

A Time of Prayer and Fasting

“David built an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. THUS, THE LORD WAS MOVED BY PRAYER FOR THE LAND AND THE PLAGUE WAS HELD BACK FROM ISRAEL.”
2 Samuel 24:25 (NASB)

Unusual times call for unusual actions! Our country and all the inhabited world are in the throes of dealing with a virus for which there is currently no known vaccine and no cure.

When unusual affliction comes to the people of God, God’s people are to respond, and to do so together. Extraordinary methods must be employed.

God warned His people of what to do should trouble come, in a dream to an ancient king. When things were very good, God spoke to Solomon of what to do should things become very bad...

“If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, IF... My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, THEN... I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” 2 Chr 7:13-14 (NASB)

We are also shown example after example in the Bible of people deciding to lay aside eating to draw near to God in times of crisis or urgency. This discipline is called fasting.

- Moses fasted as he was receiving the 10 Commandments.
- Elijah fasted when he sought God after his nation *abandoned* God’s Laws.
- David fasted to avert a plague that killed 70,000 in three days.
- Esther and her maids fasted for 3 days to avert the destruction of her people.
- The Lord Jesus did not even begin His ministry until he stared down the powers of darkness through fasting and prayer over 40 days.
- The Early Church prayed and fasted to launch Barnabas and Saul as apostles.

God has so ordered the universe that every created thing responds to the prayers of God’s people—and when praying includes the element of personal sacrifice, (including abstaining from food) in holy mystery, the power released through that intercession is amplified.

While our world is taking drastic measures and using all their powers to end a pandemic, we are to call upon the name of the Lord for mercy to flow in response to prayer and Jesus’ sacrifice.

We are inviting every Christian believer to join in a communal fast on Wednesday March 25, 2020 to seek the mercy of heaven to stop the pandemic!!!

Guidelines for Fasting

If you are unable to abstain from eating due to a medical condition, the command to fast may be obeyed using the same methods as Daniel the Prophet: He ate plainly and simply; he ate only the minimum, and did not eat to enjoy the meal. He would eat quickly, then use the time allotted to an ordinary meal to pray into whatever purpose was involved in his prayer time.

If you have never fasted before, skip one meal: Go off to a private place, and use the time usually allotted for eating to pray. You may drink plenty of water. If this is your first fast, you may drink clear juice. In place of eating, seek God. Each time you experience a hunger pang, let it call you to fire off a sentence prayer for God's grace to flow.

If you have fasted before, but not often, skip two meals: Use the two times of not eating to pray for your church family, for your city and region, and the cause of the Gospel across the earth. Let each hunger pang become a prompting to pray into God's purposes to buy back this event for His glory.

If you are more seasoned in fasting and praying, begin your fast at the end of your supper time on the evening before: Deliberately lay aside eating for 24 to 36 hours. If you sense a calling to pray longer, you already know that you will need to lessen your physical activity. Adjust accordingly and allow the Lord's Spirit to "pray through" you (Romans 8:26).

Whether this is your first fast, or a regular discipline, it is important to draw no unnecessary attention to your action. In a public, communal fast (in which large groups of people are joining in the discipline together), we are seeking God together around a shared purpose. We are asking God to intervene to end the pandemic and to guide us concerning how we are to walk through it. Fasting is always accomplished without show or pretention. Because this is a communal fast, you may tell those affected by it, i.e. your spouse or your children. No one else need know.

Please receive this resource as a guide to enable you to pray. You may use this approach or lay this aside for another method. The goal is that we are praying and fasting *together*, that the Lord's power intervenes to alter the course of history.

For this day of communal fasting and shared intercession we are using Psalm 95 as our focus for the day. It includes three sections: two are celebrating God's goodness, the third is a word to pay heed as we discern God's voice, and contains a warning for those who do not heed when God speaks—and we are asking Him to speak to us.

