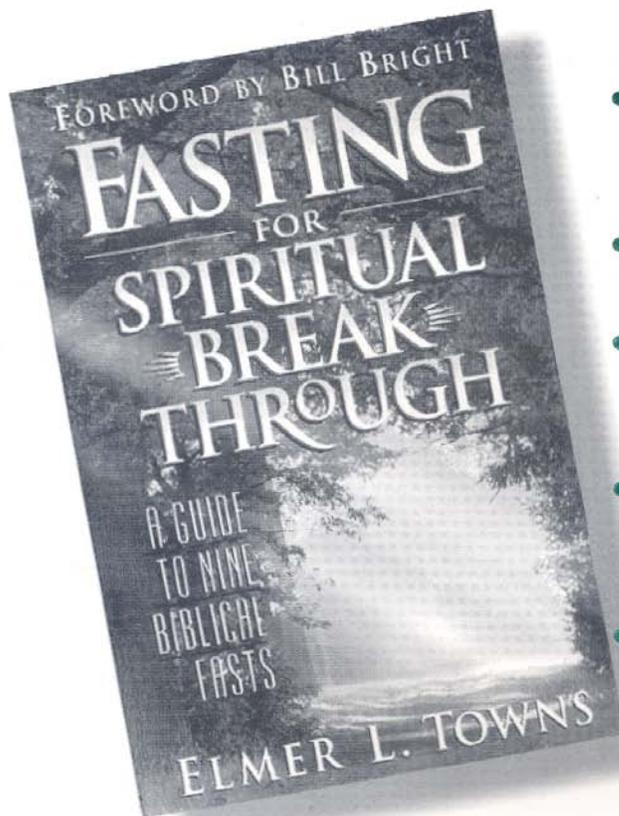


# BIBLICAL STUDIES FOR FASTING

*A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR YOU  
TO USE IN FASTING*



- Bible study guide for each of the nine fasts
- What to do when fasting
- Step-by-step schedule for each fast
- A checklist for each of the nine fasts
- What the Bible says about your challenges and concerns

by Elmer L. Towns



*Bible Studies*  
*for*  
*Fasting*

*for Personal and Group Study*

Elmer L. Towns

***Bible Studies for Fasting  
for Personal and Group Study***

**Getting Started**

- 1. The Disciples' Fast to Break Addiction**  
Preparing to Fast the Disciple's Fast  
Recognizing Who I Am "In Christ"  
Finding Light in the Midst of Darkness  
Softening a Hardened Heart  
Replacing Pride with Humility  
Yielding to God and His Authority  
Learning from the Disciple's Fast
  
- 2. The Ezra Fast to Solve Problems**  
Preparing to Fast the Ezra Fast  
Recognizing the Value of Problems  
Identifying the Source of My Problems  
Developing a Problem-Solving Strategy  
Learning from the Ezra Fast
  
- 3. The Samuel Fast to Win People to Christ**  
Preparing to Fast the Samuel Fast  
Understanding the Nature of Revival  
Recognizing the Dimensions of Evangelism  
Discerning the Role of Prayer in Evangelism  
Learning from the Samuel Fast
  
- 4. The Elijah Fast for Emotional Problems**  
Preparing to Fast the Elijah Fast  
Learning How Bad Habits Are Formed  
Learning How Good Habits Are Formed  
Developing a Habit-Busting Strategy  
Learning from the Elijah Fast
  
- 5. The Widow's Fast for Humanitarian Needs**  
Preparing to Fast the Widow's Fast  
Understanding My Social Responsibilities  
Recognizing Genuine Needs Around Me  
Responding in Wisdom to Meet Needs  
Learning from the Widow's Fast
  
- 6. The St. Paul's Fast for Insight and Decision-Making**  
Preparing to Fast the St. Paul's Fast  
Learning How to Make Good Decisions

Living by the Principle of Scripture  
Discerning God's Will for My Life  
Learning from the St. Paul's Fast

**7. The Daniel Fast for Health and Physical Healing**

Preparing to Fast the Daniel Fast  
Developing a Healthy Diet and Lifestyle  
Understanding How God Heals the Sick  
Praying the Prayer of Faith  
Learning from the Daniel Fast

**8. The John the Baptist Fast for an Influential Testimony**

Preparing to Fast the John the Baptist Fast  
Recognizing the Value of a Good Reputation  
Remaining Faithful in the Face of Opposition  
Overcoming Habits that Hinder My Testimony  
Learning from the John the Baptist Fast

**9. The Esther Fast for Protection from the Evil One**

Preparing to Fast the Esther Fast  
Recognizing the Work of Satan in the World  
Preparing for Spiritual Warfare  
Claiming the Victory Which Is Mine  
Learning from the Esther Fast

**Epilogue**

## GETTING STARTED

When you get ready to fast, first follow each step in the checklist to make sure you fast properly. Next, there are several Bible studies with each fast to give you a scriptural basis to pray and fast. Study the verses and write out answers to the questions. Then, pray the prayers. Finally, there is a questionnaire to be filled out at the end of your fast to help you learn and grow because of fasting.

The checklist should be used with the textbook, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*, Regal Books, by Elmer Towns. It describes 9 different fasts with 9 different prescriptions, each for a different purpose. The Bible studies in this checklist are different from the material in the textbook. Use this checklist to understand the biblical basis for each fast.

1. The Disciple's Fast: To break addiction.
2. The Ezra Fast: To solve problems.
3. The Samuel Fast: For evangelism and revival.
4. The Elijah Fast: To solve emotional problems.
5. The Widow's Fast: For humanitarian needs.
6. The Saint Paul's Fast: To make decisions.
7. The Daniel Fast: For health and healing.
8. The John the Baptist Fast: For testimony.
9. The Esther Fast: For protection from the evil one.

### YOUR FIRST FAST

If you have never fasted, begin with the fast which involves not eating solid foods for 24 hours. Don't begin with the Absolute Fast which includes no liquids or solids. Follow the example of the Jews who fasted sundown to sundown, a Jewish day. Take a small snack in the late afternoon (English call this high tea) and don't eat an evening meal, breakfast, and lunch. Do not eat again until after sundown the next day. Spend the time in prayer. Before you fast, write out the purpose of your fast.

### GENERAL CHECKLIST

Purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Fast: What you will withhold \_\_\_\_\_

Begin: Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

End: Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Vow: I believe God is the only answer to my request and that prayer without fasting is not enough to get an answer to my need. Therefore, by faith I am fasting because I need God to work in this matter.

Bible Basis: My Bible promise \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Resources: What I need during this fast \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

God being my strength and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# Chapter 1

## The Disciple's Fast to Break Addiction

### Study 1 Preparing to Fast the Disciple's Fast

As you prepare to fast the Disciple's fast, complete the following checklist. During your fast, take time to review the related Bible studies and read the chapter on the Disciple's Fast in *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Regal, 1996). As you fast, be sensitive to the lessons God may be trying to teach you about yourself and the problems which concern you most.

#### CHECKLIST FOR THE DISCIPLE'S FAST

Aim: Disciple's Fast for freedom from addiction.

Vow: I believe there is no earthly temptation that can enslave me but that God has a way of escape for me (1 Cor. 10:13). I believe the power of the blood of Christ and the strength of the name of Christ (Acts 3:16; 16:18). Therefore, I am fasting because I want the Son of God to make me free indeed (John 8:36).

Fast: What I will withhold \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Begin: Date and time I will start \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

End: Date and time I will end \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Decision: I am fasting to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Basis: My Bible promise \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast for God's glory.*

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Signed

Date

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about my personal bondage to sin: \_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about my compulsive behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about my personal addiction: \_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about my problems: \_\_\_\_\_

In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Study 2     Recognizing Who I Am “in Christ”**

Jed Clampet could very well be typical of a great many Christians living in the west today. Clampet was that poor mountaineer who barely kept his family fed. But then the day came when he struck oil while out hunting for food. With his newfound wealth, he and his family were off to California and a popular sit-om was born.

The irony of Jed Clampet continued in Beverly Hills. Though he was one of the richest men in the city, he never really adjusted his lifestyle to that of the rich and famous. He continued to live like that poor mountaineer in a much more comfortable setting. Though he could afford to eat at the finest restaurants, he continued to take his gun out looking for rabbits.

Like Clampet, many Christians are living in spiritual poverty in spite of the riches they possess in Christ. “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Cor. 1:20), but too often we struggle as spiritual paupers in our Christian life. In today’s study, we will look at several verses that help us better understand who we are “in Christ.”

The Apostle Paul used the expression “in Christ” almost two hundred times in his epistles to describe Christians. This expression describes the intimate relationship we enjoy with Christ as Christians. Because we are in Christ, we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). When we come to realize that we share in the riches of Christ, we will have a new perspective on who we are in God’s sight. This then becomes the basis upon which we live and enjoy the abundant life Jesus promised (John 10:10).

Read John 15:15. Jesus talked to His disciples about the special relationship He had with them explaining it from His perspective. On the lines which follow, describe that relationship in the form of a personal affirmation of who we are “in Christ.” Write the affirmation in the first person singular.

“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known to you”(John 15:15).

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In Romans 5:1, the Apostle Paul also describes your relationship to God. In that place he uses a legal context to describe how God responds to us “in Christ.” On the lines following, describe your legal standing before God, using the personal affirmation form used previously.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

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The Bible also describes our relationship to one another in the context of corporate Christianity. Read 1 Corinthians 12:27 and write a personal affirmation of that truth on the lines following.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (I Cor. 12:27).

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One of the ways God teaches us who we are “in Christ” is to use descriptive titles which reflect His expectations in our lives. A football coach may call a promising athlete “Champ” long before any awards are won to encourage the young athlete to strive for excellence. What does God call us in Ephesians 1:1? What does this tell you about His expectations for you?

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful it Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1).

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Just because God may have certain expectations for us does not mean we must constantly strive to meet His approval. God loves us unconditionally. Many people find that hard to accept because they have never been loved that way by others. According to Colossians 1:14, how has God demonstrated His unconditional love to you? How does it make you feel as you understand this truth as a part of your Christian experience?

“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

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Many children raised in dysfunctional homes are conditioned to think of themselves as inadequate or incomplete in some significant way. Our relationship to God “in Christ” also speaks to this very real need in our life. Read Colossians 2:10. On the lines following, write a personal affirmation of who you are in Christ relating to this personal need.

“And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10).

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Read Colossians 3:3. What has God done to secure your relationship to Him?

“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).

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Many of us struggle with security in relationships. You can only be dumped so many times before it starts to color your perspective. Read Romans 8:1-2. Explain why you can be confident in your relationship with God never having to fear being dumped by God.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

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When you are confident of God's love for you and the security of your relationship with Him, problems which come your way do not have to overwhelm you. Read Romans 8:28. What does this verse tell you about problems in your life?

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” Romans 8:28).

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Problems which may come your way are not an indication of God's hostility toward you. The nature of unconditional love is that it is unconditional. Read Romans 8:35, 38, 39. What do these verses teach about the security of your relationship to God?

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35, 38, 39).

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The fact of God's unconditional love should not be used as an excuse for not growing to realize your potential. God's love and concern for you should encourage you to become all you can be in Christ. Read Ephesians 2:10. What term does God use to describe you in that verse? How does it make you feel when you see yourself in that context?

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

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God does not create a work of art to merely sit on a shelf or hang on a wall to be admired by others. Rather, He has a specific function in mind for each of us. In Matthew 5:13-14, Jesus used two metaphors to describe us. On the lines following, rewrite each of these metaphors as a personal affirmation of your significant role in society.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:13-14).

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The verses we have looked at in this study are by no means exhaustive. They are a sampling of the many ways Christians are described in the New Testament. Did you learn something new about yourself today? Perhaps you discovered something new about your net worth in the eyes of God. Conclude this study by thanking God for what He has done and is continuing to do in your life. As you prepare to pray, complete the following statement.

The most significant thing I learned about myself today is \_\_\_\_\_

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### PRAYER

<p>Lord, I thank You for dying for my sins and accepting me in Jesus Christ. I thank You for making me Your child and giving me eternal life. I accept my new position “in Christ” and will live as You expect Your children to live. Help me to live above the trials of this life and reflect Your glory in all my life. Amen.</p>
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### Study 3 Finding Light in the Midst of Darkness

During World War II, a little known strategy was used to confound Adolph Hitler and help insure the ultimate victory of the allies. When it became known that Hitler often consulted astrologers and considered their advice before making major decisions, stories began to appear in the major newspapers of Europe of an astrologer with amazing psychic ability. According to published reports, this man had accurately predicted a number of significant events and was regularly being consulted by the rich and famous. It was not long before news of this psychic reached the German leader and a meeting was arranged between these two men.

At that meeting, Hitler heard the psychic tell him things about the war effort that were not common knowledge. Also, the psychic was able to accurately predict which cities would be targets of allied bombing raids. Impressed with the man’s psychic abilities, Hitler drew him into his circle of close advisors. During the remaining years of the war, the psychic served his new client as a part of the inner circle of the German High Command.

What Hitler did not know was that his psychic advisor was not all he appeared to be. He was really an English spy who depended upon British intelligence for the advice he would share with his client. As the spy’s influence grew, he was able to manipulate Hitler into doing exactly what the Allied leaders wanted him to do. Well planned military campaigns that had a reasonably good chance of success were delayed while others were pushed ahead of schedule.

Just as a master deception helped confound the German war machine, so deception can play a major role in frustrating us in our Christian life. Jesus described the Devil as a liar (John 8:44), so we should not be surprised that he makes use of deception in his work against the children of God. What is surprising is how often we assist the Devil in his work by deceiving

ourselves. Let's take a closer look at this matter of deception and how it can be best dealt with in our life.

Read Psalm 51:6. How important is our personal integrity to God?

“Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom” (Psalm 51:6).

What advantage is there to being a person characterized by integrity rather than deceit or guile?

“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psalms 32:2).

Jesus identified a direct relationship between personal integrity and liberty from spiritual bondage. Read John 8:31-32. What discipline in the Christian life will help you “know the truth” and experience a fuller measure of liberty in Christ?

