

PRAYING FOR PURITY

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The Big Idea

Prayer and fasting are likely the greatest untapped resources of the church. In the hectic course of our daily lives, it's easy to let prayer slide. Yet all of history attests to the fact that God hears and answers prayer, especially when accompanied by fasting and repentance. What answers await your prayers? How could our church rise to a new level of God's presence and power to fulfill our mission? Let's pray and find out.

Abraham Lincoln's proclamation of a day of prayer and fasting

Our theme this month is prayer.

- "Let every heart prepare him room."
- We will connect prayer to three important spiritual dynamics.
 - Purity
 - Passion
 - Power

First of all, let's look at the importance of prayer.

1. Pray persistently.

- **Mark 9:14-29** *He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."* NIV
 - **Normal** Christianity is only possible through **persistent/consistent** prayer.
- We would see more happen if we prayed more.
 - **Luke 18:1-8** *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.* NIV
 - When was the last time you gave up?
- Don't be satisfied with only praying **relationship** prayers.
 - Pray some **Kingdom** prayers.
 - **Matthew 6:9-10** NIV
*This, then, is how you should pray:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*
 - The Lord's Prayer also features praying for needs and forgiveness – ours and others.
- What does God want to do in your family, job, church, and city?
 - Pray his Kingdom to come wherever you are to the people you are with.

2. Pray with fasting.

- Fasting is a God-approved method of adding **power** to your prayers.
- Jesus fasted.
 - **Luke 4:1-2,14** *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry... Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.* NIV
 - He was a man who needed to pray with power.
 - He needed to be sensitive to God's voice.
- Fasting is not eating for spiritual purposes.

- Fasting is not eating for spiritual purposes.
 - Fasting is a way of saying no to our physical desires, which tend to dominate our lives.
 - Fasting increases your **spiritual sensitivity**.
- God **rewards** fasting from a sincere heart.
 - **Matthew 6:16-18** *When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. NIV*

3. Pray for purity.

- Sin is a great **destroyer**.
 - **Ecclesiastes 9:18** *A wise person can overcome weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much that is good. NLT*
- Ask God to point out destructive stuff in your life.
 - **Psalms 139:23-24** *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. NIV*
- Purity is a function of the **Holy Spirit**.
 - **2 Thessalonians 2:13** *We are thankful that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation, a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and by your belief in the truth. NLT*
- When you see it, confess it.
 - **1 John 1:8-9** *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. NIV*

4. Reap the benefits of restoring prayer and purity.

- Jesus cleansed the temple and restored the house of prayer.
 - **Matthew 21:12-13** *Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" NIV*
- Prayer and purity bring big results.
 - **James 5:16-18** *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. NIV*

Proclamation Appointing a National Day of Prayer and Fasting
Washington, D.C., March 30, 1863

Senator James Harlan of Iowa, whose daughter later married President Lincoln's son Robert, introduced this Resolution in the Senate on March 2, 1863. The Resolution asked President Lincoln to proclaim a national day of prayer and fasting. The Resolution was adopted on March 3, and signed by Lincoln on March 30, one month before the fast day was observed.

By the President of the United States of America. A Proclamation.

Whereas, the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the Supreme Authority and just Government of Almighty God, in all the affairs of men and of nations, has, by a resolution, requested the President to designate and set apart a day for National prayer and humiliation.

And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

And, insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th. day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.

All this being done, in sincerity and truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope authorized by the Divine teachings, that the united cry of the Nation will be heard on high, and answered with blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins, and the restoration of our now divided and suffering Country, to its former happy condition of unity and peace.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this thirtieth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty seventh.

By the President: Abraham Lincoln
William H. Seward, Secretary of State

Praying for Purity, Passion, and Power
This Week's Discussion Guide – January 3-9, 2010

The beginning of the year is a great time to step up our prayer life and make some spiritual investments for future dividends. Sundays we will connect prayer to purity, passion, and power. As a follow up to this week's teaching on purity, use the following questions and Bible verses for personal study and reflection. You may also want to discuss them with your family, friends, small group, or mentor. And don't forget to pray! "Let every heart prepare him room."

1. Pray persistently.

- What have you seen God do in answer to your prayers?
- What keeps you from praying more?
 - Too busy
 - Doesn't make any difference
 - Boring
 - Don't know how
 - _____
- What works best to help you pray?
- What steps can you take to pray more?
- Prayer verses:
 - Matthew 6:9-10
 - Mark 9:14-29
 - Luke 18:1-8
 - Colossians 4:2-6
 - James 5:16-18

2. Pray with fasting.

- Have you ever fasted?
- If so, what benefit did you receive from it?
- What questions do you have about fasting?
- Fasting verses:
 - Isaiah 58
 - Luke 4:1-14
 - Matthew 6:16-18
 - Jonah 3
 - Acts 13:1-3

3. Pray for purity.

- What areas of your life does God want to clean up?
- Pray Psalm 139:23-24 daily.
- Keep a journal to write down thoughts that come to mind
- Ask forgiveness of people when God reminds you that you sinned against them.
- Ask a trusted person what areas God might want to clean up in you.
- Purity verses:
 - Psalm 139:23-24
 - 1 Corinthians 6:9-20
 - 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
 - Ephesians 4:1-5:20
 - 1 John 1:8-9