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RESTORING THE CHURCH - PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH LIFE

Prayer & Fasting

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this lesson is to develop an understanding of the basic Christian disciplines of prayer and fasting, to help believers to see the importance of these disciplines and to challenge the believers in regard to the regular and systematic practices of these disciplines in their lives.

KEY VERSE:

Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

Jeremiah 29:12-14

I. WHAT IS PRAYER?

- A. Prayer is spending time in conversation with God.
- B. Prayer is the act of beseeching God earnestly for someone or something.
- C. Prayer involves communion with God and a recognition of His presence.

II. WHAT IS FASTING?

- A. Fasting involves denying the body natural food and drink that we may intensify our sensitivity and openness to the Lord.
- B. Fasting is a time of placing the desires of the flesh under the desires of the spirit, or, as it is sometimes called, “chastening of the soul” (Psalm 69:10, 11).
- C. Fasting was a regular practice of the Early Church.
 - 1. It was practiced individually (2 Corinthians 11:27).
 - 2. It was practiced corporately (Acts 13:2).

III. WHO PROVIDES THE GREATEST EXAMPLE OF PRAYER AND FASTING?

Jesus, Jesus Christ, who was the only perfect man, gave us a perfect example of communion with the Heavenly Father and, in doing so, demonstrated His absolute dependence on the Father (Luke 3:21; 4:1, 2; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 11:1).

“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.”
Mark 1:35

IV. WHAT ATTITUDES SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN PRAYER AND FASTING?

- A. We should pray in **faith** (Hebrews 11:6).
- B. We should come **humbly** before the Lord (Psalm 35:13).
- C. We should come desiring God’s **will** (1 John 5:14-16).
- D. We should come with **pure** motivation (Psalm 24:3, 4; Isaiah 58:6, 7).
- E. We should come without **hypocrisy** (Matthew 6:5-18).

V. WHAT ARE SOME BIBLICAL GUIDELINES GOVERNING PRAYER?

- A. Believers should have an attitude of prayer or open communion with God at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Romans 1:9).
- B. Believers should have a specific time set aside for daily prayer (Psalm 5:1-3; 55:16, 17).
- C. Believers should spend time listening to God in prayer times, realizing that prayer is two-way communication (Psalm 143:8; Isaiah 40:31).

VI. WHAT ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PRAYER FOUND IN THE BIBLE?

There are many kinds of prayer mentioned in the Bible. All the different forms are valid and are to be found operating at various times in the life of the believer.

- A. Persevering, or Fervant, Prayer (James 5:16; Luke 11:5-13).
- B. Intercessory Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1).
- C. Giving of Thanks (1 Timothy 2:1, 2; Philippians 4:6).
- D. Prayer in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:14).
- E. Prayer and Fasting (Matthew 17:21).
- F. Supplication (1 Timothy 1:1, 2)

VII. IN WHAT REALMS SHOULD OUR PRAYER LIFE BE PRACTICED?

- A. Individually. Much of our prayer life will be in secret on a daily basis (Matthew 6:5-7).
- B. With two or three. Often, we will solicit the prayer support of others to see special needs met (Matthew 18:19, 20).
- C. Corporately. The whole church will also have a corporate life together in prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:24; 13:1-3).
 - 1. The House of the Lord is to be the house of prayer (Matthew 21:13).
 - 2. The House of the Lord is a place where the voices of God's people will be heard in prayer, praise and thanksgiving (Psalms 64:1; 66:19; 18:6).

VIII. IS PRAYER AND FASTING ONLY A RELIGIOUS FORMALITY?

No. Absolutely not! Prayer and fasting are much more than an external form. God promises to respond to our prayers (2 Chronicles 7:14). Prayer definitely changes things (Psalm 91:14, 15).

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

1 John 5:14-15

CONCLUSION:

Prayer and fasting are not optional disciplines in the life of the believer. Every believer must make a place for these practices in their life in order to maintain and ever deepen their personal relationship to God. The corporate prayer life of the church is vital and necessary and should be entered into by all; but it is no substitute for the personal prayer life of the individual. God is willing to give us all the grace to lay these foundations properly in our life.