

Priorities of Faith

DAY 4 — THE FREEDOM OF A FOCUSED LIFE OF SIMPLICITY

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matt. 6:16–18, ESV)

Fasting Makes Space

One way of creating space to live a life focused on God is fasting. Fasting means decluttering our minds and lives by deliberately making room for the movement of the Holy Spirit in us and by focusing on God and His Word. The Bible often mentions fasting in connection with prayer. Jesus fasted before He started His public ministry (Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:2). The apostles fasted and prayed to be guided by God (Acts 13:2, 3), and in the Old Testament, fasting was frequently practiced among believing men and women (1 Kings 21:9, 12; 2 Chron. 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:3, 16; Isa. 58:6; Jer. 36:9; Dan. 9:3; Joel 2:12; John 3:5; etc.).

In contrast to wellness fasting, biblical fasting is not about observing a specific diet designed for weight loss and well-being. Instead, it is the conscious decision to abstain from food and distracting activities for a period of time to pray and commune with God. By temporarily giving up the familiar, we gain new spiritual freedom. During fasting and prayer, the focus of daily life changes: away from satisfying our own needs, away from our own works, and toward obedient listening to God. Biblical fasting expresses our desire to increase our dependence on God and pay attention to spiritual things that matter. This encompasses more than not eating; in fact, it challenges every area of our lives. In fasting, we acknowledge that we want to make space for God by reducing any distractions that crowd our attention and desire. We indicate that we want to seek and treasure God’s presence in our lives more than anything else.

Abstain and Include

How can we live this life of simplicity, where we learn to concentrate on things that truly matter? Just as we need to watch what we eat, we must be mindful of what we put before our eyes and what enters our ears. What we hear affects our thoughts just as much as what we see. What types of music, books, podcasts, or websites cause toxic thoughts or occupy your precious time with vanity? In addition to abstaining from certain things, you may need to deliberately include new habits to help you build up and create healthy, healing thoughts.

A life of simplicity, a mind unfrazzled, does not come from what the world tells us to pursue. A content heart comes from trusting God. When we learn to focus on Him, rather than on what others are doing, and when we practice letting go of things that distract us, we discover a simpler life of rest and peace with our Creator and Redeemer.

Let’s pray together.

Prayer Time (30–45 Minutes)**Praying God's Word — Matt. 6:16–18**

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“When You Fast”

Our loving Heavenly Father, thank You for providing us with whatever we actually need. In our excess and abundance, we often forget that too much of something is never good. Lord, fasting does not come naturally, and so we plead for Your strength to choose to abstain from indulgence and abstain from anything harmful, whether food, music, movies, shopping, etc. Also, show us how we can be more intentional in replacing what is not beneficial with what is. Help us to choose a holistic, healthy lifestyle. Amen.

“Like the Hypocrites”

Oh God, we desire a heart transformation. Forgive us for our hypocrisy, for whenever we say, teach, or preach one way, but live another way. We want to do the things we do for You from a heart that is surrendered to You, a heart that is motivated by love, a heart that is renewed by Your mercy and grace and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit. May our fasting, and all our spiritual and daily activities, be a true expression of Your holy presence in our hearts. Amen.

More Prayer Suggestions

Thanks and Praise: Give thanks for specific blessings and praise God for His goodness.

Confession: Take a few minutes for private confession and thank God for His forgiveness.

Guidance: Ask God to grant wisdom for current challenges and decisions.

Our Church: Pray for regional and world church needs (see separate sheet with requests).

Local Requests: Pray for current needs of church members, family, and neighbors.

Listen and Respond: Take time to listen for God's voice and respond in praise or song.

Song Suggestions

SDA Hymnal: I Surrender All (#309); I'd Rather Have Jesus (#327); Be Thou My Vision (#547)

Other Songs: As the Deer; Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord; Unto Thee, O Lord