We are recommending that this day have three dedicated sections, in 20-minute blocks (though you may do this in a single concentrated hour). For example, you may pray 1) at the beginning of the day, then 2) at noon, and then 3) at your usual supper hour, or at any time you may choose. Meanwhile, you will go about your day as always, with each hunger pang calling you to remember the purposes for which you have been praying.

Psalm 95 is before you in two translations. We are recommending that you keep a notebook. The Bible passage will help you focus on the Lord. The notebook is there to write down any impressions that come to you in your time of prayer. Begin your day of communal fasting by reading the Psalm aloud in one or both translations.

PSALM 95 (ESV)

PSALM 95 (MSG)

Section 1—Let's Praise and Give Thanks

Oh, come let us sing to the Lord;
Let us make a joyful noise to the Rock
of our salvation.
Let us come into His Presence with thanksgiving
Let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs
of praise!

*Come, let's shout praises to God,
Raise the roof for the Rock who saved us!*

*Let's march into his presence singing praises
lifting the rafters with our hymns!*

For the Lord is a great God,
And a great King above all gods!

*Why? Because God is the best,
High King over all the gods!*

In His hand are the depths of the earth

*In one hand he holds the deep caves and
caverns,*

The heights of the mountains are His also!
The sea is his, for he made it,
And his hands formed the dry land!

*In the other hand grasps the high mountains!
He made Ocean—he owns it!
His hands sculpted Earth!*

Section 2—Let's Gather and Worship

Oh, come let us worship and bow down!
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!
For He is our God.
And we are the people of his pasture
And the sheep of his hand.

*So come, let us worship: bow before him.
On your knees before God who made us!
Oh yes, he's our God.
and we're the people he pastures,
The flock he feeds.*

Section 3—Let's Pay Heed Together

Today, if you hear His voice,
do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof,

*Drop everything and listen; listen as he speaks!
"Don't turn a deaf ear as in the Bitter Uprising,
As on the day of the Wilderness Test,
when your ancestors turned
and put **me** to the test!*

though they had seen my work.

*For forty years they watched me at work among
them.*

For forty years I loathed that generation
And said, "They are a people who go astray
In their heart,
And they have not known my ways."

*as over and over they tried my patience.
And I was provoked—oh was I provoked!
'Can't they keep their minds on God
For five minutes! Do they simply refuse to
walk down my road?*

Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest."

*Exasperated, I exploded,
"They'll never get where they're headed,
Never be able to sit down and rest."*

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- 1) In this First Section, we set the tone for our day apart; the focus is not on “having our needs met” or even on the averting of a pandemic. The focus is on God’s Majestic Sovereignty. Begin your time by doing *exactly* as the Psalmist tells us—Sing! Make noise! Declare Who God Is! If you have a favorite song or hymn, recite it or sing it now! Reginald Heber’s classic hymn does as the Psalm requires:

1 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

2 Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim, falling down before thee,
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

3 Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

4 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

- 2) Now thank God for what He has done for us—in creation, in your life, your family/friends, your church, in the great Church, and in your nation. Do this personally until you sense your thanksgivings are complete.

- 3) Acknowledge God as the Psalmist does: Declare that He is Creator of the starry heavens and the fiery molten core of the planet, of growing trees and ocean depths, the birds that fly, and the fish that swim and breathe through the water. God made it all! You may find yourself needing to walk through creation, thanking God for the grass that grows, or the mountains that soar. Do that deliberately.
- 4) Now remember that there is a focused purpose to this day of prayer and fasting. We are asking God to intervene. We have declared that God is in charge! Ask Him to work out His Sovereign purposes behind His allowing of the pandemic. Then ask Him to call us back from self-focus to a Godward life. Ask God to heal us—of our selfish sin-sickness, of our sin-saturated culture, and to *bring the pandemic to an end in a way that will bring God (and not mere human achievement) glory.*

Throughout the first third of the day...