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’ (John 8:31, 32).

To become people of integrity, Paul advises us to take two specific actions. Read Ephesians 4:25, then list each of these actions on the following lines.

“Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25).

As we begin “putting away lying,” a good place to start is with the lies we tell ourselves. The New Testament suggests several ways in which you may deceive yourself. Read James 1:22. How can you deceive yourselves in our response to God's Word?

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves” (James 1:22).

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Read 1 John 1:8. How does your attitude toward personal sin in your life reveal the extent to which you may be deceiving yourselves?

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

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Pride also has a way of blinding us to the light of God. Read Galatians 6:3. On the lines following, paraphrase this verse in the first person singular.

“For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself” (Galatians 6:3).

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One of the ironies about self-deception is that we are often the last to realize what is happening. Read 1 Corinthians 3:18. On the lines following, list areas in your life which should be reexamined to identify self-deception which may exist.

“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise” (1 Corinthians 3:18).

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Read Galatians 6:7. Think of your actions in the past twenty-four hours. What are the likely long-term consequences of those actions? Which actions do you need to work on changing?

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

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Perhaps the most significant area in which many people deceive themselves relates to their eternal destiny. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9. Have you been deceived into believing you will go to heaven without being converted to Christ? If so, talk to someone who has a personal relationship with Christ about being converted.

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived” (1 Corinthians 6:9).

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Even those who are converted need to take actions to insure their behavior is consistent with the gospel. Read 1 Corinthians 15:33. Are you involved with groups or places that are likely to have a corrupting influence in your life? Make a specific list of these danger areas.

“Do not be deceived. ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

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As you read those verses, did you discover areas where you have been deceiving yourself? It is only natural for us to want to see things the way we want them to be instead of the way they really are. But when we deceive ourselves, we keep ourselves bound in spiritual darkness rather than walking in the light with Christ. Stepping out of darkness into the light is not easy, but it is necessary if we are to experience the liberty Christ has promised those who walk in the truth. As you conclude today’s Bible study, use the following prayer to address those areas in which you have been deceiving yourself.

### PRAYER

Lord, I agree that I have been deceived in the area of \_\_\_\_\_.  
Thank You for forgiving me. I commit myself to know and follow Your truth. Amen.

## Study 4 Softening a Hardened Heart

When asked to explain why Moses allowed the practice of divorce in the law, Jesus attributed it to “the hardness of your hearts” (Matt. 19:8). He explained marriage break-ups universally involved one or both parties developing a hardened heart toward the other. This problem infects all relationships. As parents and children harden their attitudes against one another, conflict begins to characterize that relationship. As various ethnic groups in a city harden their attitudes against one another, racial conflict takes root. As nations harden their attitudes against one another, the threat of war looms.

Some observers fear this hardness of heart is increasingly becoming a norm in attitudes of those of us living at the end of the twentieth century. Former President George Bush once called his people to become “a kinder, gentler nation.” Civic leaders in many cities have called for greater racial harmony in their communities. World leaders have attempted to intervene to bring end to ethnic wars in various nations, apparently with little success.

Our increased hostility to one another is the product of at least two major influences in our world. First, throughout the last half of this century, we have been conditioned to become a consumer society. The question which best reflects the motive of many in our society today is, “What’s in it for me?” Second, increased global competition in the new information age means many of us are working harder for less than we had previously. It is easy to become mean spirited under such circumstances.

But Christians are supposed to be different. As Jesus met with His disciples for the last time before He was betrayed and crucified, He took time to teach them certain essentials that would help them remain distinctive in the world after He was gone. Many of these distinctives dealt with attitudes which would be their motives for action. Read John 13:34-35. What did Jesus identify as the distinguishing mark of His disciples?

“A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

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The ability of His disciples to get along with one another was crucial to Jesus. In fact, this command is repeated twelve times in the New Testament. Jesus saw it as essential to success in accomplishing His greater purpose in the world. He expressed this thought later that evening as He prayed to His Father. Read John 17:20-21. Why is a loving bond of unity among us as His disciples today so important to Jesus?

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe You sent Me” (John 17:20-21).

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Unfortunately, many of our relationships are not characterized by oneness of spirit. When individuals in relationship with one another do not work hard at “loving one another,” the normal stresses of that relationship are magnified. Ultimately, fractured relationships experience a complete breakdown and cease to exist. Read Matthew 19:8. How did Jesus describe the cause or broken relationships?

“He said to them, ‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so’” (Matthew 19:8).

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A hard-hearted attitude is expressed in various ways. Read Ephesians 4:31-32. Note the six characteristics of a hard heart described at the beginning of that verse. How does Paul describe the attitude which ought to characterize Christians?

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

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Certain consequences are associated with allowing Your heart to become hardened toward others. One of those consequences involves the influence of Satan over you. Read 2 Corinthians 2:10-11. What do these verses tell you about the spiritual consequences of an unforgiving spirit?

“Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

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A hard-hearted attitude toward others will also impact your relationship with God. Read Matthew 18:34-35. What risk do Christians take in their relationship with God?

“And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:34-35).

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In contrast to the consequences of an unforgiving hard heart, significant long-term benefits are associated with being tender-hearted toward one another. Read Romans 2:4. How does God’s goodness influence change in your life? Could a better attitude on YOUR part produce a similar change in someone else for whom YOU care deeply?

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).

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Softening a hard heart is hard work. No magic formula can immediately resolve this difficulty. Rather, some principles which, when applied consistently, will change your heart toward others. Read Ephesians 4:26-27. What are two ways you can deal with conflict in your relationships to insure they do not fester and cause your heart to harden?

“Be angry, and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

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Paul discusses another important principle that will help often your heart toward others. In Romans 12:19, Who is responsible for “getting even” in your relationships? How does this knowledge affect the way you deal with offenses?

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

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When Jesus talked about loving one another, He spoke of a kind of love that was expressed in specific positive actions. Read Luke 6:27-28. On the lines following, list three ways you can demonstrate love to those who are hostile toward you.

“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Luke 6:27-28).

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Many other biblical principles dealing with our attitude toward others prove helpful in developing relationships. They may be summarized in one biblical statement. Read Luke 6:36. As you think of a specific relationship in which you are currently involved, list one or two specific actions you could take to demonstrate the Father’s merciful nature to someone else and list them on the lines following.

Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

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Hard hearts are more common than we often care to admit. Even those who find it easy to empathize with others can become hard-hearted in relationships. As we conclude this study, use the following prayer to guide you as you respond to what you have learned.

## PRAYER

Father, thank You for loving me with an everlasting love. Forgive me for allowing myself to become calloused in my relationships with others. Soften my hardness of heart in my relationship with \_\_\_\_\_. Help me demonstrate Your love to him/her this week by \_\_\_\_\_. Amen.

### Study 5 Replacing Pride with Humility

The young preacher had looked forward to that day for years. During his difficult days of study in seminary, he would often encourage himself with the thought that someday he would stand behind a pulpit and preach the Word of God. Now the courses were complete, the degree was earned, and the moment had come. As the congregation concluded the hymn, he adjusted his tie and proudly stepped into position to begin his sermon.

His chest swelled slightly as he looked out at the gathered crowd. They had come to hear him preach. With a loud clear voice he began to preach his well-rehearsed sermon. He couldn't believe how good it was to hear his own voice echo throughout the large auditorium.

But as he continued preaching, something else happened. First, he lost his place in his notes. Quickly he recovered only to discover too late he had skipped ahead to the next point in his haste. As he tried to incorporate what he had missed, his mouth began to dry. The confident voice began to fade as the sermon continued. By the time the sermon ended, the young preacher was glad to walk quickly back to his seat as someone else led the final hymn. He only wished the seat he now sat in was not in such a public place.

After the service, he was approached by a sympathetic parishioner. In a quiet voice she shared that which she felt her pastor needed to hear. "Perhaps if you had come into the pulpit as you went out, you would have gone out as you came in," she explained.

It is so easy to become proud even when there is very little to be proud of. In the course of his public life, Winston Churchill was called upon to make a statement about another politician with whom he had often locked horns. Churchill explained, "I have always found him to be a very humble man with much to be humble about." At least part of that statement is true of all of us. Let's take a closer look at the problem of pride.

Pride and humility are often contrasted in the Scriptures. Read Proverbs 16:18, 19. Why does the writer place greater value in a humble spirit than success that might be achieved in cooperation with proud people?

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:18-19).

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Pride is not only self-destructive, it also draws to itself some rather significant opposition. Read Proverbs 3:34. This verse is quoted twice in the New Testament (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). How does God respond to the scornful and proud person? What in your life is likely to draw this kind of response from God?

“Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble” ( Proverbs 3:34).

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One man who experienced God’s response to a proud heart was Nebuchadnezzar. The Scriptures identify this man as one of the greatest world leaders of all time, but he was struck down with a form of insanity which caused him to think and act like an animal. When He regained his senses, he formed certain conclusions about God. Read Daniel 4:37. Make a list of the things in your life in which you take great pride. Are these things worth the risk associated with possessing and taking pride in them?

“Now, I Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of Heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down” (Daniel 4:3).

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Although some people experience great loss before they experience humility, others have learned the secret of being humble by placing their confidence in God. Read Philippians 3:3-4. Even though Paul had things in his life in which others might take pride, the focus of his life was God. Review the list you prepared in the previous question. Then list one thing you can focus on in God which is greater than each of those things in which you could take pride in your own life.

“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so” (Philippians 3:3-4).

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At the very heart of discipleship is the issue of prioritizing one’s values. Read Matthew 16:24. Before taking up our cross and following Him, we must first deny ourselves. As you review your answers to the two previous questions, make a list of the areas in your life you that are now prepared to deny and yield to God.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me’” (Matthew 16:24).

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As humility becomes a part of your life, it will impact your relationships with others. Read Philippians 2:3 and Romans 12:10. Think about a relationship in which you are now involved. List two or three specific actions which will help you honor others and communicate respect.

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” (Philippians 2:3).

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” (Romans 12:10).

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A starting point in expressing humility is in our relationship with God. Read 1 Peter 5:6-7. Make a list of the concerns which hinder you from transferring your confidence from yourself to God. Later, You will use this list as the basis of your prayer response to God.

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

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As you approach God in humility, do so on His terms. Read James 4:8-10. List the five steps to take in correctly approaching God. Rewrite this verse in the first person as a prayer response to God.

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:8-10).

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Do you personally struggle with the problem of pride as so many of us do? If so, use the following prayer as a tool to express the desire of your heart to God. Adapt the prayer as necessary to better reflect your personal situation.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for creating me in Your image. I confess that I have taken pride in myself rather than the One in whose image I am made. I have allowed \_\_\_\_\_ to become more important to me than You. In response to Christ's call to discipleship in my life, I now deny \_\_\_\_\_ and submit myself before You to bear Your cross in meekness and humility. Amen.

## Study 6 Yielding to God and His Authority

The first time he did it, it was cute. He had just started walking and liked the feel of going about on two legs. When his mother called him to come to her, he turned and started walking off in a different direction. Those who witnessed the incident chuckled and said things like, "Isn't that cute." It happened again, and again, and before long the child was drawing praise from a much wider circle over his cute behavior.

He was still young when his running away stopped being cute. His mother was sitting on the front porch with neighbors when she noticed he was getting too close to the road. She called him to come and true to form he darted off in the other direction. As he emerged into the road there was a sickening squeal of brakes followed by a dull thud. It would be weeks, perhaps months before he would walk again, but this time he would also learn to come.

The tragedy of one family serves to illustrate the potential consequences of rebellion, failing to yield to one's authority. Christians struggle with the problem of rebellion in their relationship with God. Read 1 Samuel 15:22-23. To what sins does the prophet compare rebellion and stubbornness? What were the consequences of rebellion for Saul?

"So Samuel said: 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the Word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king'" (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

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Part of our problem with rebellion is our tendency to trivialize it. Like those who saw the young boy run from his mother, we use terms that make our rebellion sound cute. Read Daniel 9:5. Note how Daniel describes this sin. How do Christians rebel against God?

"We have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments" (Daniel 9:5).

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One of the problems many of us struggle with in this area is in our attitude toward those God has placed in positions of authority over us. These individuals have been delegated authority

by God to be exercised in our life. Before looking at specific contexts, read Ephesians 5:21. What should be the governing attitude in our response to others?

“Submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21).

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Let’s begin by looking at civic authority. Read Romans 13:1-2. According to these verses, where do civic officials get their authority to govern? How does my response to their laws reflect my response to God?

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13:1-2).

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As Christians, we have specific civic responsibilities to be fulfilled. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-2. How should we pray for government officials? Which government officials should you pray for today? List one specific prayer request for your mayor, governor, and President.

“Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

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Simply praying for our leaders is not enough. Read 1 Peter 2:13-14. Are you submitting to the laws of the land? How many have you broken today? Make a list of the laws you routinely break. These are expressions of your rebellion against God.

“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the raise of those who do good” (1 Peter 2:13-14).

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Let’s move on to the workplace. Read 1 Peter 2:18-19. What is the response of a yielded Christian toward his or her employer? How does that response change if the employer has a

hostile attitude toward his or her employees? Could your relationship with your employer be described in this way?

“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully” (1 Peter 2:18-19).

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One area where authority is often tested is the home. Read Ephesians 6:1-3. How should children respond to their parents’ authority over them? Could your relationship with your parents be described in this way?

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

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God has also placed an authority structure within the marriage relationship. Read 1 Peter 3:1, 2. How does God expect wives to respond to the husband God has placed in authority over them? How does this response give wives significant influence over their husbands? Could your relationship with your spouse be described in this way?

“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Peter 3:1-2).

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These authority structures designed by God even reach down to our church life. Read Hebrews 13:17. Why should you yield to the authority of your church leaders? How would you describe your relationship with those who hold offices in your congregation?

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

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As you have worked through today's study, you have looked at some of the authorities God has placed over you to help you live the Christian life. This study has not looked at every aspect of any of these relationships but rather has focused on your response to divine authority. The way you respond to those in authority over you reflects your real heart toward God. Perhaps you have found areas in which you have fallen short. Read Daniel 9:9. Will God forgive your rebellion against Him? Make a list of the areas where rebellion needs to be replaced with yielding.

