



Challenging Christians to Pray

Prayergram[®]

January-February 2025



FASTING AND PRAYER

Fasting facilitates the power of prayer

In the summer of 1876, grasshoppers did much damage to the crops in Minnesota. In the spring of 1877, farmers were worried because there was every indication this dreadful plague might again destroy the entire wheat crop and bring destruction to thousands. **The situation was so drastic that Governor John S. Pillsbury proclaimed April 26 as a 'day of fasting and prayer.'** He urged every man, woman, and child to seek God's divine intervention. On that April day all schools, shops, stores, and offices were closed. There was a reverent, quiet hush over the entire state. What happened? The next day, temperatures soared to midsummer heat. It was unusual to have that kind of weather for the month of April. Imagine the disappointment and horror of the people when billions of larvae of the dreaded pest began wiggling into life for the next three days, the scorching heat persisted and the larvae were all hatched out, ready for their work of destruction.

On the fourth day, miraculously, the living God of heaven interposed, and the temperature suddenly dropped, and that night frost covered the earth and destroyed the entire creeping, crawling locusts. On that memorable day in April, history was made, when the citizens of Minnesota saw God at work as they sought divine help in the hour of need. A chapel was built in **Cold Spring, Minnesota to honor that day when God's power manifested in that State.** But the 1877 residents of Minnesota were not the first people to experience God's divine intervention in times of need. The Scripture speaks of fasting approximately 55 times, both in the Old and New testaments. **"I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God,"** writes Ezra, the scribe. (Ezra 8:21)

The "people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). The prophet Daniel was so determined to know the mind of God that for three weeks "he ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in his mouth, neither did he anoint himself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled" (Daniel 10:3). What is fasting? According to Webster's dictionary, to fast is "to practice abstinence from food voluntarily for a time as a religious exercise or duty." Let us remember that fasting is not simply abstaining from food, but from anything that hinders our communion with God. Someone has said, "Fasting means to do without, to practice self-denial." Beloved, fasting is just as relevant today as it was in days past!

It is no exaggeration to say that our nation is in a moral and spiritual quandary, and we desperately need God in an hour such as this when multitudes are being swept away by the tides of unbelief and self-sufficiency. In the Old Testament, we read about King Jehoshaphat, when faced with the armies of the Ammonites and the Moabites, he was afraid and set himself to seek the LORD and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah and led the nation in prayer for mercy. **"O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that comes against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee"** (2nd Chronicles 20:12). "And Jehoshaphat king of Judah bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of

Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD” (Vs.18). What a mighty act of humility as he humbled himself before the sovereign God of the universe. Prayer for mercy is always associated with true humility, brokenness and heartfelt contrition for personal sins and the sins of the nation. Jehoshaphat’s prayer was answered by a glorious victory over the Ammonites and the Moabites. The profound words of **Jonathan Edwards, early America’s thinker and theologian come to mind, “Nothing sets a man so much out of the devil’s reach as humility.”** President Abraham Lincoln, America’s 16th President, who was a man of great humility and who believed in the power of prayer, declared Thursday, the 30th day of April 1863 as a national Day of **‘humiliation, fasting and prayer’** for the healing of our nation.

Today, the world is taunting at us (Christians) by saying, **“Where is your God?”** Lack of power in our midst is the result of lack of seeking after God. We are so eager to try new methods and techniques to make our work grow, yet, surprisingly, how little time we devote to ‘prayer and fasting.’ Did I say, fasting, yes, I did!? I just used one of the most neglected words in our Christian vocabulary. It is my humble opinion that every two sermons we hear on prayer, we should hear a third one on fasting. It is inconceivable that such a major Biblical practice in both the Old and New testaments have been neglected, ignored and disrespected. Scriptural fasting should not be mistaken by people who skip meals to lose weight. Biblical fasting is always saturated with prayer as we abstain from a meal or two on behalf of the One Who fasted 40 days in the wilderness.

First, we should fast because our Lord fasted and taught us to do likewise. Apostle Paul fasted often and in 2nd Cor.11:27, **“In weariness and painfulness, in watching often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness.”** The early church fasted and prayed. **“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23).** Fasting enables one to become a repository of spiritual power for either a blessing to others or bringing blessings to himself. Scriptural fasting with sincerity and love for the Lord will positively break the bond of sin and spiritual oppression. Today, we are witnessing a level of spiritual oppression we have not seen in years. Fasting strengthens the intensity of prayer, and together, it removes unbelief and elevates obedience and reverence among the body of Christ.