As your day unfolds, the most important thing is to keep focused, not on a pandemic, but on a Majestic Sovereign Creator God who, in Holy Mystery, is working out His purposes. Make a joyful noise! Sing! Remember His power first and place the pandemic under His Sovereign Hand. Sing! If “*He grasps the deep caves...*” and “*holds the high mountains*” He can take hold of a viral infection, use it for His deeper purposes, and then bring it to an end. We are asking Him to do both. Remember your favorite hymn and sing it as you ask Him for mercy.

Section 2—Let’s Gather and Worship

Oh, come let us worship and bow down!
 Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!
 For He is our God.
 And we are the people of his pasture
 And the sheep of his hand.

*So come, let us worship: bow before him.
 On your knees before God who made us!
 Oh yes, he’s our God.
 and we’re the people he pastures,
 The flock he feeds.*

- 1) In Section Two, we join with people everywhere to worship God *together*. Worship is not be done alone, but as an extension of what it means to be a people of God together. Though you may be alone in your room, you are joining in a communal fast with people from across the earth. Worship also requires sacrifice. In 2 Samuel 24:25, David was required to offer animal sacrifices, even before he could pray. We have a better and more costly sacrifice, the blood of God the Son. He is the perfect Lamb offered for our salvation and our healing. Think of the different Christians you know—from every branch of His Church... Now thank God for the believers you know by name. Thank God for the international workers (IWs) you know, and the women and men from the church up the street who are faithful followers of Christ.
- 2) Here the Psalmist is indicating that *posture* affects *attitude*. We are to *bow* and *kneel*. Both actions reflect submission to the Divine Will. If you are physically able to bow and kneel, let’s do exactly as the Scripture commands. If you are unable, then tell the Lord that you are in yielded submission to Him, with all your heart. From that place of a posture of submission, pray for every kind of church that you know is faithful to the Lord. We are remembering that God is God and that we are His responding people.

- 3) The last line of this section indicates we are the sheep of His hand. Sheep follow. They pay heed to the voice of the Shepherd. They eat. They sleep. They follow the Shepherd. Sheep do not usurp the role of the Shepherd. They only follow, and they do so *together*. This line serves as a bridge to the final section of the Psalm where the focus is on paying attention to the Voice. Though sheep may wander, most sheep do not move unless they hear the Shepherd's voice.
 - a. Place the current events of our society before Him—the pandemic has made nations stop what they are doing. Is God speaking through this?
 - b. Ask God to lead us into the healing of our lives, our churches, our nation and our world.
 - c. Do you have a practice of spending time listening to the Shepherd?
 - d. What do you sense the Shepherd is trying to communicate to you?
 - e. Finally ask God to heal us of the pandemic.

Throughout the second third of the day...

Remember that kneeling and bowing reflects being yielded to God's voice. Tell God you will obey whatever you know of Him as soon as you know it! Every time a hunger pang is felt, ask God what He might be speaking. Then ask God to redeem our culture, even as He heals the pandemic.

Section 3: Let's Pay Heed Together

Today, if you hear His voice,
do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof,
though they had seen my work.

For forty years I loathed that generation
And said, "They are a people who go astray
In their heart,
And they have not known my ways."

Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest."

*Drop everything and listen; listen as he speaks!
"Don't turn a deaf ear as in the Bitter Uprising,
As on the day of the Wilderness Test,
when your ancestors turned
and put **me** to the test!
For forty years they watched me at work among
them.
as over and over they tried my patience.
And I was provoked—oh was I provoked!
'Can't they keep their minds on God
For five minutes! Do they simply refuse to
walk down my road?
Exasperated, I exploded,
"They'll never get where they're headed
Never be able to sit down and rest."*

God is speaking, and we need to pay attention—and to do it *together*. Have we been guided of late, and then wondered whether God was still with us? This Psalm brackets the fact that Israel was miraculously guided—and fought the Lord the whole way! It underscores Israel's consistent resistance over the time between leaving Egypt and the spying out of the Promised Land. 40 days turned into 40 years. The sin at Massah (*testing*) and Meribah (*quarrelling*) is in Exodus 17—after God brought Israel through terrible trials guided by miracles, they didn't simply ask God to save them. Instead, when trouble came, they fought Moses, slandered God, and by extension, fought the God who sent him to save them. It ends in their tenth consecutive resistance at Numbers 14—followed by 40 years of constantly bickering and contention.