“To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him” (Daniel 9:9).

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In contrast to rebellion, God calls us to yield to Him. Read Romans 12:1-2. Does this express your desire in your relationship with God? If so, conclude this study with a prayer of confession, confessing specific areas of rebellion in your life and yielding each of those areas to God and those authorities He has placed over you.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

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## PRAYER

Lord, I yield my life to You. Help me to see areas of my life where I am not yielded because I am blinded by selfish reasons. Then I will also yield these areas to You. When I am not willing to do Your will, make me willing to do it. I yield to the authority of government over me, the church over me, my employers over me, and I yield to the authority of my family. Forgive me where I have selfishly rebelled and help me serve You. Amen.

## Study 7 Learning from the Disciple's Fast

This week, you have taken a closer look at the Disciple's Fast. Before moving to another discipline of fasting, take time to review what you have learned to identify important lessons God has been teaching you through the Disciple's Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you have gained this week.

1. Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you

need to continue observing the Disciple's Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?

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2. In your second Bible study, you took time to look at who we are in Christ. On the lines following, identify the most significant thing you learned about yourself in that study. How will this new knowledge change your life?

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3. Personal integrity is often a key element in securing the benefits associated with the Disciple's Fast. Did you discover areas in which you had been deceiving yourself? On the lines below, list one or two areas in which you have been deceiving yourself. What steps are you taking to insure you break free from the bondage of deception to enjoy the liberty of truth?

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4. Our addictions often impact our relationships with others, making it difficult to express our love for others in healthy ways. Are you involved in a relationship which is suffering because you have failed to express your love for someone in a healthy way? What specific actions are you planning to take to allow God's love for others to be expressed through your life?

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5. To paraphrase Churchill, we are often so prideful with so little to be proud about. As you worked through the Bible study on pride and humility, what areas of your life did the Holy Spirit bring to your mind? What steps have you taken to humble yourself before God in those areas? What steps do you plan to take to prevent pride from taking root in that area of your life again?

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6. In the previous study, we looked at the authorities God has placed over us. How well are you obeying these authorities? Did you find areas in which rebellion rather than yielding might better describe your response to them? What is one area in which you will make a concentrated effort to replace rebellion with yielding this week?

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7. What is the most significant lesson God has been teaching you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the Disciple's Fast?

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### PRAYER

Lord, deliver me constantly from addiction to sin and protect me constantly from attacks by the Evil One that would place me in future bondage. I believe You can deliver me and protect me from bondage. Amen.

# Chapter Two

## The Ezra Fast to Solve Problems

### Study 1     Preparing to Fast the Ezra Fast

As you prepare to fast the Ezra Fast, complete the following checklist. During your fast, take time to review the Bible studies associated with this fast and read the chapter on the Ezra Fast in the book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*, (Regal, 1996). As you fast, be sensitive to the lessons God may be trying to teach you about yourself and the problems which concern you most.

#### *CHECKLIST FOR THE EZRA FAST*

- Aim:            The Ezra Fast is to solve a problem.
- Vow:            I will examine all facts to understand my problem and will ask God to give me insight into the causes and solutions to my problem. I will fast and seek God for His solution to my problem. After I have followed all the principles that God has shown me and everything I can do to solve my problem, I will accept the results within the providence of God (Rom. 8:28).
- Fast:            What I will withhold \_\_\_\_\_
- Begin:          Date and time I will start \_\_\_\_\_
- End:            Date and time I will end \_\_\_\_\_
- Decision:      I am fasting to \_\_\_\_\_
- Statement of the Problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to this fast for God's glory.*

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about my problem: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about my problem-solving strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to accept the following conditions in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Study 2     Recognizing the Value of Problems**

A farmer who had unsuccessfully struggled for years to turn a profit through crop farming on his small farm was convinced his world had come to an end when a tractor accident resulted in his losing the use of his legs. As he lay in bed, his frustration grew as thought of all the work that had to be done. He knew his wife and children were doing what they could to keep the farm going but feared it would not be enough. But after several weeks of worrying, he got an idea that he thought would work.

Rather than plant the usual variety of crops, he instructed his family to only plant low grade feed corn. Then he had them clean out the barns and sell off certain pieces of farm equipment he would no longer use. Later, as the corn was being harvested, he used the money he had raised in the equipment sale to purchase young pigs. Rather than selling his corn, he used it as feed to fatten his pigs. When the pigs were ready to slaughter, he instructed his family to use the whole pig to make sausage meat. Usually the butcher used only lower grade pork cuts to make sausage, but by using the whole hog, this farmer's sausages were leaner and tasted better.

Soon word spread about these unique sausages. People were willing to pay a premium price for sausages that cost no more to make than other sausages. When a major meat distributor began selling the sausages to several grocery chains, the lame farmer began buying mature pigs from other farmers to keep up with the demand. It took a significant problem that threatened his family's financial security to discover the means of acquiring a family fortune.

Nobody really likes problems, but often problems are easier to handle when we can recognize value in them. The early Christians had a rather unique response to the problems that came into their life. Read Acts 5:41. How did the early Christians respond to the problem of persecution in their life?

<p>“So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” (Acts 5:41).</p>
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Rejoicing is not something that comes natural in the midst of problems, but it was often characteristic of the early Christians' response. The only time many of us feel like rejoicing in the context of a problem is when God intervenes and removes a problem from us. Read 2 Corinthians 12:8. Paul never identifies the specific problem he faced although many Bible teachers have attempted to identify it. What was Paul's natural response to this problem? How did God respond to Paul in this situation?

“Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me” (2 Corinthians 12:8).

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Perhaps the only thing more frustrating than being confronted with a significant problem in your life is to be confronted with God's refusal to remove the problem and make everything all right again. Read 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10. How God's promise enable Paul to change his response to his problem?

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

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Can something of value really be associated with my problems? Read 1 Peter 1:6-7. What is one of God's purposes in allowing problems to come into your life?

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

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The testing of our faith is not simply an end in itself. It is part of a process used by God to accomplish a greater purpose. Read James 1:2-3. What is one of the things this process with

problems produces? Is this a need in your life? If so, identify specific areas of your life in which you would benefit most from this process.

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2-3).

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Even patience or perseverance is not the end of this process. Read Romans 5:3-4. In your own words, describe the positive results you might expect to see as a result of problems in your life.

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3-4).

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Often in the midst of our problems we come to know God in a different way. It is interesting to note the name of God *El Shaddai*, the All-Sufficient God, is used more in Job than anywhere else in Scripture. It was in the midst of his problems that Job came to know God in this way. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3. What are some of the things about God you can learn in your problems? Has God allowed your present circumstances to help you get to know Him in a special way?

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

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God is not so unkind as to abandon us in our problems. Read 2 Corinthians 1:7. What can we expect from God in our problems?

“And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation” (2 Corinthians 1:7).

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God’s promise of comfort or consolation is encouraging when you face an apparently overwhelming problem. Read 2 Corinthians 1:4. What is God’s purpose in comforting you in the midst of your problems?

“Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted b God” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

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God’s ultimate purpose in your life stretches beyond ministry. Read Romans 8:28-29. What is God trying to accomplish in your life? How does He use problems to accomplish that purpose?

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among man brethren” (Romans 8:28-29).

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As we begin to understand the value of problems in our life, it gives us a basis for changing our attitude toward problems.

David wrote Psalm 7 in the midst of a significant problem in his life. Read Psalm 7:17. How did David respond to God in the midst of His problems? Can you respond in a similar manner in the midst of your present problems?

After answering this question, conclude this study with a prayer of thanksgiving for what He is doing in your life through the problems you are now facing.

“I will praise the Lord according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High” (Psalm 7:17).

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### PRAYER

Lord, I thank You for being with me in all my troubles. Forgive me for not seeing You when You were there with an answer in some troubles, and thank You for giving me strength and wisdom to get through other troubles. Help me through my present problem that I may learn what You want to teach me in this trouble. May I become what You want me to be because of this present problem. Solve this problem for Your glory. Amen.

## Study 3 Identifying the Source of My Problems

The residents of a particular community began contacting their doctors complaining about a variety of unusual symptoms. These symptoms did not match any common disease known by their doctors. Although the doctors could not diagnose the disease, it was obvious their patients were sick. When the community doctors began talking to one another about these difficult cases, it became obvious that common symptoms were widely shared by those affected by the strange condition. The town was apparently on the verge of an epidemic and no one was quite sure what to do about it.

As one doctor puzzled over this situation. He noted that several patients had unusually high levels of a particular toxin in their blood. Further checking revealed smaller amounts of the same toxin in each of the patients who had reported being sick. The evidence seemed to suggest the patients had been poisoning themselves, but that didn't make any sense at all.

Armed with this new evidence, the doctor began looking for the source of the toxin. Before long he found his answer. A few months before the first reported case of the new disease, a chemical factory had opened in another town several miles to the north. A routine environmental inspection revealed a toxic chemical was being dumped into the storm sewers polluting the river from which the town to the south had been drawing their drinking water. Once the problem in the chemical factory was resolved, cases of the new disease declined and those infected began to show improvement in health.

Sometimes, the key to resolving a problem is to first discover its source. Knowing where the problem comes from helps us know how to respond. Read Job 14:1. Rewrite this verse as a promise concerning what you can expect regarding problems in your life.

“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1).

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Many people believe problems are the result of our environment. Blaming uncontrollable circumstances for one's problems is becoming an increasingly common practice. Read Job 5:7. How does this verse tend to minimize the role of circumstances as the source of your problems?

“For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble spring from the ground; yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:6).

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This does not mean a problem-free life is possible. The Scriptures makes it clear you will experience problems throughout life. But many people complicate their lifestyle by acquiring more than their share of problems. Read Matthew 6:34. What is one source from which you may obtain extra problems?

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34).

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Sometimes you may find yourself involved in problems that do not have to be part of your life. Read Proverbs 26:17. What is the source of problems in this verse? What is likely to happen to you when you acquire problems from this source?

“He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears” (Proverbs 26:17).

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Some problems are simply part of the normal life experiences of all people. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. How does God help you in the midst of these kinds of problems? What is the likelihood of your surviving these problems?

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

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Other problems are part of the normal course of events in any relationship. Read Luke 17:1. How does your understanding of this principle prepare you for these kind of problems? If problems are going to characterize a relationship anyway, are you justified in being the cause of these problems? How should your understanding of this principle influence behavior in relationships?

“Then He said to the disciples, ‘It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come’ (Luke 17:1).

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Other problems we experience have nothing to do with others. Read James 1:14-16. What is the source of problems in this verse? What is the likely consequence of problems from this source? How do you need to deal with problems experienced that come from this source?

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desires have conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.” (James 1:14-16).

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Our problems may also find their source in the involvement of spiritual beings. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7. What two names did Paul use to describe this problem? What do these names suggest about the nature of this problem? Why would God allow problems from this source to be part of a Christian’s life?

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

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There is yet one more source of problems in the Christian life. Read Deuteronomy 8:2. What was the source of Israel’s problems in the wilderness? Why would God allow problems from this source to be part of your Christian experience?

“And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” (Deuteronomy 8:2).

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If at least some of your problems come from God, does that mean God is to be blamed for your response to those problems? Read James 1:13. Explain why you can not use God as an excuse to justify your response to problems.

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (James 1:13) .

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Many Christians take a rather simplistic view of their problems, blaming them all on a single source, i.e. sin, the Devil, someone else, etc. As we have worked through this Bible study, you have discovered there are many sources of problems in your life. What is the source of the problem for which you are fasting? Does understanding the source of your problem give you

insight into how you should respond to it? As you conclude this study, take time to ask God to help you discern the source of problems as they come into your life and respond accordingly.

## PRAYER

Lord, help me understand the cause of my problem and accept Your will. Even when I do not understand all that is happening, I yield to You and will try to do Your will. Help me solve this problem and help me get through this situation. Amen.

### Study 4     **Developing a Problem-Solving Strategy**

“I’m not really sure what to do,” the man told his friend. “I have a payment due tomorrow and I only have half of what I need to deposit in my account.” When he purchased the property a year earlier, he had set up a special account from which mortgage payments were automatically drawn. Recently, he was finding it harder to find enough to cover the mortgage payment each month. This month, the money just wasn’t there.

“How much do you have in your account right now?” his friend asked.

“I don’t know. I just know I have to sell this property before I go broke. But that is not going to happen before tomorrow,” he added.

Upon the advice of his friend, the man called the bank to get his current balance. To his surprise he discovered that the amount he had to deposit would raise the account balance high enough to meet the urgent payment. That would give him a month to investigate other alternatives to deal with the larger problem.

Don’t you wish all your problems were that easy to solve? Many are. The problem with problems is that they tend to overwhelm us. In the midst of a crisis, it is hard to think clearly. But unless you develop a clear problem-solving strategy and apply it diligently to your problem, you are unlikely to resolve your problems satisfactorily.

Many Christians have a problem-solving strategy that sounds good but just doesn’t work. Their standard response to every problem is “turn it over to the Lord in prayer.” Outside Christian circles, that is called “passing the buck.” Read Proverbs 16:1. As important as prayer is, who is responsible for developing solutions to your problems? Who do you usually depend upon to bail you out?

“The preparation of the heart belongs to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord” (Proverbs 16:1).

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Just because we are responsible for making plans and decisions does not mean we can do whatever we want. Read Proverbs 16:9. What is God’s role in our decision-making?

“A man’s heart plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

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The best decisions we make in life are those which are consistent with God’s decisions about our life. Read Proverbs 14:15. How important is the process of making decisions? What distinguishes the approach of the simple person and prudent or wise person?

“The simple believes every word, but the prudent man considers well his steps.” (Proverbs 14:15).

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The greatest challenge for many of us is acquiring the mind of God in our decision-making and problem-solving process. The Scriptures call this wisdom. Read Psalm 19:7. What is one source from which you can get this needed wisdom? Does this source have anything to say about the problem you are now facing?

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” (Psalms 19:7).