There is no short-cut when it comes to the power of prayer, which is the all-important recipe for a Christ-filled life. We live in a day and time when we can extract a message or meditation from the Internet and expect it to be in fellowship with God. Oh, the vacuity of all these, the misplaced priorities would make one wonder what is really happening to us! God’s greatest blessings come through desperate soul-travail. Do not face the day without prayer! There is something majestic about being in the presence of God by having personal intimacy with Him. I implore you to discover the life-changing practice of prayer coupled with fasting before you draw any hasty conclusion!

And Jesus said unto them, “Because of your unbelief... Howbeit this kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:20,21). Psalmist David wrote, **“I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into my own bosom” (Psalm 35:13).** Fasting masters the old nature, subjugating the flesh; it pleases the spirit, and is one of the most essential spiritual exercises known to believers. Down through the history of revivals, fasting played a major role as Christians fasted and wept before the Lord in true ‘humility, contrition and brokenness.’

PRAYER, A DIVINE FORCE

A praying man is a mighty weapon in the hand of our living God, and his impact can never be minimized. **Charles Steinmetz**, a world-renowned American scientist, was asked what was the next great development that we ought to research. He replied, **“Research prayer, for it’s the world’s most powerful resource.”** Much is being said about who is right and who is wrong. This is no time for hair-splitting theology, but to pray one for another. Opinions are too easily given, but seldom do they offer constructive solutions. Everyone agrees that our nation, indeed our world, is facing a crisis, but no one cares to define its nature, discover its causes or bring about a lasting solution. The answer to all our problems can be defined in one word, prayer—our first responsibility and our most effective and meaningful action. Bleak pessimism abounds on every side. It is reflected in our literature, apparent in our politics, manifest in our religious

thinking, and voiced with increasing frequency throughout the world by the common man. Since the inception of the 'Social Media,' everyone has become an overnight sensation, placing questionable and sleazy information out in the public domain, seeking a moment of fame. Consequently, noble and helpful goals have been abandoned and godly motives forgotten as we have seemingly adopted a dog-eat-dog philosophy. Since we seem to be going nowhere, it matters little how we seek to get there. Today the question of right and wrong is decided by polls, and believe me, Americans take more polls than anyone else. The immortal words of **William Penn are worth remembering, "Right is right even if everyone is against it; and wrong is wrong even if everyone is in favor of it."**

One who longs for peace in the world must be prepared to pray for peace. It is time for us to unite in prayer by casting aside those things which would divide us. When we pray for the world, our prayers lift us from cynicism, enhance our concept of the world, generate a new interest in the affairs of all mankind, and give us a sense of divine direction. The world needs an immediate renewal in prayer where its citizens can come together in the love of God and for the sake of helping this world. How often do we pray for those who are in authority over us! When we kneel before God in prayer, His power enables us to forsake hatred and prejudice, practice love, abandon selfishness and show compassion towards others. Great leaders have not hesitated to kneel before God. Many of our forefathers were men of prayer, and when they were confronted with enormous problems that were beyond their powers to resolve, they laughed at their own plight and prayed for divine help. The great documents of our Revolution were composed under the benediction of prayer.

In this technological age, we have learned to harness the power of the atom, but very few of us have learned that a man is more powerful on his knees than behind the most powerful weapons. I am grateful for the people who spend time on their knees praying instead of talking about it. For example, the immortal words of **George Whitefield, history's greatest open-air preacher, "Whole days and weeks have I spent prostrate on the ground, in silent or vocal prayer."** The younger generation is moving away from God because they have neither been taught nor seen nor experienced a mighty move of God like the generations before them. If one generation sleeps at the wheel where spirituality is concerned the next generation suffers from it, and that's precisely what is happening in America today. Pray amid darkness; soon the darkness will disappear. Praying is the right thing to do in every situation. Prayer is not given to us to use when all else fails but is given to us to keep all else from failing. Believe me, it's time for us to wake up from our ubiquitous slumber and willing to fall on our knees with a heartfelt contrition that we have broken the heart of the ONE who never breaks our hearts! Our hearts need mending and when something is broken, we need to fix it! As Christians, we have devised so many religious innovations to enhance our worship services but abandoned the family altar where the entire family gathers to seek the face of God daily. May God help us restore the 'Prayer Altar' in our homes and churches, is my prayer!

