshaphat chose to have community fasting and prayer. Possibly it was because the vast armies were coming against all of Judah. Maybe it was because the king knew that the collective prayer of the people would honor God and show their dependence and

commitment to Him. Whatever Jehoshaphat's reason, his plan worked, and the people of Judah proclaimed together, "Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (20:12).

The result? Jehoshaphat and Judah depended on God, seeking Him through fasting and prayer. God delivered them from their enemies, and the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side. What does this tell you about the significance of prayer and fasting? Ask yourself, *Am I willing to make a life change that includes fasting and prayer?*

The New Testament tells us we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Study what that means in regards to the temple that bears your name in this week's memory verse.

Memory Verse: 2 Chronicles 20:9

"If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this **temple** that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us." (2 Chronicles 20:9; emphasis added)

Week 5

Ezra and Two Fasts

Ezra 7-10

“The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way.”

—Ezra 8:31

In preparation for this study please read Ezra 7-10.

Who was Ezra? What were his duties and his strong points?

Whose hand was upon Ezra? Why do you think Ezra had such favor?

Ezra was a scribe, a priest, and a man who knew God’s Word and obeyed it. God’s hand was on Ezra because he studied and lived out the Word of God. He also shared and taught what he learned so others would apply the Holy Scriptures to their lives. Wouldn’t we all like the favor of having God’s hand on all that we touch for His glory? Ezra is a great role model to follow as we seek to make a difference in this world for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ezra was a passionate leader who led the second group of exiles to Judah and Jerusalem. King Artaxerxes rolled out the red carpet for Ezra to do this. Let’s take a look at the preparation, the journey to Jerusalem, and what Ezra discovered about the people when he arrived. Especially take note of the two fasts and Ezra’s reasons for them.

1. Read the letter King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra in chapter 7:11-26.

- Name the things that the king gave to Ezra to take to Jerusalem. What was he to use them for (vv. 13-17)?

- What did the king say Ezra could do with any leftover gold and silver (vv. 18-20)? In verse 20, where could Ezra take things from if he had more need?

- What was the king afraid of (v. 23)? (Note that the king calls the Lord “your God.” Even though he did not refer to Him as his God, the king had a healthy respect and fear of the God of heaven.)

- What did the king tell Ezra to teach everyone (vv. 25-26)? What did the king say should befall them if they did not obey?

- What was Ezra’s response to God (vv. 27-28)? Because the hand of the Lord was upon Ezra, how did that affect the way he led the people?

2. In chapter 8:15-23, where did Ezra and the people camp? For how long?

3. In verse 21, what did Ezra declare and why?

4. In verse 22, what was Ezra’s reason for not wanting to ask the king for protection?

Ezra was a faithful mouthpiece for his God. He shared with the king how mighty his God was. As Ezra camped, he looked around at the people, the children, and the expensive items they were carrying to Jerusalem. He knew there may be enemies along the way and there could be an attack. Ezra didn’t want the king to think he had lost trust in God, so he did what we should always do in the first place: depend fully and completely on our Lord by petitioning Him.

5. Read verse 8:23. Memorize this short verse and use it to encourage you when you are fasting.

6. Read 8:31-32. How did God answer the fasting and prayer of Ezra and the people?

7. In chapter 9:1-2, what was Ezra told about the behavior of the people of Israel? What was his reaction in verses 3-4?

8. In 9:5-15, what do you notice about Ezra's prayer in regards to where he lays blame? Do you find it interesting that Ezra's prayer stated as "our" sins? Please read 2 Chronicles 7:14. As the church we all need to be praying for our country that there will be a turning from sin and healing for our land.

9. Chapter 10 holds the resolution to the sin of the people and it is a tough pill to swallow for some. In 10:1-4, what is the solution they decide on?

10. What does Ezra continue to do in verse 6 because of the sin of Israel?

11. The people confessed and made a vow to right the wrong done. Read 10:18-44. All of these people paid a price for their sin. Do you think there are always consequences to sin? God forgives us when we ask, but often the consequences are set in motion as a natural result of our choice to disobey.