- 1) The point was that the wilderness generation had already seen God at work, bringing them through trials by miracles—yet they whined when any trouble came. If that is true of you, it is time to repent. Spend the next few minutes calling on God to forgive and cleanse.
- 2) Canada as a country, and many nations of the world, however, have not seen God at work in recent times. Pray that God sends healing in this hour, and that it is indisputable that He is the One who is working. Let's pray for Canada, and for the entire world, to be miraculously delivered from this pandemic, and spiritually transformed.
- 3) A warning to the Church: The wilderness generation saw God work multiple times, and they sadly *refused* to call on Him, preferring to complain. This consistent refusal to invite the Lord's power to save, provoked God to withhold His blessing and send no more help their way. Yet the Psalm was written to a people who were in the Promised Land, to remind them by way of a negative example to cry out to God whenever they were in trial. It is quoted in Hebrews 4. There, God is asking us to *listen*, and to enter God's rest by crying out to Him for help in time of need.

Throughout the final third of the day...

Pray for the great Church and for our denomination, that we will pay heed to what God is saying. Pray that we will pay attention when God is sending a signal for us to be at His work. Ask God for mercy to fall, for the scientific community to be guided, for governments to be directed into how to care for their people, for healing to be given the afflicted ones, for church pastors and leaders to know how to lead their people, for national leaders to be given guidance, and for the Lord to be glorified.

Additional Prayers to Consider

- 1) Pray that our eyes be lifted from above the headlines and fixed on who our Lord Jesus is, and what He is doing through this (Hebrews 12:2).
- 2) Pray that we operate by faith and not fear (Romans 3:11)
- 3) Let's believe that our Lord reigns over this pandemic and that He is our refuge (Psalm 11)
- 4) Let's be confident that our God will accomplish His purposes through this crisis (Romans 8:28)
- 5) Pray that we set an example of calm assurance, faith and hope in the living God (Isaiah 41:28-29)
- 6) Pray for the front-line health care workers tirelessly tending to the afflicted.
- 7) Pray for the protection of the vulnerable—the elderly, the homeless, the poor, those with pre-existing medical conditions, and remote populations, with little means to obtain care.
- 8) Pray for the grieving people who have lost loved ones to this virus.
- 9) Pray for the physical, emotional and financial repercussions for individuals, families, cities, churches, ministry agencies, and nations.
- 10) Pray for wisdom for the scientific community striving to find a treatment and a vaccine.
- 11) Pray for those unable to leave in foreign countries who are desiring to return home safely and quickly.
- 12) Pray for the salvation of huge numbers of people in Canada and around the world during these uncertain times.
- 13) Pray for wisdom for local, provincial and federal government officials taking decisions and giving direction to contain the spread of COVID-19.

- 14) Pray for the media to provide the needed information without inducing anxiety or fear.
- 15) Pray for pastors, church leaders, International Workers, District Superintendents, National Ministry Center officials, the Board of Directors, and all leaders, to give wise guidance for the C&MA family of churches, as well as the leaders of other movements.
- 16) Pray for business leaders making tough decisions affecting the future of their employees.
- 17) Pray for parents who cannot stay at home from work but must find appropriate childcare.
- 18) Pray that believers and local congregations will show compassion toward neighbors in need and engage in acts of kindness.
- 19) Pray that God works sovereignly through this pandemic, and that He brings this affliction to a complete end.
- 20) **Pray concerning any leading that you might receive.**
- 21) _____
- 22) _____
- 23) _____

*Developed and compiled by Alliance Pray! Team (APT)
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