FASTING IN THE CONTEXT OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Even a casual study of church history shows how relevant fasting was to those who were trailblazers in spreading the gospel around the world. **John Wesley was a man who believed in the importance of fasting that he refused to ordain young men to the ministry who would not fast two days each week. What a blessed idea! Martin Luther** fasted, as did John Knox, John Welch, David Brainerd, Charles H. Spurgeon, George Muller and many others. It is no exaggeration to say that fasting adds power to prayer that is received in no other way. **Samuel L. Brengle, once declared, "All men who have had spiritual power to prevail with God and man, have been men who learned to sternly deny themselves and keep their bodies under subjection."** Jesus said, **"When you fast, be not as the hypocrites..." (Matthew 6:16)** Let us not convolute the real meaning of fasting by arguing and fussing about the mechanical aspect as to how and when we should fast; instead, let's observe 'fasting' as a life-changing spiritual exercise which transcends all other exercises!

--- Matthew Skariah

ON SELF-DENIAL

The sustainability of the Christian faith is based on self-denial and a life of true discipleship. The spirit of self-denial must continue to exist among believers, if there is to be faith and love unmixed with pride and selfishness. There is no real Christian discipleship other than that which seeks first His Kingdom. Our Lord and Savior became poor that we through His poverty might become rich. The cross is not a symbol of earthly indulgence; rather, it's a symbol of those who suffer and cast their lot with Him who said, **"Follow me."** Our Lord lived in a little provincial, despised village of three thousand people, which bore the contempt of men as they scornfully asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" But from this despised town of Palestine, He emerged with sheer humility as the Son of God with a heavenly mandate for the whole world to know and experience the purpose of His coming. He made that town the city of all ages. When we become infatuated with the world and all its alluring propositions, we lose our moral and spiritual compass! Jesus said, **in Matthew 5:13, "Ye are the salt of the earth."** Salt makes people thirsty. Our lives should make others thirsty for Jesus! We can't make others thirsty for Jesus if we continue to live a life apart from God, but once our lives bear the fruit of the Spirit, people will want to discover the 'artesian well' that replenishes humanities souls.

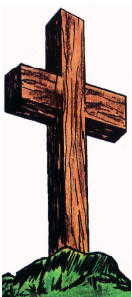
When we help share the Good News of the gospel, we are lighting a candle of hope which will dissipate the spiritual darkness that now covers the earth. These are extraordinary days; God is at work in ways that DEFY HUMAN LOGIC. Obviously, something majestic is happening and the power of Christ is erupting the world over. Will you join in giving God the glory and praise? Then allow Him to guide you, work through you, love through you, and even sacrifice through you if possible. I believe current social and moral conditions present unusual opportunities for Christians to share the message of the cross.

SOME SACRIFICIAL SOULS IN HISTORY

David Livingston requested that his heart be buried in Africa for the love of Christ and the people of Africa, during his funeral service. At the age of 52, former Cambridge University Cricket star and a millionaire's son, C. T. Studd, sacrificed all and went to Africa (Congo), walked about 700 miles inland in 1916 for the gospel's sake and for souls to be saved. Joseph Damien, the priest, not caring about himself but burdened about the souls of Molokai lepers, served and died of leprosy at the age of 49. On his gravestone these words were engraved "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John and Betty Stam, missionaries to China who were butchered by the communists' leaving their few months old baby for the sake of the gospel as well. Oswald J. Smith—founder of the Peoples Church in Toronto, Canada, traveled around the world mobilizing people for mission. The People's Church was one of the highest financial supporters of missions in his time, and God met their needs miraculously. God is no man's debtor! William Carey, at the age of 31 left his native England for India to propagate the gospel. He never went back home as he lived and worked among the Indians. He died there at 72 in 1834. May God help each of us to invest our lives in matters of eternal consequence, is my prayer! **"All God wants is all of me." What a superb concept!**

**Ours is a global assignment—propelled by Calvary love
and proclaimed with passion for souls.**

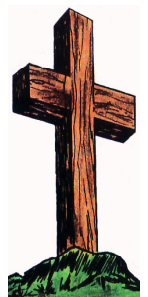
--- **Matthew Skariah**



PRAYER IS THE MIGHTIEST FORCE -- 2 Chronicles 7:14

Website: www.worldprayerband.com

E-mail: mwpbs@yahoo.com



**Intercession ★ Prayer Conferences ★ Revivals
One to One Outreach ★ Publications**

Phone: (575) 626-5097 • World Prayer Band P.O. Box 92953 • Southlake, Texas 76092