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James reveals another source from which the Christian can draw wisdom. Read James 1:5. Identify this source. As you think about your problem, what are the issues in which you need special wisdom? If you have not yet tapped into this source, take a few minutes to do so now.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

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People become like those with whom they associate. Read Proverbs 13:20 to discover another source of wisdom. Are the people with whom you associate a help or a hindrance when it comes to solving your problem? Make a list of those you think are likely to be most helpful.

“He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20).

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People who make good decisions rarely make them alone. They consult others as part of their problem-solving strategy. Read Proverbs 20:18. Before you wage war on your problem, make a list of people who should be consulted for wise counsel. These are people whom you respect as having special insight and know how to resolve their own problems well. Make a list of the people you should consult about the problem for which you are fasting.

“Every purpose is established by counsel; by wise counsel wage war” (Proverbs 20:18).

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Before we conclude this study, let’s take time to apply a problem-solving strategy to the problem that concerns you most. Use the following questions to guide you through the process.

1. Get the facts
2. Establish biblical principles
3. Evaluate the facts
4. List various possible solutions
5. Choose the best available solution

What do you need to know about your problem before you can begin to solve it? On the lines below, briefly describe your problem as you see it. Then read what you have written to determine if you have all the basic facts correct.

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What biblical principles are likely to apply to your problem? Write the principles in your own words on the lines below. Include the Scripture reference upon which each principle is based.

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Which facts are relevant to resolving the problem? Often some of the facts we include in the description of our problem are intended to justify our actions rather than recount events accurately. Which facts were left out of the description of the problem that become relevant in light of the biblical principles you listed above.

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Begin compiling a list of possible solutions. Don't take time right now to evaluate them. List any action you or someone else could take to resolve the problem. The more possible solutions you come up with, the better. Therefore, set a goal to list ten possible responses.

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### PRAYER

Lord, help me see all the answers to my problem. Help me to think clearly and write out what I can do. Then as I make this list of possible solutions, show me which is the best one for me at this present time. Amen.

As you look over your list of possible solutions, some are obviously better alternatives than others. Rate each of these alternatives on a scale of one to ten. Which solution holds the best promise for resolving the problem? Write that solution on the lines below.

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### PRAYER

Lord, help me make the best decision to solve my problem at this time. Then give me inner peace after I make my decision. Finally, give me strength to implement the decision and make it work. Amen.

Sometimes big problems take time to resolve. As you worked through this problem-solving strategy, you may have come up with a solution that will improve your situation without solving the problem. Work for the improvement, then work through this problem-solving strategy again to come up with another action that will bring you another step closer to resolving your problem.

### PRAYER

Lord, I have fasted and prayed over a problem. I have tried to follow good problem-solving principles. I have studied Your Word to know Your will. I have made a decision to solve my problem. Do the things I cannot do to solve my problem and help me to do the things I can do to solve my problem. By faith, I thank You for the answer. Amen.

## Study 5 Learning from the Ezra Fast

This week, you have taken a closer look at the Ezra Fast. Before you move on to consider the next discipline of fasting, take time to review what you have been learning this week to

identify important lessons God has been teaching you through the Ezra Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you have gained this week.

1. Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you need to continue observing the Ezra Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?

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2. As you completed the Bible study on the value of problems, perhaps you gained new insight into how God wants to use problems in your life. What do you believe God is trying to accomplish in your life by allowing your present set of problems? How much progress is being made on accomplishing that goal? How much more work is left to do?

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3. Our problems come from many sources. As you worked through the Bible study on the source of our problems, what source did you attribute to your present problem? Are you still convinced your problem comes from that source? How should you respond to your problem in light of its source? Do you tend to acquire more problems than you need to? If so, what steps are you taking to make sure you do not complicate your life by adding unnecessary problems?

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4. In your last Bible study, you looked at applying a problem-solving strategy to the problem which concerns you most. What specific steps are you taking to resolve your problem or work toward an improvement in your present situation?

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5. What is the most significant lesson God has been teaching you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the Ezra Fast?

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## PRAYER

Lord, I thank you for problems because of what they teach me. I thank you for solutions because of what You do for me. Help me to see You in the middle of every problem and strengthen my faith. Amen.

# Chapter Three

## The Samuel Fast

### to Win People to Christ

#### Study 1 Preparing to Fast the Samuel Fast

As you prepare to fast the Samuel Fast, complete the following checklist. During your fast, take time to review the Bible studies associated with this fast and read the chapter on the Samuel Fast in the book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Regal, 1996). As you fast, be sensitive to the lessons God may be trying to teach you about yourself and the problems which concern you most.

#### *CHECKLIST FOR THE SAMUEL FAST*

- Aim: The Samuel Fast is for revival and soul-winning.
- Vow: I believe in the power of God to revive individuals and people (Ps. 85:6), God's desire to pour Himself out on His people (Acts 4:17) and send times of refreshing from His presence (Acts 3:19). I believe when people humble themselves, pray, seek God's renewal and turn from their wicked way; God responds. Therefore I will fast and pray for revival and soul-winning (2 Chron. 7:14).
- Fast: What I will withhold \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Begin: Date and time I will start \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- End: Date and time I will end \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Decision: I am fasting to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Bible Basis: My Bible promise \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast for God's glory.*

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Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about my relationship with God: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about pride in my life: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

During my fast, I learned the following about sin in my life: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Study 2      Understanding the Nature of Revival**

In early December 1949, four church leaders from the Parish of Barvis on the Island of Lewis in Scotland met together for an unusual prayer meeting. For several months, these men and others had been praying for revival in their parish. As they met for prayer that night, one of the group read a psalm. Suddenly, each of the men became convicted of sin in their own life. That night, the focus of their prayer was not on the sin of the community. Rather, they spent most of that night confessing their own sins and asking God to forgive them.

When Duncan Campbell arrived in the area a few weeks later for a preaching mission on the island, the revival experienced by those four ministers quickly spread. Before long, people were gathering to worship God in churches and other meeting places across the entire Island. As news of the Lewis Awakening spread, interest in revival was sparked in other parts of the British

Isles. Soon prayer groups were meeting and praying for a similar outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their community. The Lewis Awakening proved to be the first of many similar revivals throughout the world in the mid-twentieth century.

Revival is an extraordinary work of God in which Christians tend to repent of their sins as they become intensely aware of His presence in their midst. They respond to God in renewed obedience to the known will of God. This results in both a deeper experience with God and an increased concern for the spiritual welfare of those around them. Throughout the years, revivalists have used various expressions to describe this experience. One of the more commonly used expressions is “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” Read Acts 3:19. What is our responsibility to insure such times of refreshing do come?

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

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On the Day of Pentecost, Peter used another expression to describe the revival of that day. He drew that description from the Prophecy of Joel. Read Joel 2:28-29. How did Peter and Joel describe revival? What does this description suggest about the nature of revival?

“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28-29).

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The image of rain or an outpouring is used throughout the Scriptures to describe God’s blessing coming to his people. Read Romans 5:5. What is one aspect of God’s blessing poured out with the Holy Spirit? What difference will this make in our relationship with God and others?

“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

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One of the characteristics of revival is that Christians renew their commitment to doing the will of God. Read Ephesians 5:17-18. What is God’s will for Christians regarding our relationship with the Holy Spirit?

“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:17-18).

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Several steps are involved in being filled with the Holy Spirit. Read Matthew 5:6. What is the first condition associated with being filled with the Holy Spirit? What needs to be done to establish this condition in your life?

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6).

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Repentance of known and practiced sin is another precondition to experiencing God’s revival blessing. Read Psalms 23-24. Using this prayer as a model, list the things you need to deal with in your life before you can enjoy the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23-24).

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The presence of sin in our life will hinder our relationship with God if it is not dealt with. Read 1 John 1:9. What do we need to do to deal with sin? What will God do in response? If you have not already done so, why not take a few minutes right now to do this.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

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Because people are different, their descriptions of their relationship with God will differ. Be careful to avoid the tendency of copying someone else’s experience. Read 1 John 5:14-15. How can we know we have been filled with the Holy Spirit?

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

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Being filled with the Holy Spirit should not be viewed as the end of one's Christian experience. Read Galatians 5:16. How should you continue in your relationship with God? How will doing so impact your lifestyle?

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

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As you continue living a life yielded to the control of the Holy Spirit, He begins developing His character in your life. Read Galatians 5:22-23. Use this list as a guide to measure the progress of the Holy Spirit in developing His character in your life.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

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Revival is one of those things that is better “felt than telt.” It would indeed be unfortunate to study the nature of revival and miss the experience of revival. Perhaps as you have worked through this study, you have discovered areas of need in your own life. Use the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24 as a model for your prayer as you conclude this study. Be specific in applying this prayer to your personal situation.

### PRAYER

Lord, I want revival in my life. Pour out Your Spirit on my life and refresh me. I confess to dryness and apathy. Forgive me for taking my faith casually. Help me to see any sin in my life that blocks your presence from my perspective. Take away m sin and renew m life. Amen.

### Study 3 Recognizing the Dimensions of Evangelism

When Harold stepped out into an aisle and began making his way to the front of the church to receive Christ at the conclusion of the church service, several people in the auditorium felt good about what they were seeing. His father and other family members smiled broadly as they saw the answer to so many prayers finally bearing fruit. Several others in the church remembered Harold as student in their Sunday School class and rejoiced to see the Word of God finally taking hold in his life. Many of his friends in the youth group shed tears of joy as they

thought of the hours they had spent sharing their personal testimony and encouraging him to trust Christ as Saviour.

When people like Harold receive Christ as Saviour, often it is the result of many Christians doing the work of evangelism. For most of us, conversion is part of a larger process of coming to Christ. Throughout this process, we move closer to the point where we actually receive Christ as Saviour. Bringing people to Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit, but God uses people throughout the process. Each one of us can have an important role in bringing people to Christ as we are faithful in the work of evangelism.

Evangelism is communicating the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit to unconverted persons at their point of need with the intent of bringing them to Christ as Saviour. Often we think of evangelism as taking place only when people trust Christ as Saviour. That is the goal of evangelism. But just as conversion is a process, so the term “evangelism” is used to describe various aspects of that process of bringing people to Christ. In this study, we will consider various dimensions of evangelism. We will do this by looking at various biblical descriptions of people doing the work of evangelism.

The first term used to describe evangelism was used by Jesus Himself. Read Acts 1:8. How did Jesus describe His disciples in their evangelistic ministry? What does this term imply concerning my approach to evangelism?

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

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As the disciples began their work of evangelism in Jerusalem, many people were converted to Christ. Luke uses a second term to describe their witness. Read Acts 4:1. How does Luke describe the evangelism of the apostles? How does this term challenge your view of being a “silent witness” for Christ?

“Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them” (Acts 4:1).

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Two other terms are used to describe the early preaching of Saul of Tarsus. Read Acts 9:22. Why was it necessary to “confound the Jews” in the process of evangelism? How would you go about “proving that Jesus is the Christ?”

“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:22).

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As Paul matured in his ministry, a pattern began to emerge in his evangelistic ministry. Read Acts 17:2-3. Note the three words Luke uses to describe Paul's approach to evangelism. How important is a logical presentation of the Gospel in evangelism? List a basic outline of how you would explain the Gospel to your friend.

"Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3).

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Paul Himself used the terms "declare" and "preached" to describe his own work of evangelism. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. What was the content of Paul's gospel? What difference did he believe this gospel would make in a person's life?

"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that Word which I preached to you-unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

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The descriptions of evangelism we have looked at to this point emphasize the process of communicating the Gospel. Other terms are used which emphasize the probable results of evangelism. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. What results did Paul anticipate in his evangelistic ministry? What changes do you need to make in your evangelism to experience similar results?

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

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The ministry of evangelism grows out of the Great Commission. Read Matthew 28:19-20. Evangelism is more than decision-making. It involves the process of disciple-making. List the things you think a person should be taught in this process of making disciples.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Paul used one more term to describe his evangelism which tends to focus on results. Read 2 Corinthians 5:11. How would you go about doing this in your witness to your unsaved friends?

“Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well-known to God, and I also trust are well-known in our consciences” (2 Corinthians 5:11).

Perhaps as you have worked through this Bible study, you have come to see evangelism as a much larger process than you had previously imagined. It is a process in which God wants each of us involved. Read 2 Timothy 4:5. What changes do you need to make in your present evangelistic ministry as you apply this verse to your life?

“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5).

As we conclude this Bible study, let’s take a few minutes to renew our commitment to the work of evangelism. Use the following prayer as a model for your own prayer of commitment.

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for providing the means whereby people can be saved. Thank you for entrusting people like me with the task of communicating the Gospel to others. I confess I have not been as faithful as I should have been in living up to that. Amen.

## Study 4     Discerning the Role of Prayer in Evangelism

The night he was saved, Reuben Archer Torrey was convinced he had come to Christ on his own without the involvement of any other person. He had been reading the Bible by himself when he suddenly realized he needed to be saved. He knelt beside his bed and asked Jesus Christ to forgive him and save him. There was no one else in his room that night.

Later, R. A. Torrey became associated with Dwight Moody, the leading evangelist of the nineteenth century. Torrey was also instrumental in bringing revival to many parts of the world in the early part of the twentieth century. He was instrumental in the formation of both Moody Bible Institute and Biola College and wrote several books.

In one of his books on prayer he told the story of his conversion. Writing about it years after the fact gave him a new perspective on his conversion. He had come to learn afterward of his mother's prayers for his salvation and the prayers of several Christian friends who had been concerned about him. Through years of evangelistic ministry, he had noticed a pattern between people praying and others coming to Christ. He concluded that he doubted if it were possible for anyone to come to Christ as Saviour unless someone else was praying for him or her.

If you are going to be effective in evangelism, it is important that you be a person of prayer and understand the role of prayer in evangelism. In this Bible study, you will consider several important principles of prayer and form our own personal prayer list of unsaved friends, relatives, associates and neighbors.

If the conversion of people is dependent upon the prayers of others, it is important to know who should pray. Read Proverbs 15:29. Who can or cannot pray effectively for the salvation of others?

“The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 15:29).