12. What are the two reasons for fasting we see in Ezra chapters 7-10?

God has given us examples in Scripture so we can learn His truth and His ways. His Word is a blueprint for our lives. It shows us how to walk with Him and live a life that points others to Him. Ezra knew God's Word, obeyed it, and taught it to others all while living an upright life before Him. We would do well to follow his example not only in prayer and fasting but in his complete dedication to God. What steps can you take to be more like Ezra? What will you sacrifice? What will you incorporate into your life in order to live uprightly?

Memory Verse: Ezra 8:23

“So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and He answered our prayer.” (Ezra 8:23)

Week 6

The Fast of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1:1-2:9

I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

—Nehemiah praying in Nehemiah 1:6

Read Nehemiah 1:1-2:9 and note who Nehemiah was to King Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah had an important yet dangerous position before the king. As cupbearer he was charged with choosing and tasting the wine prior to presenting it to the king. Why? So if it were poisoned the king would be spared.

Take some time to look at some commentaries (biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries) to learn more about the gravity of this career choice. Some suggest that the time spent before the king as cupbearer was lengthy and repetitive enough to cause a trusted relationship to form between the king and his servant. This might even extend to the king inquiring of the cupbearer in regards to certain situations within the kingdom.

When Nehemiah receives some bad news, his response is fasting and prayer. We will look at his prayer, his preparation for going before King Artaxerxes, and how God answers Nehemiah's prayers. This serves as a good example for us as we take important issues before the throne of our King, Lord Jesus.

1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-3. Where did Nehemiah live at this point in time? Where did his brothers come from and what group did they belong to?
2. These men brought Nehemiah some news. What was it?
3. In verse 4, what was Nehemiah's reaction to the news? After he poured out his initial emotions, what spiritual discipline did he engage in? Why do you think he chose to fast and pray?

When the Jewish people fasted and prayed, their mourning was with a loud voice. We have a phrase “I feel your pain,” Nehemiah identified with the suffering of the people of Judah because they were his people. How often do we pray for the church body, for the bride of Christ, collectively and with great passion? Are we apathetic or do we actually grieve with and for others?

4. Read Nehemiah’s prayer in chapter 1:5-10. Then take a look at the order in which this prayer is constructed.

- How does Nehemiah refer to God? Who does God keep His covenant of love with?
- Who does Nehemiah ask forgiveness for? Have you ever prayed for forgiveness in this way?
- Our Lord is a God of justice, forgiveness, and restoration. In verse 8, what instructions does Nehemiah remind God of?
- In verse 11, what does Nehemiah say God’s servants delight in?
- Read Psalms 37:4. What is the desire of Nehemiah’s heart as he goes before the king?

Nehemiah is willing to be used of God. Even though he was devastated by the news of Jerusalem, he didn’t rush in and ask the king for help. He first went to the king of heaven to confess his sins and ask for favor. What will you do the next time you face a trial that requires action? Will you go in your own strength or fast and pray before the Lord, waiting on his guidance?

5. Let’s look at how God answered Nehemiah’s prayer. What does the king notice different about Nehemiah (2:1-3)?

6. What is Nehemiah's answer to the king and why do you think he was afraid?

7. In verse 4, the king asks Nehemiah what his request is. What does Nehemiah do before answering?

Nehemiah sends up a quick "arrow" prayer. We should always be conscious of praying without ceasing and appealing to the Lord no matter how short or long our prayer is.

8. Nehemiah then shares his request with the king. Does the king question this request or does he grant it? What is interesting about the way the king answered the request? How does Nehemiah say the king feels about sending him?

9. Read verses 7-9. What does Nehemiah ask the king to give him for his journey and why? Why does Nehemiah say that his requests were granted? Do you think the king valued Nehemiah and that the favor granted him has anything to do with Nehemiah's fasting and prayer in chapter 1?

Nehemiah was heartsick about the situation in Jerusalem. He knew the only way to find an answer was to go before the Lord in prayer and fasting. God heard, honored his prayer, and gave him favor with the king, who provided the supplies, letters, and safety he needed to complete his journey and start rebuilding the wall.

Does this story encourage you to fast and pray? It certainly did for Wendy and me. God is faithful. If we seek Him, we will find Him. How much do you want to find Him? Is it worth a sacrifice? If so, join us in the journey of fasting and prayer.

The God of creation wants to spend time with you! Ask yourself and answer truthfully, *What does it mean to me and how important is it to me to spend time with my heavenly Father?*

Memory Verse: Nehemiah 1:5-6

“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, 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.” (Nehemiah 1:5-6)

Week 7

Esther

Esther 4

“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.”

