

"Then John's disciples came and asked him, 'How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' 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'" (Matthew 9:14-15). A Jewish wedding in Jesus' time on earth lasted several days. It was a celebration and certainly no occasion for fasting. If someone was fasting when the wedding began, he would temporarily suspend his fast that he might celebrate the wedding. The reason for this was the belief that God himself was present at the wedding. When the wedding ended, the fasting would begin again.

As we wait for the Second Coming of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, we too have many occasions to fast. We fast at times when we desperately need God to break into this broken world of sin to bring about justice and righteousness. The Scriptures record numerous times when the people of God would humble themselves through fasting to ask for His blessing or favor on specific situations.

It is important as one enters into a time of fasting to have a repentant attitude and a humble spirit. The prophets teach us that without repentance God will not listen nor respond to us when we fast and pray (Isaiah 58:1-14; Jeremiah 14:11-12). Therefore, if sin is harbored in their hearts, they need to begin their fasts with confession and repentance. "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). Also, one needs to be open during his/her time of fasting for the Lord to reveal hidden sins that one may receive His cleansing to become "an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (2 Timothy 2:21).

### **Purpose of Our Fast**

This Wednesday, May 9, the entire congregation is encouraged to fast and pray on behalf of Paula Hall. One of the reasons the saints of old fasted was to plead for changes in a particular situation. Esther asked for her people to fast for three days before she risked her life by approaching the king to stop a royal decree (Esther 4:1-17). Judah's king Jehoshaphat called for a national fast to seek help from the Lord when an overwhelming army was marching out to destroy Judah. As they fasted Jehoshaphat cried out to God, "We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chronicles 20:12). In both of these instances, God answered the desperate cries of his people in truly wonderful ways! The example of King David, however, teaches us that fasting does not obligate God to do what we ask. With his child deathly ill, David fasted for seven days. When the child died, David explained his actions, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live'" (2 Samuel 12:22). Even though David did not receive his specific request, the Lord blessed him with another son who became heir to his throne.

We are praying specifically that God will bring Paula physical healing from cancer. We need to continue to pray until God answers. Remember the parable of the persistent widow. Jesus taught, "Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to

him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7-8).

### **Plan of Action**

During your time of fasting, determine ahead of time how long your fast will last. If this is your first fast, you may choose to only miss a couple of meals. Others may want to fast a full 24 hours or longer. After deciding how long you will fast, discipline yourself to keep that commitment.

Choose one of the following methods for your fast:

1. The Normal Fast is recommended for the majority of the congregation. This is total abstinence from all food and any "heavy" liquids (such as milk). Drink plenty of water and perhaps fruit juices.
2. The Partial Fast might be helpful for those who cannot participate in a normal fast. Under the partial fast, for instance, one might choose to eat only fruits and vegetables. This appears to be the kind of fast Daniel did for three weeks (Daniel 10:2-3). For those who must eat their regular diet (such as those on certain medications or having certain medical conditions), plan to abstain from things you normally enjoy to devote that time to prayer. You may choose to fast from television, pleasurable reading, or computer games.

### **Scripture and Prayer**

Make sure you devote some extra time during your fast for prayer, meditation, and Scripture. Since this is a congregational fast, you may want to gather with others for a special period of prayer. Feel free to use the church building for this purpose if needed. Just let the office know in advance. Jesus promises a reward for those who fast properly (read Matthew 6:17-18). Expect blessings to come from the throne of God in answer to the prayers of His children.