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Read James 5:16. What does this verse tell us about our responsibility to others? What kind of results should we anticipate when we pray? Who do you pray for on a regular basis?

“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

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There are several things that will hinder our prayers for others. Read Isaiah 59:1-2. What does this verse identify as hindrance to our prayers being answered? Is this a problem in your prayer life? What changes do you need to make to insure your prayers are effective?

“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

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Read Proverbs 28:9. What does this verse identify as hindrance to our prayers being answered? Is this a problem in your prayer life? What changes do you need to make to insure your prayers are effective?

“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).

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Read James 4:3. What does this verse identify as hindrance to our prayers being answered? Is this a problem in your prayer life? What changes do you need to make to insure your prayers are effective?

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on our pleasures” (James 4:3).

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Read Ezekiel 14:3. What does this verse identify as a hindrance to our prayers being answered? Is this a problem in your prayer life? What changes do you need to make to insure your prayers are effective?

“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?” (Ezekiel 14:3).

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Read Mark 11:25-26. What does this verse identify as hindrance to our prayers being answered? Is this a problem in your prayer life? What changes do you need to make to insure your prayers are effective?

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26).

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Read Proverbs 21:13. What does this verse identify as a hindrance to our prayers being answered? Is this a problem in your prayer life? What changes do you need to make to insure your prayers are effective?

“Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard” (Proverbs 21:13).

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Read 1 Peter 3:7. What does this verse identify as a hindrance to our prayers being answered? Is this a problem in your prayer life? What changes do you need to make to insure your prayers are effective?

“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

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Before we conclude this study, let’s work through the process of preparing a personal prayer list of individuals for whom you can pray. The focus of this prayer list will be unsaved persons in your personal sphere of influence. Let’s begin with your family. As you think of your extended family, list those who are related to you by blood and marriage who, to the best of your knowledge, do not have a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Next, let’s consider our associates. Our associates include those with whom we rub shoulders on a fairly regular basis. Your list might include people you associate with in a workplace or school setting, people you regularly meet through routine activities such as commuting, shopping, working out, etc., and people you know through mutual involvement in various community activities. List all those you know by name who, to the best of your knowledge, are not Christians.

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Now, let's look at our neighbourhood. As you consider those you know by name living in your immediate community, list each who, to the best of your knowledge, is not a Christian.

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Finally, let's not forget to include your friends. There are some people who may be important to you who really do not fit into one of the three groups already surveyed. As you consider these friends, list each one who, to the best of your knowledge, is not a Christian.

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As you have completed this survey, you have identified those God has placed in your sphere of influence. Research in the field of evangelism and church growth suggests you are the most likely person who will be effective in reaching these people for Christ. These are the people for whom you should pray. While you will want to pray for everyone on your list every week, you may want to focus your prayer on two or three specific individuals for whom you will pray daily until they are saved. Check these names on your list as your specific prayer focus. Then conclude this study with prayer for those in your personal sphere of influence who do not yet know Christ as Saviour. Be sure to mention by name the three people who are the specific focus of your evangelistic prayer.

### PRAYER

Lord, I want to be more effective in prayer. Show me any barriers that block the effectiveness of my prayer. Forgive me of all sin and help me to remove it. Teach me to pray and be an effective intercessor. Amen.
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### Study 5 Learning from the Samuel Fast

This week, we have taken a closer look at the Samuel Fast. Before we consider the next discipline of fasting, let's take time to review what you have learned this week to identify important lessons God has taught you through the Samuel Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you gained this week.

1. Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you need to continue observing the Samuel Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?
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2. As you completed the Bible study on the nature of revival, what did you learn about your own relationship with God? How would you evaluate the quality of that relationship? What steps are you taking to nurture a greater intimacy with God in your own life?

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3. As you studied various aspects of the ministry of evangelism, which aspects did you feel most comfortable with? Which did you find particularly challenging? What changes are you making in your evangelistic ministry to move closer to the biblical pattern of evangelism?

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4. As you considered the role of prayer in evangelism, how would you evaluate your present prayer life in this area? List the names of the three people for whom you are most concerned and for whom you will pray daily until they come to faith in Christ. When they receive Christ as Saviour, write the date of their conversion next to their name.

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5. What is the most significant lesson God has taught teaching you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the Samuel Fast?

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### PRAYER

Lord, I want revival in my life. Give me faith to remove the barriers that prohibit Your full work in my life. Pour out your spirit in my life and ministry. Show me what to do to get your full blessing in my life. Amen.

# Chapter Four

## The Elijah Fast

### for Emotional Problems

#### Study 1     Preparing to Fast the Elijah Fast

As you prepare to fast the Elijah Fast, complete the following checklist. During your fast, take time to review the Bible studies associated with this fast and read the chapter on the Elijah Fast in the book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Regal, 1996). As you fast, be sensitive to the lessons God may be trying to teach you about yourself and the problems which concern you most.

#### *CHECKLIST FOR THE ELIJAH FAST*

Aim:            The Elijah Fast is to break a personal habit.

Vow:            Lord, I am a creature of habits. Some are good, others are bad. I am fasting to break the bad habit of \_\_\_\_\_ and replace it with the good habit of \_\_\_\_\_. Help me acquire the disciplines need to accomplish this goal as I practice the discipline of the Elijah Fast.

Fast:            What I will withhold: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Begin:           Date and time I will start: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

End:            Date and time I will end: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Decision:       I am fasting to: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Basis:    My Bible promise: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Resources:     \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast for God's glory.*

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Signed

Date

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about the habit I wish to break: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about the habit I wish to acquire: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to take the following steps to change my habit: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Study 2      Learning How Bad Habits Are Formed**

He had been doing it for so long, Barry had to think back to determine why he had first started smoking. At first, he had smoked a few cigarettes with other kids in a vain attempt to act grown up. Later, he began smoking on a regular basis when out with his friends who also smoked. It just seemed to be the thing to do. He figured he could quit any time he wanted, and to him, it was no big deal. It seemed as if everyone he knew smoked.

He couldn't remember when it happened, but soon he was smoking alone. After meals, he would sit back and light up. At the time it seemed to help him relax. He hardly noticed as purchasing a package of cigarettes each week escalated to smoking a package each day. Finally, he became convinced that smoking was a habit he wanted to bring to an end in his life. But Barry found it difficult. He had not counted on it being so difficult. And each time he tried to quit smoking and failed, it seemed that much harder to believe he might be successful if he were to try again.

We are engaged in the process of forming habits every day of our life. People are creatures of habit. Some of those habits are good, such as expressing thanks when receiving something from others. Others are bad. There are five steps by which we form habits in our life. Let's look at each of these steps that caused a whole society to form bad habits that eventually destroyed their society.

First, when you change your thinking, you change your beliefs. Read Romans 1:18-23. How did the Romans change their thinking about God? How did that change of thinking show up in their personal belief system?

“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you.” (Proverbs 23:7).

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Second, when you change your beliefs, you change your expectations. Read Romans 1:24-25. How did the Romans change their belief system? How did that change impact their expectations in life?

“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18).

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Third, when you change your expectations, you change your attitudes. Read Romans 1:28. How did the change in their expectations impact the attitude of the Romans? What attitudes would you generally associate with a debased mind? Which of these attitudes are ones you struggle with?

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of His countenance” (Psalms 42:5).

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Fourth, when you change your attitudes, you change your actions. Read Romans 1:26-27. How did the bad attitudes of the Romans change their behavior? What kinds of behavior in your life can be traced to bad attitudes?

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).

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Finally, when you change your actions, you change your habits. Read Genesis 6:5. Where did the wickedness of the pre-flood race begin? How did the regular expression of that sin develop bad habits? What are some of the habits with which you struggle that may have been characteristic of the people of that day?

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

Most of us do not realize how significant our thought life is in the development of bad habits. Read Mark 7:20-23. Note the inventory of things which grow out of an evil thought life. Consider the things which tend to dominate your personal thought life. If these thoughts continue to develop into habits, what habits are you in the process of developing in your life? Are you comfortable with developing those kind of habits as part of your lifestyle?

“And He said, ‘What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.’” (Mark 7:20-23).

This lesson has looked at how bad habits are formed. We are constantly in the process of forming habits. Perhaps as you worked through this lesson, you have become concerned about bad habits with which you are struggling or which you are apparently developing in your life. Conclude this lesson by praying and asking God to help you break your bad habits and develop good habits.

### PRAYER

Lord, I am struggling with the bad habit of I realize this habit is the harvest of the seeds I have sown. Help me overcome this bad habit by dealing with its root cause. Help me recognize other bad habits I am in the process of forming and give me the grace to discipline myself to make changes in my life that will prevent these bad habits from developing. Amen.

### Study 3      **Learning How Good Habits Are Formed**

Susan was particularly impressed one Sunday morning after hearing her pastor preach on the importance of a daily time in Bible study and prayer. She had heard others talk about how much their “quiet time” meant to them and became convinced of the value of this practice. After the sermon, she determined to incorporate this discipline into her Christian life.

Saturday night she set her alarm fifteen minutes earlier than usual. When she awoke the next morning, she read the passage suggested in the devotional book she had picked up at church the previous day. After reading, she prayed briefly and began her usual morning routine. Each day she followed the same pattern.

Initially, she felt a sense of accomplishment at finally doing what she had wanted to do for so long. But several days into this new discipline, she found it hard to wake up. As she forced herself to read that morning, she had to confess she got very little out of the suggested passage. For next couple of weeks she continued to struggle to form this new habit and found herself occasionally missing a day or two. When she discussed this problem with a Christian friend, she was surprised to discover she too had experienced a similar struggle as she had begun developing the habit of a quiet time.

Her friend encouraged her to continue the good work she had begun and called periodically over the next month to check on her progress. Being accountable in this way provided her with the extra motivation she needed to continue developing the new discipline until it became a habit. Later, she used a similar process to develop other disciplines in the Christian life.

All of us have good habits we would like to develop, but like Susan we struggle. In your last Bible study you learned that there are five steps by which you form habits. Look at each of these steps once again to learn how you can form good habits.

Habits begin with the way we think. Read Colossians 3:16. From where do we draw the right thinking material to form good habits? Give a specific example of a verse you could use as the basis of forming a good habit you would like to develop.

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).

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When you change your thinking, you change your beliefs. Read Romans 10:17. From where do Christians draw their personal belief system? Using the verse you selected in the previous question, explain what changes you may anticipate in your beliefs if that verse becomes the focus of your thinking.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:1).

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Second, when you change your beliefs, you change your expectations. Read Proverbs 29:18. How does the absence of a belief system impact people? How does the presence of a

belief system impact people? How would your expectations change if you believed the contents of the verse you chose in question one?

“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18).

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A change in expectations results in a change in attitudes. Read Philippians 4:8. Note each of the eight qualities that should characterize our attitudes. Based on this list, what influences in your life should be encouraged in the process of forming good habits? Which influences in your life should be eliminated so as not to discourage the formation of good habits?

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

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A change in actions follows any change in attitudes. Read Luke 6:43-45. What is the root cause of good actions? If the eight qualities of Philippians 4:8 became the standard which characterized your personal thought life, what specific actions would you anticipate?

“For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:43-45).

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When you change your actions, you change your habits. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What is God’s ultimate objective in giving us the Scriptures? What are the steps by which this is accomplished?

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

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The process by which we form habits is the same whether it is a good habit or bad habit. The difference in the end product is the content at the beginning. What good habit would you like to develop in your life? List several verses that could form the foundation for the process by which good habits are formed. Then conclude this lesson with prayer asking God to help you apply the principles in this study to develop the good habit you desire.

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### PRAYER

Lord, I want good habits to glorify You and build strong character in my life. Help me to see destructive habits and deal with them. Help me to understand how to form good habits and build them into my life. I want strong biblical character as a positive testimony for Your glory and an effective witness to Christians and the unsaved. Amen.
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#### **Study 4     Developing a Habit-Busting Strategy**

Sally knew her driving habits were bad even before the accident, but the repair bill for the dented fender was large enough to motivate her to change her driving style. If she had not been travelling so fast she may have been able to stop sooner and avoid hitting the car that had stalled in the intersection. Therefore, her driving speed was the first thing she was going to change.

It was not easy, but she made a concentrated effort to drive at or a couple miles per hour below the posted speed limit. At first it seemed like the car was hardly moving at all and she had to constantly resist the temptation to step a little harder on the gas pedal. By setting the cruise control as soon as she got on the highway she found it a little easier to stick to the limit.

After a few weeks, driving slower seemed to come more naturally. The improved gas mileage and realization of how little time she had actually saved speeding around the neighborhood encouraged her to stick to her goal of becoming a safer driver. Soon other problems were tackled. Six months later, Sally was among the safest drivers in her community.

All of us have struggled with bad habits we want to replace with good habits. Sometimes our efforts to change have been successful. At other times we have failed to accomplish our goal. What we need is a habit-busting strategy that works when consistently applied. Habits are formed by repetition. The constant repetition of an attitude or action results in both good and bad habits. You can develop new good habits to replace the old bad habits you no longer want. Several steps are involved in breaking old habits and forming new habits.

The first step involves knowing and understanding your situation and condition in life. Read Romans 7:18. How did Paul describe his problem? How is your situation and condition similar and/or different from Paul's?

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Romans 7:18).

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The second step involves taking inventory of and evaluating both our strengths and weaknesses. Read Romans 7:19. What strengths could Paul build on? What weaknesses hindered him in breaking his bad habit? What strengths and weaknesses are affecting your habit?

“For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice” (Romans 7:19).

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The next step in breaking a habit involves visualizing what life would be like without that bad habit. Read Romans 6:14. How did Paul describe a clear mental image of a future without his bad habit? In your own words, write out your own vision of life after you break a bad habit in your life.

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

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Next, it is important to understand your position “in Christ.” Read Romans 8:2. How did Paul’s understanding of his position help him see breaking his bad habit as possible? Would a similar understanding of your position in Christ produce a similar effect in your life?

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

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Desire is another important step in breaking a bad habit. Read Romans 6:11. How did Paul create a desire to break his habit? What can you do to establish a similar desire in your life?

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:11).