—Esther, to Mordecai in Esther 4:16

The book of Esther is a fascinating story in the Old Testament. In this book, God’s name is never once mentioned, yet the entire story is about God’s use of His strategically placed servants, Mordecai and his cousin Esther, to save the Jews from annihilation. For a background on how Esther came to be the Persian King Xerxes’ queen, read Esther chapters 1 and 2.

1. Read Esther 3:1-5. What led the king’s advisor, Haman, to become enraged with Mordecai?
2. What does verse 6 tell you about Haman’s solution to this problem?
3. What was the response of the Jews throughout the provinces to the news of their imminent destruction (4:3)?
4. Using your own knowledge or an online resource, what was the significance of the Jews’ laying in sackcloth and ashes?
5. At times, we need to humble our posture before the Lord when we come before Him in prayer and fasting. In what ways could this be true in your life right now?

6. Throughout history, there have been plans to wipe out the Jewish nation. Read Ephesians 6:12. What does this verse teach us about the true source of all plots against God's people?

7. Mordecai approached Esther and asked for her to go uninvited before King Xerxes, which under his rule was punishable by death. Read Esther 4:13-14. What was Mordecai's personal warning to Esther?

8. Where do you see evidence of Mordecai's unfailing faith in verse 14?

9. And what was Mordecai's encouragement and charge to Esther in the latter part of verse 14?

10. Where has God placed you to serve Him in a way that only *you* can "for such a time as this"?

11. If you are unsure, ask Him to reveal it to you as you seek Him in prayer and fasting. Then write out a brief prayer to Him here, either thanking Him for the task He has placed before you, or asking Him to clarify your current purpose in His plan.

12. Read Esther 4:15-17. What was Esther's immediate response to Mordecai's request? What does this tell you about her character and faith?

13. Why do you think she chose to fast and ask for the Jews to fast with her before she went before King Xerxes? What kinds of things might she have been praying for during those three days?

14. In what areas of your life do you need to seek Him for wisdom and direction? Will you add fasting to your seeking Him for what you desperately need?

15. Read chapters 5-8. They tell of the king's response to Esther and the miraculous "coincidence" of events God used to rescue his people. List verses from chapter 5 that show Esther's wisdom, humility, and courage.

16. What character traits or qualities do you hope God will develop in you? In what ways will you ask Him to use your time of fasting to transform you

17. Write out Hebrews 4:16.

18. Where Esther had to approach the king with fear for her life, how are we invited to approach God's throne?

19. What does Hebrews 4:16 tell us we will receive from our King, the Most High God?

20. How does this encourage or challenge you today?

Memory Verse: Esther 4:14

“If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

Week 8

The Fast God Chooses

Isaiah 58:1-12

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.
Raise your voice like a trumpet.
Declare to my people their rebellion
and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.”

—Isaiah 58:1

Isaiah chapter 58 contains wonderful verses on the right and wrong way to fast. Not a food how-to but a heart how-to! A convicting section of Scripture, the passage is also incredibly inspiring. The promises God gives to those who fast according to His desires may become some of your favorite promises to claim. Begin by reading verses 1-12.

1. In Isaiah 58:1-2, God is warning His people. In what way did the Israelites feel they were doing the right things (v. 2)?
2. In verses 3-4, God explains the problem. What two questions did His people ask (v. 3)?
3. What were the complaints God had against them (vv. 3-4)?
4. What is the stern warning in the last part of verse 4, and how do you think this may apply to you today?

5. Verse 5 shows God’s view of the kind of fast the Israelites were practicing—an outward show of humility with no spiritual outcome. Verses 6-7 give eight specific examples of what God wanted them to consider or accomplish on their days of fasting. List them here:

-
-
-
-
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-
-
-

6. Which one or two of the above actions challenges you most at this time? Is there someone for whom you need to pray for deliverance from a yoke of oppression? Is there a family dispute that needs reconciliation? Is there a needy person in your life who needs material, spiritual, or emotional help right now? Write out some specific ways you feel the Spirit leading you to action.

7. When you fast this week, focus on praying specifically for opportunities to act.

8. Verses 8-9 give six incredible results and promises for those who fast in the frame of mind, attitude of heart, and intercessory action God intends. List them here:

*Your light will
and your healing will
then your righteousness will
and the glory of the Lord will
Then you will call, and the LORD will
you will cry for help, and He will say:*

9. Which of the above blessings would you most like to experience in your life right now?
10. He doesn't say we have to pick one! He is offering all of them to us. How does this encourage you to fast and seek Him?
11. The second half of verse 9 and the first part of verse 10 offer two "if" statements. What three things does God want us to do away with (v. 9)?
12. What two ways does He challenge us (v. 10), and what does each mean to you?
13. The second half of verse 10 gives the "then" or result of completing what God asks. What magnificent promises are given?
14. Who, or what situation, needs to see your light this week? Or what darkness needs to be expelled from your life or home by the power of the light He will pour out on you?
15. What three things will the Lord do for you (v. 11)?
- The LORD will _____ always;*
he will _____ in a sun-scorched land.
and will _____ your frame.
16. Are you most in need of His guidance, provision, or strengthening at this time in your life? Will you turn to Him as you fast and pray this week and ask Him to meet this need? He is faithful to His word!

17. Verses 11-12 give four promises of what God's people *will* do or be if they fast in the way He chooses. List them here:

*You will be like a _____ garden,
like a spring whose waters _____ .
Your people will rebuild the _____
and will raise up the _____
you will be called Repairer of _____ , the Restorer*

18. Is there an area of your life this ministers to most? Are you experiencing abundant life, filled with the living waters of the Holy Spirit (see John 7:37-39)? Is He calling you to be a Repairer or Rebuilder of His purpose in your family? Your workplace? Does someone around you need encouragement or "building up"? Who needs to drink from the Living Water, and will you offer it this week?

19. Please write out a prayer below, seeking Him or committing to do what He has revealed to you already. Then thank Him for these incredible, amazing promises!

Memory Verse: Isaiah 58:9

"Then you will call and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."
(Isaiah 58:9)

Week 9

Daniel's Fast

Daniel 10:1-14

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

—Ephesians 6:12

Daniel fasted from pleasurable foods, wine, and lotions. We might think of this type of fast as no meat or rich foods, no wine or deodorant, and no moisturizer or perfume. Some commentators suggest Daniel did not even bathe. From the biblical text, it's obvious he ate something, but what he had was limited.

This account shows that fasting does not have to focus on food; rather, fasting can include temporarily eliminating other items or activities from our day. This is why we suggest that every individual seek the Lord on what type of fast they should enter into.

In preparation for this study, read Ephesians 6:12. Who is our battle against?

Now read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Who do we war against? Who are our weapons mighty through? What are we to do with our thoughts?

The Greek word for “strive together,” *sunagonizom*, is the root for our English word *agonize*. One of the definitions of agonize is to put forth great effort. In Greek, *agonizesthai* is defined as struggling, as for a prize. Consider Romans 15:30: “Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to **strive together** with me in your prayers to God for me” (NASB; emphasis added). What did Paul ask other believers to do with him and for him?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. What kind of self-discipline do we need to run this race of life for God? If we ignore prayer, worship, and Bible study, do you think we will run well? What kind of commitment do we need to make as we run towards our heavenly prize?

Read Daniel 10:1-14, then work your way through the following questions.

1. In verses 1-3, what was given to Daniel and how did it come to him? What did he do for three weeks after he received the message? Note specifically what Daniel's fast included.
2. In verses 4-8, what did Daniel see? Compare this account with what the apostle John records in Revelation 1:12-16. Do you see any similarities between Daniel's vision and John's? Do you think Daniel, like John, had a vision of Christ? There were others with Daniel when this vision occurred to him. What did these other individuals see, and what was their reaction?
3. In verse 9, Daniel fell on his face to the ground and went into a deep sleep. Basically, it appeared Daniel passed out or even fainted, but when he came to, the first vision had left and a heavenly messenger was now present. Review verses 10-14. Who do you think this messenger was?
4. Many interpret this messenger as the angel Gabriel. How does this heavenly being describe Daniel? How does he tell him to listen to the message he is about to share? This messenger explains that he was "sent" to Daniel. In verse 12, what does it say Daniel set his mind to do and with what attitude? How soon after Daniel spoke in prayer was his request heard?