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Most of us find our habits are bigger than we are. We need help to break a bad habit. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Where did Paul look for the strength and help he needed to break his habits? Where can you find help as you attempt to break your habit?

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

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When we are ready to break a bad habit, we need to make a conscious choice to do so. There is a power in making a decision. Once that decision is made, we must doggedly stick to that commitment until we accomplish what we set out to do. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:21. On the lines following the verse, write out your decision to break a bad habit. Be specific in expressing your commitment to this challenge.

“Test all things; hold fast to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

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Like everything else in the Christian life, breaking a bad habit is ultimately an expression of faith. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:24. Why did Paul believe he could overcome bad habits in his life? Write out one or two verses that you can claim as promises as you begin working on changing your bad habit.

“He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

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Just as it took time to form a bad habit, it will probably take time to break it. As you take the first steps in breaking a particular habit in your life, conclude this Bible study with prayer asking for God’s help as you rise to take on this challenge.

## **Study 5      Learning from the Elijah Fast**

This week, we have taken a closer look at the Elijah Fast. Before examining the next discipline of fasting, let’s take time to review what you have learned this week to identify important lessons God has taught you through the Elijah Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you gained this week.

1. Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you need to continue observing the Elijah Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?

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2. As you look at your life, what bad habits do you struggle with? What bad habits are you in the process of developing? What changes are you making in your life to correct this problem?

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3. As you worked through the Bible study on forming good habits, did you determine what habits you would like to develop in your life? What steps are you taking to begin developing these habits?

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4. As you worked through the habit-busting strategy in the previous Bible study, which habit did you choose to work on breaking? What steps are you taking to break your bad habit? To whom are you accountable to insure you complete the project you are undertaking?

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5. What is the most significant lesson God has taught you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the Elijah Fast?

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## PRAYER

Lord, help me break bad habits in my life and establish good habits for Your life. I confess my weakness and I need Your strength to form good character. Renew my life and help me live for you. Amen.
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# Chapter Five

## The Widow's Fast for Humanitarian Needs

### Study 1     Preparing to Fast the Widow's Fast

As you prepare to fast the Widow's Fast, complete the following checklist. During your fast, take time to review the Bible studies associated with this fast and read the chapter on the Widow's Fast in the book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Regal, 1996). As you fast, be sensitive to the lessons God may be trying to teach you about yourself and the problems which concern you most.

#### *CHECKLIST FOR THE WIDOW'S FAST*

Aim:            The Widow's Fast to meet humanitarian needs.

Vow:            Lord, You have caused me to hear the cry of the poor in \_\_\_\_\_  
and I am willing to yield to your leading in my life in this area.     I vow to fast  
one day per week for \_\_\_\_\_ weeks and pray for the hurting people of this  
region. I further commit myself to give the funds that would normally be spent on  
the meals; I will fast to You to help meet this urgent need. Grant me the grace to  
accomplish my desire and use this fast to show me how I should adjust my  
personal lifestyle to be more effective in serving you and others.

Fast:            What I will withhold: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Begin:           Date and time I will start: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

End:            Date and time I will end: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Decision:       I am fasting to: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Basis:    My Bible promise: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Resources:     \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast for God's glory.*

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Signed

Date

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about my lifestyle: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about the needs of others: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about what I can do to help meet the needs of others: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Study 2     Understanding My Social Responsibilities**

Paul and Debbie were already finding things tight and struggling to keep their heads above water when the last recession hit. Life would have been difficult if even one of them had lost their jobs but when both received notices that their jobs, were being eliminated within a month of each other, the roof caved in. The little they had managed to save would not last long. Prospects for a new job were dim.

A couple of nights after people in the church heard about the layoffs, one of the pastors arrived at Paul and Debbie's home. He explained that their friends at church had heard about their difficulty and wanted to help. He asked Paul to help him bring in some groceries he had in the trunk of the car. That night he also handed Debbie an envelope explaining several people had approached him wanting to help them make any urgent payments that needed to be made. After the pastor left, Paul and Debbie counted the money and wept quietly as they considered the kindness shown them by their Christian friends.

About a week later, Paul received a telephone call from one of the deacons in the church. The church board had met the night before and thought Paul might be able to help them with a problem. The church needed someone to clean the church building. The deacon explained the job would normally take about thirty hours per week and paid only slightly better than minimum wage. If Paul was interested, the deacon was authorized to offer him the job.

Churches, relief agencies, and individual Christians have been engaged in providing for people in times of need throughout the years. The Scriptures have much to say about our social responsibility toward others who are less fortunate. Read Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 11. What should your attitude be toward those who are poor? Can poverty be eliminated? How can it be managed well in a society?

“If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him, sufficient for his need, whatever he needs . . . For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land’” (Deuteronomy 15:7-8,11).

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Sociologists use the term “the working poor” to describe an emerging class of people in the west who are earning less than necessary to maintain a comfortable standard of living. Read Deuteronomy 24:14-15. How can employers help the working poor manage life better? How do some employers contribute to the problems encountered by the working poor?

“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, it be sin to you” (Deuteronomy 24:14-15).

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The poor have not been abandoned by God. Read Psalm 72:12-14. What is God’s relationship to the poor? How does He respond to their specific needs?

“For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight.” (Psalms 72:12-14).

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In light of God's concern for the poor, how should we pray for the poor. Read Psalm 82:3-4. What are some specific things you can pray for as you pray for people in need today?

“Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalms 82:3-4).

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Failure to care for those in need has its consequences. Read Proverbs 14:31. What does this verse tell us about the consequences of ignoring or aggravating the problems of the poor? How does your attitude toward people in need reflect what you really think about God? What would people think about your relationship with God in light of this verse?

“He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy” (Proverbs 14:31).

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Read Proverbs 17:5. What does this verse tell us about the consequences of ignoring or aggravating the problems of the poor? How does your attitude toward people in need reflect what you really think about God? What would people think about your relationship with God in light of this verse?

“He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 17:5).

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Read Proverbs 21:13. What does this verse tell you about the consequences of ignoring or aggravating the problems of the poor? How does God respond to you when you ignore the needs of others around you?

“Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.” (Proverbs 21:13).

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Read Proverbs 28:27. What does this verse tell you about the consequences of ignoring or aggravating the problems of the poor? Would you describe yourself as one who lacks or does not lack?

“He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses” (Proverbs 28:27).

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Read Proverbs 29:7. Notice the contrast between the righteous and wicked. What is the most evident indicator of character in this verse? In light of this verse, would those who know you best consider you righteous or wicked?

“The righteous considers the cause of the poor, but the wicked does not understand such knowledge” (Proverbs 29:7).

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Just as ignoring the poor has its consequences, so God blesses those who care for the poor. Read Proverbs 19:17. What promise can be claimed by those who have compassion on the poor?

“He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given” (Proverbs 19:17).

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Read Proverbs 22:9. What promise can be claimed by those who have compassion on the poor?

“He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor” (Proverbs 22:9).

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Read Psalm 41:1-3. What promises can be claimed by those who have compassion on the poor?

“Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.” (Psalms 41:1-3).

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As we have worked through this lesson, we have considered both positive and negative motivations for fulfilling our social responsibility. We are our brothers' keeper. As you conclude this Bible study, express your desire to help meet a specific humanitarian need to help people in need.

## PRAYER

Lord, make me sensitive to those who are poorer than I am in this world's goods. Help me to look at life through their eyes. Give me heart compassion for them and show me how I can help the poor. Amen.
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### Study 3     **Recognizing Genuine Needs around Me**

There was something about the way the man explained his story that confused the young pastor as he listened. A sick wife and hungry baby was enough to make him want to help in any way he could. When he heard about the rent due next week, he wondered if there was enough in the benevolent fund to cover the emergency. Still something just didn't sit right.

Uncertain with what to do, the pastor excused himself to make a few calls. None of his board members would be available to talk to for a few hours, so he decided to call a couple other pastors he had come to know since arriving at the church a few months earlier.

No sooner had he begun describing the situation he was facing when the voice at the other end began to laugh. "So they decided to hit you up too," the other pastor said. He explained the same man had just left his office with fifty dollars cash and a bag of groceries. A few more calls confirmed that he was the sixth pastor in the community to have been approached that day. As near as could be calculated, the days work had netted the needy man about five hundred dollars in cash and eight bags of groceries. By the time the pastor returned to the outer office, he was not as eager to help out as he had been fifteen minutes earlier.

The abuses practiced by others in the name of charity should not cause us to neglect the poor. Read Psalm 142:4. How does that statement make you feel? Have you ever felt like that? Do you know someone who may be feeling that alienated today?

"Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul" (Psalms 142:4).
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God is very much concerned for the poor and interested in their welfare. Read 1 Samuel 2:7-8. What is the basis of hope for the poor? How can the cycle of poverty be broken in a family?

“The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and He has set the world upon them” (1 Samuel 2:7-8).

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Sometimes, the problems people experience are the consequences of wrong behavior. Read Proverbs 10:4. What is the root cause of the poverty described in this verse? What is the best way to respond to this problem to achieve a long-term solution?

“He who has with a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Proverbs 10:4).

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Read Proverbs 13:8. What is the root cause of the poverty described in this verse? What is the best way to respond to this problem to achieve a long-term solution?

“The ransom of a man’s life is his riches, but the poor does not hear rebuke” (Proverbs 13:8).

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Read Proverbs 13:23. What is the root cause of the poverty described in this verse? What is the best way to respond to this problem to achieve a long-term solution?

“Much food is in the fallow ground of the poor, and for lack of justice there is waste” (Proverbs 13:23).

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Read Proverbs 21:17. What is the root cause of the poverty described in this verse? What is the best way to respond to this problem to achieve a long-term solution?

“He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.” (Proverbs 21:17).

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Read Proverbs 22:16. What is the root cause of the poverty described in this verse? What is the best way to respond to this problem to achieve a long-term solution?

“He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, and he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty” (Proverbs 22:16).

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Read Proverbs 28:8. What is the root cause of the poverty described in this verse? What is the best way to respond to this problem to achieve a long-term solution?

“One who increases his possessions by usury and extortion gathers it for him who will pity the poor” (Proverbs 28:8).

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It would be wrong to conclude that poverty is always the result of sin in one’s life. Sometimes poverty is to be chosen over making unacceptable ethical compromises. Read Proverbs 19:1, 22; 28:6. What values would you refuse to compromise even if it cost you a significant financial loss? How would you respond to someone in need because of a refusal to compromise one of their core values?

“Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool” (Proverbs 19:1).

“What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.” (Proverbs 19:22).

“Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich” (Proverbs 28:6).

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Attempting to discern the validity of one’s need can be difficult. Read Luke 4:18-19. How can the Holy Spirit assist you in making that judgment? What is your priority in helping those in need?

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19).

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As you conclude this study, ask God to give you spiritual eyes to discern the causes of poverty in those you meet and grace to minister appropriately to different kinds of needs.

## PRAYER

Lord, give me eyes to see those who are poor around me. Give me a spirit of gratitude for the things that I have, so I will want to share with those who are without. Show me what I can do materially to help the poor. Then show me what I can do to keep them from remaining poor. Amen.

### Study 4     **Responding in Wisdom to Meet Needs**

As the community changed over the years, the church was slow to adjust to the new reality. Most of the members continued to live in the suburbs and drive in on Sundays. They simply didn't realize how much and how quickly the church neighborhood had changed. They may have never come to realize it if the new pastor had not insisted on doing a community census as part of their ministry assessment and planning process.

Church members involved in the actual census were the first to discover the new realities in their community. Not only were most of the people living near the church of another race and ethnic background, most had no idea what the name of the church on the corner was or what services it offered. The only time the church was identified by neighbors was when they asked why the fence was chained up all week instead of letting children play in the unused parking lot.

The census revealed a significant number of single-parent families within a four block radius of the church. These families shared a growing concern for the safety of their children between the time school ended and the time mothers could get home from work. That gave the church an opportunity to get involved in their neighborhood once again.

It took a few months to get organized, but when the church began offering a three-hour after-school care program for children in the neighborhood, fifty-six families signed up for the service. The church hired students at an area Bible college to come and supervise a program that included a light after-school snack, recreational activities and an opportunity for neighborhood families to build relationships with church workers. It didn't happen all at once, but about six months after the program began, several neighborhood families had begun attending Sunday services. Within a year, three new Bible study groups had been formed for mothers of children reached through the after-school program.

Sometimes, in our haste to maintain the status quo, we become insensitive to needs around us and miss opportunities to express God's love to others. Read James 1:27. What is the essence of pure religion? How are you personally involved in the expression of your religion?

“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

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As Paul began preaching the Gospel to Gentiles, the character of the early church experienced a significant change. Read Galatians 2:9-10. How did Gentile Christians express their religious convictions in the context of people in need?

“And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do” (Galatians 2:9-10).

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Over the years, well-meaning people have practiced welfare strategies that may have hindered as many people as they helped. The Bible has several strategies for helping people in need. Read Leviticus 25:25. What role can families have in helping members of their extended family who have significant needs? How is this approach to helping people better than delegating the responsibility to a social agency?

“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold” (Leviticus 25:25).

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Another means by which the poor were helped in the Old Testament was through a once-in-a-lifetime debt forgiveness program called the Year of Jubilee. Read Leviticus 25:10, 54. How can forgiving a debt help people in need? When is forgiving a debt not an advisable means of helping people?

“And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family . . . And if he is not redeemed in these years, then he shall be released in the Year of Jubilee-he and his children with him” (Leviticus 25:10, 54).

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A third approach to helping people in need is found in Leviticus 19:10 and 23:22. How does this approach help those in need maintain a sense of responsibility while being helped? How can this principle be applied in a nonagricultural setting today?

“And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God ... When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the comers of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord our God” (Leviticus 19:10; 23:22).

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Read Acts 2:44-45 and 4:34-35 to discover a fourth way people were helped in the Scripture. What are some practical ways churches could implement this strategy today? How can your family be involved in sharing to help others in need?

“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need . . . Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45;4:34-35).

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The last way people helped people in need was with financial gifts. Read Acts 11:29-30. How does your family plan its giving to meet humanitarian needs? How can that approach be improved to be more effective in raising money?

“Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29-30).

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Let’s not forget our focus in helping people in need. Read Luke 7:22. What was Jesus’ ultimate concern as He met the physical needs of others? How is your involvement in a humanitarian project going to assist others in reaching people for Christ?

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard; that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the Gospel reached to them’” (Luke 7:22).

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In this study, you have looked at several creative ways to help people in need. As you review these biblical strategies, choose one you believe you and your family could begin doing within the next month. Conclude this study with prayer, asking God to help you be more sensitive to how to best help needy people in around you.

### PRAYER

Lord, make me more sensitive to the poor and needy in my neighborhood and church community. Show me ways to help them with financial and physical help. As I fast, use the money saved on food to help others. Expand the use of this money to make the maximum blessing to others. Amen.

### Study 5     **Learning from the Widow's Fast**

This week, you have taken a closer look at the Widow's Fast. Before moving to the next discipline of fasting, take time to review what you have learned this week to identify important lessons God has taught you through the Widow's Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you have gained this week.

1.     Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you need to continue observing the Widow's Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?

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2.     We are our brother's keeper. As you worked through the Bible study on our social responsibility, what benefits did you discover you had been missing because of your neglect of the poor? What negative consequences of neglecting the poor are you now working to reverse in your life?

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3.     As you completed the Bible study on recognizing genuine needs around us, did God speak to you about any specific need felt by people around you? What do you think He wants you do to about it? What steps are you taking to meet those needs?

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4. In our last Bible study, we looked at five biblical strategies for helping people in need. Which one was most appealing to you as a strategy in which you could become involved? What steps are you taking this week to begin helping people in that way?
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5. What is the most significant lesson God has taught you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the Widow's Fast?
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### PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the privilege of fasting for the needs of others. Use the money I have saved from not eating to bless the lives of others. Show me other ways I can help the poor with material and financial gifts. Continue to make me more sensitive to the needs of those who have less than I have of this world's goods. Amen.

**Chapter Six**  
**The St. Paul's Fast**  
**for Insight and Decision-Making**

**Study 1     Preparing to Fast the St. Paul's Fast**

As you prepare to fast the St. Paul's Fast, complete the following checklist. During your fast, take time to review the Bible studies associated with this fast and read the chapter on the St. Paul's Fast in the book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*, (Regal, 1996). As you fast, be sensitive to the lessons God may be trying to teach you about yourself and the problems which concern you most.

*CHECKLIST FOR THE ST. PAUL'S FAST*

Aim:            The St. Paul's fast is for wisdom and decision making relating to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Vow:            I will delight myself in the Lord so that my desire becomes what He wants in this decision (Ps. 37:4). I will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in my life so I can follow His principles in analyzing making a decision (Matt. 6:33). I will seek the Lord for His answer to the problem. I am fasting because I want to make the best decision and be in the center of His will (Rom. 12:1-2).

Fast:            What I will withhold \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Begin:           Date and time I will start \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

End:            Date and time I will end \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Decision:        I am fasting to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Basis:    My Bible promise \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Resources:     \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast for God's glory.*

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Signed

Date

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the issue which concerns me: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I discovered the following options to consider: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I believe the best action to take is: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Study 2     Learning How to Make Good Decisions**

The president of a successful bank had a reputation for his business skills. Under his leadership, the bank had grown from a small bank on the corner to being the largest chain of banks in the tri-state area. On the day of his retirement, he was approached by a young man beginning his career in banking.

“How did you become so successful in banking?” the younger man asked.

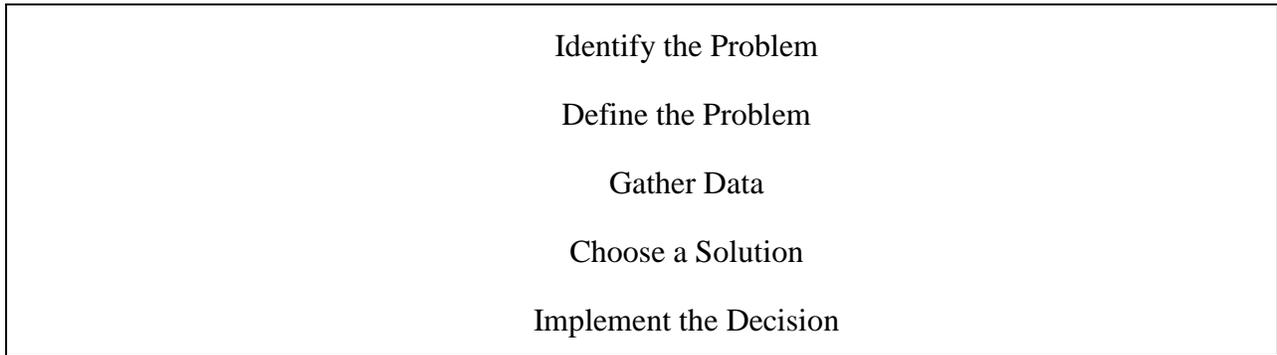
“Two words,” the retiring president responded. “Good decisions.”

After a moment's thought, the young man asked a second question. “How do you learn how to make good decisions?”

Once again the retiring president was brief in his response. “Two words,” he said. “Bad decisions.”

For many of us, making good decisions is the result of trial and error. We learn from our mistakes and try to do better the next time. Actually, those who consistently make good

decisions tend to apply a decision-making strategy to the process. This strategy has five steps as outlined in the following chart.



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As you fast to make a decision concerning the issue which concerns you most in your present situation, use this strategy as a guide in your decision making. If you consistently follow these steps, your decision has a better chance of being a good decision rather than a bad decision.

Read Proverbs 4:7. What is the difference between a good decision and a bad decision? How would you rate the probability factor of your making a good decision in light of this verse?

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).
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If wisdom is that important, it becomes imperative that we pursue it in any way we can. Read James 1:5. What does this verse teach us about the pursuit of wisdom? Have you consulted this source as you prepare to make a significant decision? What insights did you gain through that process?

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).
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Read 2 Timothy 3:15. What does this verse teach us about pursuit of wisdom? Have you consulted this source to make a significant decision? What insights did you gain through that process?

“And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

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Read Proverbs 19:14. What does this verse teach us about the pursuit of wisdom? Have you discussed your present situation with your spouse? What insights did he or she have that may have a bearing as you prepare to make a significant decision? What blind spots in your viewpoint has your spouse helped you identify?

“Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord” (Proverbs 19:14).

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Read Proverbs 14:15. What does this verse teach about the pursuit of wisdom? In your desire to resolve your present situation, are you rushing the process? Who would you consult to discuss the decision you are trying to make?

“The simple believes every word, but the prudent man considers well his steps” (Proverbs 14:15).

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## APPROACHING MY PROBLEM/DECISION

Before concluding this study, take the time to review the Scriptures, the questions that have been asked, and your response to each question. Are you on track to making a wise decision? Fill out the following to help make the correct decision.

## PRAYER

Lord, I am entering the steps of problem-solving. Give me wisdom to see my problem/decision as You see it. Give me wisdom to understand all the facts that relate to my problem and help me list all the possible solutions. Lead me to the correct decision/solution and help me to implement it in my life. Amen.

1. What is the cause of my problem/ decision? Write it out.
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2. Define the problem. Write it out.

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3. List all the facts that relate to the problem/decision.

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4. List all the possible solutions to your problem/decision. Make sure to list the non-plausible ones. In writing them out, they may help you think of the correct solution.

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5. Choose the solution. Write out what you will do.

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6. What will you do to implement the decision/solution to your problem?

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### PRAYER

<p>Lord, I have gone through the steps of problem solving and made a decision. I yield the results to You and ask You to change things I cannot change. Work through the decision I have made to solve my problem. I give You praise for being interested in my problem/decision and helping me solve it. Now, help me live through the results to Your glory. Amen.</p>
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### Study 3 Living by the Principles of Scripture

One day a kite was flying above the trees rising on currents of air under the skillful direction of a young child guiding it from the ground. All was going well until the kite noticed a bird flying even higher than it was.

“I too could be flying higher if it were not for this string holding me down to the ground,” the kite thought to himself. “It is just not fair that a bird should be allowed to fly freely but kites are held back by children.”

As the kite continued to think along these lines, it decided to take action. In a way that only kites can, it broke free of the string holding it down in anticipation of soaring above the clouds. But that did not happen. Moments later the kite soared to the ground and became tangled and broken in a tree.

Like the kite, many Christians resist things they believe are holding them back from the freedom they desire. Some even use the Scriptures to justify their actions claiming to be “free from the law” and “free in Christ” to do as they please. What they fail to realize is that God has established His laws as a means by which we can enjoy true liberty. Just as a kite cannot fly high without the tension of the string, so Christians will never rise higher in their Christian life if they cut themselves loose from the laws and principles God has established for living.

In this Bible study, we will examine several aspects of God’s law as it relates to our life. Read Matthew 5:17-18. What was Jesus’ attitude toward the law? Why do you think He valued it so highly? What benefits have you experienced in your own life by applying biblical principles to make decisions?

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18).

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Some Christians argue that Paul taught Christians should live completely unrestricted lives. Read Romans 8:1-2. How did Paul view the relationship between the freedom we have in Christ and laws or principles by which we should live? Are these two concepts contradictory or complementary?

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

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A number of specific laws are identified in Scripture as having universal application. Read Matthew 22:37-38. What is the “great commandment”? How can we express our obedience to this commandment today?

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment’” (Matthew 22:37-38).

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Obeying God's laws often results in specific benefits in the Christian life. Read Psalm 37:4. What benefits can be achieved by keeping the great commandment? List the personal desires you have that may be realized this way.

"Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Psalms 37:4).

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A second commandment like the first is also called "the royal law." Read James 2:8. List two or three specific ways you can express obedience to this law in a particular relationship in which you are currently involved.

"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well'" (James 2:8).

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Read Galatians 6:2 to discover a third law by which we should live. As you look at your prayer lists, which concerns of others are you praying for on a regular basis? Are you aware of a need another Christian has that you could assist with? How would you go about doing that?

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

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Sometimes we forget about the physical laws by which God governs His world. Read Genesis 8:22. As you examine your prayer list, are you asking God to violate one of His physical laws to answer your prayer? Are there specific physical laws which may guide you as you consider your present situation?

"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22).

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One of the laws God has set in place is the law of personality. Read Proverbs 16:1, 9. How does the law of personality (the heart) influence the process of making decisions? Does this mean God has abandoned us in our crisis? What is God's role in helping us make decisions?

“The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord . . . A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:1, 9).

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The fact that God created people with the ability to think rationally and make good decisions should not be viewed as a threat to God’s sovereignty in our life. Read Proverbs 21:1. Who is in ultimate control of human personality? How do you think God would respond if we continue to resist His influence in our life?

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1).

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Another law by which God governs our life is the law of liberty, the Scriptures. Read James 1:25; 2:12. What do these verses tell us about our response to this law? Which words in these verses best describe you in your response to the law of liberty? Which words would you like to describe you?

“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does . . . So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12).

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The law of liberty can be a very significant law in our life. Read Jeremiah 20:9. How did the law of liberty influence Jeremiah in a major decision in life? What is the law of liberty saying about the decision you now face?

“Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name.’ But His Word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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It is not enough that we get into the Scriptures. The Scriptures must also get into us. Read Luke 17:10. What should the normal Christian response to the law of liberty be? What specific principles of the Scripture does God want you to act on in your present situation?

“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:10).

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Take a few minutes to take inventory of your own attitude toward the principles by which God wants you to govern your life. Conclude with prayer, thanking God for caring enough to give you rules to live by and reaffirming your willingness to yield to these principles in your decision making.

### PRAYER

Lord, I thank You that You have not left me to live without Your planned purpose. Thank You for principles by which to live. Help me to live by Your principles, and accomplish Your purpose for my life. Give me greater understanding so I can know how to live and give me strength to follow Your will. Amen.

## Study 4 Discerning God’s Will for My Life

“What are you doing?” asked a friend.

A Bible school student had come to a department store with his friend to purchase two shirts. They found the store with the sale and made their way quickly to the display area. Then, instead of picking up the shirts, the student bowed his head and closed his eyes.

“I’m praying,” the student responded. “I want to know God’s will about which color shirt I should buy,” he explained.

“You don’t pray about shirts,” the friend replied. “You just buy them.”

Many people have different ideas about God’s will as it affects their life. Should we pray about the color of shirts we purchase? What about the purchase of a car or home? How do we discern God’s will about major life decisions such as the choice of a marriage partner, a new employment opportunity, or the naming of our children? Or does it make any difference to God what we do in these areas?

The Bible teaches God does have a perfect will that should be the basis of our decision making. Some Christians believe discerning God’s will is a difficult task most of us will never accomplish. But the Scriptures suggest several principles by which we can discern God’s will in the decisions we face. By applying these principles to our decision making process, we can make good decisions consistent with God’s will for our life.

Let’s take a closer look at several biblical principles that will help us discern God’s will for our life and in our decisions. Read John 7:17. What does this verse tell us about the relationship between our commitment to doing God’s will and our ability to discover it? Are you

ready to do what God wants done in the situation you are now facing? What sort of things would hinder you from doing God's will?

“If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on my own authority” (John 7:17).

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The second principle tells us one place to find God's will. Read Psalm 119:105. Have you consulted this source in your attempt to discern God's will? List several verses you think may apply to the decision you must make.

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105).

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

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As we pursue God's will, we need to remember that communication is a two way street. Read Luke 18:1 to discover a third step in discerning God's will. Have you taken this step? What specific things should you pray about related to the issue you are facing?

“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

“Saying, ‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done’” (Luke 22:42).

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Our motives are also important in the process of discerning God's will. Read Matthew 6:22-23. How would you evaluate the brightness of the light bulb in your lamp? What needs to be done to increase its brilliance in your life?

“The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness” (Matthew 6:22-23).

“Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17).

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Sometimes, our problem is with doing rather than discerning God's will. Read Romans 12:1-2. What do you know God wants you to do that you have not yet done? Is there some area in which you have been resisting God's known and revealed will? Would He be justified in refusing to continue revealing His will to you?