5. Lastly, read verses 13-14. Why was the answer to Daniel's prayer delayed and for how long? Who delayed it?

Refer back to the verses from the New Testament that we provided for preparation at the start of this study (Romans 15:30; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:12). Who are we at war with? Ask yourself, *What kind of effort am I putting into this fight?* Is it enough? If not, it's time to consider consistently wearing your armor (Ephesians 6:11-17) and becoming a true soldier of the Lord.

James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to one another, pray for each other, and that the fervent prayer of a righteous individual is powerful and effective. We are to be transparent with one another. We are to pray for each other. The word *fervent* means with great intensity of spirit. We are fighting a spiritual battle, and we fight most effectively on our knees.

Is prayer a hit-and-miss activity or a casual thing for you? Be honest with yourself about your commitment to prayer and sacrifice for Christ; search your heart. When Wendy and I did that, we ended up as "Fast Friends." The result: we came to know Jesus, truly, our first love—our everything! Who do you want Jesus to be to you? Spend some time in thought and prayer over that question, asking God to speak truth to your heart about who He wants to be to you!

Memory Verse: Romans 15:30

Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me. (Romans 15:30 NASB)

Week 10

Joel: A Call to Repentance

Joel 2

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

—1 John 1:9

In preparation for this study, please read Joel 2. In fact, we would recommend that you read the entire book of Joel; it's only three chapters. Joel is the first prophet to mention the "Day of the Lord." There is rich history and exciting prophecy in this book, which should not only convict but cause great hope for those in Christ. Our future is secure because of Jesus, and we will, because of salvation through His blood, have victory and an eternal home with God.

We encourage you once again to become a student of the Bible, God's Word. We recommend online sites like Bible Gateway for commentaries to help you in your understanding of Scripture. Of course, the greatest help is the Holy Spirit. Make sure you invite Him into your reading and study. Take time to strengthen the greatest relationship you will ever enter into—namely, your relationship with the God of creation. There are three definite ways that will help you develop that closeness: prayer, study of the Bible, and fasting.

1. Let's go to Joel chapter 1 and read verses 13-14. Whose idea was it for the elders to call all of the inhabitants of the land to fast? In Old Testament times, the Jewish people would fast during times of great adversity, seeking God's guidance. Their fasting would also be accompanied with them collectively confessing to God their sin and looking for His mercy. Since God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, do you think He has eliminated this type of approach for His forgiveness and leading?
2. Let's take a quick look at a few other places in Scripture where God's people went before him in fasting and prayer. We encourage you to do more in-depth study on these passages.
 - Read Judges 20:26-28. Why did the Israelites fast and pray, and what was God's response to them?
 - Read 1 Kings 20:20-28. What does Elijah tell Ahab? What does verse 25 say about Ahab? How does God respond when Ahab humbles himself in fasting?
 - Read Jonah 3:3-10. What did Jonah's proclamation cause the king to decree the people do? How does God respond in verse 10?

3. Read Joel chapter 2 if you haven't already.
4. What happens prior to God's invitation in verse 12? In that same verse, what does God ask his people to do?

God asks His people to *return* or *turn*, which means "repentance." Repentance comes from the Greek word *metanoeo*, which means "a true sense of one's own guilt and sinfulness and turning (repenting) from it to God; a change of mind and purpose and life, to which remission of sin is promised" (M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* [London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1897]).

5. Repentance leads to and includes a changing of the mind. You no longer want to live in the sin you have confessed and determine to turn away from it. What spiritual discipline are the people to engage in as their approach to repentance? What emotions are to accompany that act?
6. In verse 13, what are the people to rend? Note that God did not ask the people to rend their garments but their hearts. Remorse was often shown by tearing or *rending* of outer clothing. God wanted an authentic inward repentance. An outward sign of repentance cannot compare to the sincere condition of a contrite heart. Do you really feel remorseful when you repent and confess sin? Are your prayers of repentance halfhearted or hurried, or are you truly sorry for your sin?
7. Go back over all of the accounts we have looked at today. What is a common thread in God's response to fasting and prayer?
8. Go back to Joel 2:13-14. What does God say about Himself?
9. Read 2 Peter 3:9. Why does it say that God is patient? How would you define God's character as it pertains to this desire?

10. Read 1 John 1:9. What does God promise if we confess our sin?

11. Now read Romans 8:1-2. What are we free from? Who set us free?

12. Ask yourself why God would want the people of Joel's day to mourn, weep, fast, pray, and confess their sin. Why do you think He would want you to do the same? If you come to the conclusion that it is because He loves you, wants to forgive you, redeem you, and set you free from sin and death, loving you as His own dear child who He desires to have a relationship with, you are spot on!

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the grave, the Lord is always for you, never against you. He is not punishing you by suggesting you fast and pray, feel sorrowful for your sins, and repent. He is trying to release you from the sins that so easily derail you. He knows the brokenness you experience when you are entrapped by sin and temptation and how it impedes your growth in Christ.

In John 10:10, Jesus says, *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly"* (NASB). In other words, *"I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of"* (MSG). We must believe that everything God does towards us and asks us to do is truly good, for He can do nothing else.

If God is impressing on your heart to fast and pray, to confess your sin in all sincerity so He can forgive and bless you, by all means get to it! He wants to offer you redemption, freedom, and a life of abundance in Christ. He wants nothing less for you. Surrender to Him, make the necessary sacrifices, and lay down your life. We guarantee that if you do, you will most definitely find the life He created you for!

Memory Verse: Joel 2:27

"Then you will know that I am in Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and there is no other; never again will my people be shamed." (Joel 2:27)

Week 11

The Forty-Day Fast of Jesus

Matthew 4:1-10

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

—Matthew 4:1-2

While there are many mysteries known only to the triune God about this time of testing and fasting Jesus endured, there are truths and applications we as Christ followers are able to glean today. Pray the Spirit will open the eyes of your heart (Ephesians 1:18-19) to see how the forty-day fast of Jesus might encourage or empower you.

1. Read Matthew 3:13-17, the verses just preceding the temptation of Jesus, for context. What significant thing had Jesus just done?
 - What immediate result occurred in verse 16?
 - What were the words the Father spoke over His Son in verse 17?
2. Immediately following the baptism of Jesus, we have the account of His temptation, or testing, in the desert. What explanation does Matthew 4:1 provide regarding how Jesus ended up in the desert and why He was there?
3. After the tremendous public revelation of who Jesus was and praise from the Father (Matthew 3:13-17), His private time of preparation and testing for ministry began (chapter 4). If you are experiencing a season of trial, despite knowing you have been faithful and obedient to God, does Jesus' experience encourage you? If so, how?

4. Matthew 4:2 states, “After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” For what kinds of things do you imagine Jesus was in prayer and fasting for during those days?

5. How does it help you to know that even the Son of God sought guidance, strengthening, and preparation during fasting?

6. After these days of fasting, the enemy began his testing while Jesus was at his weakest physically. What can you discern from this about the enemy and his methods?

7. Fill in the missing words from the first temptation:

“If you are the _____, tell these stones to become _____” (v. 3).

Meeting an immediate physical need was the first temptation. Now write out the last part of Jesus’ response:

“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that _____
 _____’” (v. 4).

When we are in need, even when that need is physical or emotional, sometimes we seek to meet that need in unhelpful ways. We might try to satisfy an emotional need with food, with TV shows or movies, or even with more activity. For a physical need, we might try to fill that hole with an untested remedy that proves to be useless or even harmful. Similarly, when we fast and pray, sometimes we feel physical pangs of hunger or a sense of loss, loneliness, or deprivation that we try to satisfy in ways that might work in the short term but fail to meet the real need in a fulfilling way.

8. Does any of this describe you? Have you ever considered that these kinds of unsatisfying responses to real needs are actually instances of giving in to temptation?

9. Jesus faced such temptations in the desert. What did He say was His first response to dealing with them? If you feel weak in regard to temptations such as these, we recommend that you pray for God's strength and grab your Bible! He alone can meet your deepest longings, your most important needs.

10 In verses 5-6, the enemy takes a new tack. Fill in the blanks:

“If you are the _____, throw yourself _____.”

11. What did the enemy use in verse 6 to try to persuade Jesus to jump?

12. How is this a warning about the various ways we can be led into deception by people twisting God's Word?

13. Fill in the response Jesus gave in verse 7:

“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God _____.’”

In what ways might you be putting God to the test in your life through choices, habits, relationships, or a lack of time with Him? Pray about this and see where He leads you. Are expecting His protection without obeying His commands?

14. Verses 8-10 contain the last test from Satan. He was offering Jesus the kingdoms of the earth immediately, without having to go through the suffering and submission of the cross. Fill in the condition Satan placed on this in verse 9:

“All this I will give you,” he said, “if _____
_____.”

Jesus gave one final and definitive command in verse 10 in response. Write it out here:

15. How are you challenged to resist the enemy through these examples from Jesus?

16. What is one temptation or testing you recognize happening in your life right now?

Let your fasting this week be a tool to gain strength and clarity for the next time you face the enemy's lies. Commit God's Word to memory so you can be ready with a quick rebuke and send the enemy packing!

Memory Verse: Matthew 4:10

Jesus said to him "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (Matthew 4:10)

(We recommend you say this one with confidence and power through the Holy Spirit!)

Week 12

Fasting for Discernment and Preparation: Acts

Acts 13-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.”

—Jesus speaking in John 14:1

Have you ever longed to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit? In chapters 14-16 of the gospel of John, Jesus reassures the disciples and us of the role of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus would give to each believer. The New Testament church relied on the blessing, empowerment, and direction the Holy Spirit would provide. So should we! We have found that fasting is an incredible way to learn to discern the voice and leading, empowering and equipping of the Spirit. Let’s look at this concept more in-depth from examples found in the early church.

1. In Acts 13:2, we find the early church in Antioch engaged in two things:

While they were _____ the Lord and _____, the Holy Spirit spoke to them.

How could fasting help you focus on God to worship and seek Him?

2. One of the most difficult things for twenty-first-century Christians is learning to block out the noise and information of the world and focus on hearing the voice of God. What are some distractions you face in daily life that need to be tuned out in order to truly worship and seek God?

When you next choose a day to fast, choose at least one thing you can set aside and replace it with time in His Word or in worship.

3. Do you actively ask God to speak to you? Many of us spend lots of time in one-way conversations with the Lord. Did you know He is trying to speak to you through His Spirit? In John 10:1-5, Jesus says His sheep will hear His voice and follow Him.

Finish filling in verse 5:

“They will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will _____ from him because they do not _____ a stranger’s voice.”

One of the most powerful things that can happen through fasting is the ability to begin to clearly hear and recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd.

4. List three ways your life would benefit from being able to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit:

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-
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Through prayer, the study of His Word, and fasting, you will grow quickly in being able to have confidence in the way He guides and directs you. You will hear His voice and want to follow!

5. After the worshiping and fasting believers heard from the Holy Spirit to send Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey, what does Acts 13:3 say they did next?
6. Fasting seems to be connected with prayer and, in this instance, with preparation for ministry. Who in your life needs your prayers and fasting so they can be strengthened and empowered to meet the challenges ahead?
7. Think back in your own journey with the Lord. Whose prayers helped build your faith and love for Him? How are you continuing this in the life of others in your family or church?
8. Is there a gospel journey the Lord is calling you to take with Him? If so, where are you to go and to whom are you to take His good news?

List their names here:

9. How will you use a time of prayer and fasting to focus and ask for His favor, blessing, guidance, and protection?

10. In Acts 14:21-22, Paul and Barnabas have returned to strengthen the churches. In verse 22, what did they say must be endured in order to enter the kingdom of God?

11. How could fasting be a way of making us stronger in our faith and Christian walk? In what areas do you feel particularly weak?

12. Ask God to use your times of fasting as a way to build up self-control, self-discipline, and a lot of faith muscle!

13. In Acts 14:24, Paul and Barnabas appoint elders for each of the new churches they were encouraging. They committed these new elders to the Lord with these two ingredients:
_____ and _____.

14. What does the end of verse 23 tell you about their journey thus far with the Lord?

15. Do your words and actions reflect that you have an active trust in the Lord, or are you relying on your own strength and the world's wisdom for prepping you for the day ahead?

Spend a few moments in prayer now. Ask God to speak to you through His Spirit on a specific task or form of obedience He is calling you to today. Maybe it is to encourage a friend. Maybe it is to answer a call to serve Him. Maybe it is an area of indulgence He knows is not for your best. Maybe it is to be bold in the face of personal or business pressure to conform to the world in some way. Whatever it is, write it out here and ask Him to lead you as you trust in Him.

Memory Verse: Acts 13:2-3

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.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2-3)