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

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God's will for each of us is different because each of us is different. Read 1 Corinthians 12:11, 29-31. As you consider your own life, what are your greatest strengths? What are the areas of weakness with which you struggle in your life? Does this information give you insight into the sort of response God wants you to have in doing His will?

"But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills . . . Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:11, 29-31).

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The peace of God is also an important element in the process of discerning God's will. Read Colossians 3:15. How do you feel about the decision you are about to make concerning the issue confronting you? If you are experiencing uncertainty, what do you think is the source of that uncertainty?

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

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Sometimes, the wise counsel of other mature Christians can be helpful in discerning God's will. Read Proverbs 11:14. What would you look for in someone from whom you would probably consult for wise counsel? Who do you know like that? List the names of two or three people you could talk to about the decision you need to make.

“Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14).

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In making your decision concerning God’s will in this matter, be aware of what is happening around you. Read Acts 16:6-7. How did God use circumstances to guide the Apostle Paul? What circumstances seem to be influencing your present decision? Do these circumstances suggest a probable course of action to be pursued or abandoned?

“Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them” (Acts 16:6-7).

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

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Be careful about being rushed into the wrong decision. Read Isaiah 40:31. What is likely to happen if you delayed a decision in the matter concerning you until you were certain as to what God wanted you to do? What would happen if you rashly made the wrong decision? How important is timing in the decision you must make?

“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

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Sometimes we complicate matters in our life by looking for short-term temporary solutions to long-term problems. Read Romans 8:29. What is God’s long-term goal in your life? What are the long-term consequences of the decision you are about to make? Are those consequences consistent with your vision of what God wants you to do?

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:39).

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Finally, be flexible in your decision making. Read Philippians 3:13-14. Have you made decisions in the past that need to be altered to better achieve you goal? Do you need to rescind to prevent them from hindering your future progress?

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

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As we conclude this Bible study, take a few minutes in prayer to thank God for making His will known to you and recommit yourself to do God’s will to the best of your ability.

### PRAYER

Lord, I thank You that there is a perfect will for my life. Help me to find it and know it. I yield myself constantly to You to do Your perfect will. Give me strength to do Your will. Amen.

### Study 5      **Learning from the St. Paul’s Fast**

This week, we have taken a closer look at the St. Paul’s Fast. Before moving to another discipline of fasting, let’s take time to review what you have learned this week to identify important lessons God has been taught you through the St. Paul’s Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you have gained this week.

1.      Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you need to continue observing the St. Paul’s Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?

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2.      The key to making good decisions is applying wisdom to the decision-making strategy. As you worked through that study, which sources of wisdom have you found most helpful in the past? Which new sources of wisdom are you beginning to tap into? What insights have you gained from these sources?

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3.      Being under grace does not exempt us from the eternal laws by which God governs this world. Which laws have a direct bearing on the decision facing you in your present situation? List the specific biblical principles you believe God wants you to apply in making your decision.

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4. As you worked through the Bible study on discerning God's will, what conclusions did you come to concerning the matter concerning you? Write out the decision you make concerning your response to that situation. Have you begun to implement that decision? What is the next step you need to take? When will you take that step?

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5. What is the most significant lesson God has taught you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the St. Paul's Fast?

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### PRAYER

Lord, I pray the words of the Lord Jesus, "not my will but Yours be done." Help me to see areas of my life where I am not living according to Your will. I yield them to You. Give me strength to live for your glory. Amen.
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*God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast for God's glory.*

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Signed

Date

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about my unhealthy lifestyle: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about my physical condition: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Study 2     Developing a Healthy Diet and Lifestyle**

When God described Himself as Jehovah Rapha, the title referred to two aspects of His approach to healing. There is a sense in which God will sometimes intervene and heal people who are sick with or without the aid of medicinal treatments. We will look at that aspect of this name in the next Bible study. The second aspect refers to his preventative approach to healing. Many Bible teachers believe this is the real emphasis in this context. Many books have been written to argue that following the guidelines incorporated into the law results in a healthier lifestyle in which many common diseases are absent.

Read Exodus 15:26. As you read this verse, what do you see as the relationship between good health and obeying God? How would you explain this process? Do you think this approach to living is viable today?

<p>“And said, ‘If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you’” (Exodus 15:26).</p>
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While there is no guarantee that sickness can be avoided, there are indications throughout the Scripture that good health is the desired norm for our lives. Read 3 John 2. How would you evaluate your health at this time? Do certain aspects of your lifestyle hinder your health? Are you doing things today that could have a long-term detrimental effect on your health?

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2).

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By applying the principles of Scripture to our life, we may be able to improve the quality of our health and life. Read Proverbs 3:7-8. How is this principle obvious among those who violate it? What kinds of serious health problems tend to be linked with lifestyles that are incompatible with Christian values?

“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to our bones” (Proverbs 3:7-8).

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Read Proverbs 4:20-23. It seems everybody had a grandmother who knew what to do for a bad cold. These verses describe the advice of a father to his son, advice that would encourage good health. What kind of health advice have you received from previous generations? What kind of unhealthy habits are being passed down from generation to generation in your family?

“My son, give attention to my words; incline your ears to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:20-23).

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Sometimes our health can be affected by the words others say to us. Read Proverbs 16:24. What kind of things have people said to you recently that have made you feel better? What kind of statements have you heard that have discouraged or disappointed you? How are people likely to feel who have heard you speaking in the last week?

“Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24).

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Read Acts 27:34. Good food is necessary for good health. As you consider your own diet, which foods are contributing most to your good health? Which foods affect your health negatively?

“Therefore, I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of and of you” (Acts 27:34).

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Just as a good diet is important to your health, so fasting can also be part of a healthy lifestyle. Read Isaiah 58:8. What are some health benefits associated with fasting you have noticed as you worked through the disciplines of fasting?

“Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be our rear guard” (Isaiah 58:8).

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Read Luke 8:23. Rest is also an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Even Jesus needed His rest. How are your sleeping habits? Are you waking rested each morning? Sleep disorders are sometimes a symptom of a more serious problem and should be discussed with your family doctor.

“But while they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy” (Luke 8:23).

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Finally, a healthy lifestyle also needs physical exercise. Read 1 Timothy 4:8. How do you maintain an active lifestyle? Are you getting enough exercise through your usual daily activities? If not, what steps are you taking to supplement your lifestyle with periods of increased activity?

“For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

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To a large extent, we are responsible for the quality of our health. Anyone can get sick, but those who work hard to stay physically fit and healthy tend to get sick less often than the rest of us. Also, when they do get sick, often they get better much faster. As you consider your present lifestyle, what changes need to be made for your health's sake? After listing several on the lines following, choose one you will work on implementing this month. Then ask God to help you take better care of His temple, your body.

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## PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the body You have given me with all its strengths and abilities. Be glorified in my body by life and death. Keep me as healthy as possible and as free of disease as possible. I will take care of my body and use it to glorify You. I will eat properly, exercise adequately, and rest it according to the needed prescription. Amen.

### Study 3 Understanding How God Heals the Sick

The parents of a young child felt like their world had just fallen apart when the doctor told them the news. Their two-year-old daughter had a rare blood disorder for which there was no known cure. Actually, there had been very little research done on that disease and there was little hope for any miracle drug being developed to cure the condition. At best the doctor could only guess, but he doubted the child would live out a full year.

Unsure of what to do, the young parents turned to their Christian friends for help. They asked their friends to pray but were not really sure what to pray for. Somehow they didn't think they were worthy enough to ask that the child be healed, but deep down inside, that is what they really wanted. If there was nothing the doctor could do, maybe it was time for God to intervene. The church did pray, and God did intervene. When the child returned to the doctor's office a month later for further tests, the test results puzzled the doctor. There was no trace of the disease in the little girl's blood. He looked back over the previous test results thinking he had made a mistake, but no mistake had been made. The disease had disappeared. Subsequent tests confirmed the conclusion. The little girl's body was free of the disease that had threatened her life. While this story had a happy ending, others do not. Some children die even though Christians pray. We will look at how God heals.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:8-9. Although Paul had prayed for others who were healed, his prayers for his own healing were apparently turned down. Why did God choose not to heal Paul? What was Paul's response to his unanswered prayer? Why did he respond in such a way?

“Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

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Although some people are not healed, others are. Several steps should be applied when you seek healing. Read Romans 6:13. How important is yielding to God and His will when you are praying for healing? What if your will and God's will are different?

“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:13).

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James outlines a pattern of ministry which was followed in the early church by those who sought healing. Read James 5:14. “Elders” is one of the terms used to describe pastors in the early church. Who should you contact if you want to be healed? How can they be used of God in the healing process?

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14).

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Perhaps one of the reasons church leaders were called in to pray for healing was that they could also hold their church members accountable in this process. Read James 5:16. Some, though not all, sickness is the result of sin in a person's life. How is that sin to be dealt with as part of the healing process? What is the likelihood of a person being healed who refuses to deal with sin in his or her life?

“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

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Read James 5:15. The prayer of faith will be examined further in the next Bible study. When the elders of the church pray for the sick, how are the sick healed? What is the source of that healing? Who should be given credit for the healing?

“And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:15).

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Although the Bible teaches the possibility of healing by God without the use of medicine, that does not mean Christians should not take prescribed medicinal treatments. Some Bible teachers believe the anointing with oil refers to a common medicinal treatment of that day. Read 1 Timothy 5:1. What medicinal treatment did Paul prescribe to Timothy? What does that advice tell you about Paul's attitude toward medicinal treatments? What should be your response to "healers" who oppose consulting doctors for medical problems?

"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23).

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Jesus often gave an unusual instruction to people he healed. Read Mark 1:44. Under the law, one of the functions of the priest was similar to that of the medical health officer in a community today. Why did Jesus insist on people confirming their healing with the priest? How would this principle be applied today? What is the danger of "testifying" to a healing before getting it confirmed by a doctor?

"And he said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them'" (Mark 1:44).

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Are you struggling with a health problem for which you want prayer for healing? If so, review the steps outlined in this Bible study and begin the process. That process begins with yielding our will in all things to the will of God. That is a good place to conclude this study even if you are not sick.

1. Have you called for church leaders?  
 Yes     No
  
2. Have church leaders prayed over you?  
 Yes     No
  
3. Have you been anointed with oil?  
 Yes     No
  
4. Have you dealt spiritually (confessed) with sin?

\_\_\_\_\_Yes      \_\_\_\_\_No

5. Have you asked the church body to pray continually for you?

\_\_\_\_\_Yes      \_\_\_\_\_No

6. Have you fasted the Daniel fast for healing?

\_\_\_\_\_Yes      \_\_\_\_\_No

7. Have you asked God to give you faith to pray for healing?

\_\_\_\_\_Yes      \_\_\_\_\_No

## PRAYER

Lord, I thank You for being interested in my health and giving me principles by which to enjoy good health. Give me wisdom and strength to follow your principles. Keep me from accident, disease and illness. Be glorified in my body. Amen.

### Study 4      **Praying the Prayer of Faith**

It is strange to see one man taking on over four hundred others under any circumstances, but the circumstances of this day made it even stranger still. Forty-two months earlier, Elijah had stood before King Ahab to announce the land would experience a drought until he prayed for rain. Now the same prophet was standing on a parched hill taking on the prophets who found favor with that wicked king.

“Let the god who answers by fire be God,” Elijah had ruled. The prophets of Baal had no problem with those terms. After all, Baal was the storm god and of all the gods the one most likely to answer with the required fire. But after a day of dancing, shouting and ritual cuttings, there was still no fire. Now it was Elijah’s turn.

In an unusual move, the prophet had asked that his altar be soaked. Four times men had poured water over the wood, sacrifice and stones. It now stood in the middle of a muddy puddle. Calmly, the prophet prayed. He asked God to confirm that He was God and that Elijah was acting on his behalf. Then suddenly, the sacrifice was engulfed in flame. The vast crowd that had come to see the spectacle fell on their faces crying out, “The Lord, He is God.”

The events that day and evening on Mount Carmel stand as one of those unique times when God intervened in a rather public way. Although fire rarely falls from heaven, what really happened on Carmel has been repeated many times. People pray the prayer of faith and God answers as they knew He would.

Jesus taught His disciples about the prayer of faith when they expressed astonishment that God had answered one of His prayers. Read Mark 11:22. A more literal translation of Jesus

statement is, “Have the faith of God.” What does it mean to have God’s faith concerning a matter? Is that even possible today?

“So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have God’s Faith’” (Mark 11:22, ELT).

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Charles Finney suggested there were five steps to getting God’s faith concerning a matter. The first involved finding evidence God would act in a certain way. Read 2 Corinthians 1:20. What biblical promises are your three most pressing prayer requests based on?

1. Find evidence that God will do a certain thing.
2. Hold on to the desire you have.
3. Entirely consecrate your life to God.
4. Persevere in prayer.
5. Walk With God every day.

The first step to get faith from God is to find evidence God would act in a certain way. Read 2 Corinthians 1:20. What biblical promises are your most pressing prayer requests based on?

“For the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

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Step two involved holding on to the desires you have. Read 1 Timothy 4:15. How can we avoid the tendency to be impulsive in making our requests to God rather than waiting on God to seek His mind concerning the things we pray about?

“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Timothy 4:15).

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Finney claimed entire consecration to God was important for those seeking His faith on a matter. Read Romans 12:1-2. What areas of your life are completely yielded to God and His will? What areas are you holding back in reserve? What areas have you yielded to God on only a probationary basis, intending to take them back if things don’t work out?

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

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Perseverance in prayer was the fourth step in Finney’s formula. Read Romans 15:30. What are some of the areas in which you are currently persevering in prayer? What areas should you begin to persevere in? Who is praying with you about these matters?

“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me” (Romans 15:30).

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

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The final step to gaining God’s faith involved walking with God every day. Read Psalm 37:4. How does making the Lord our delight help us recognize what God wants to do? To what extent do you believe God would indicate His desires to you under your present circumstances?

“Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).

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The next step in praying the prayer of faith involves expressing what you are trusting God for. Read Mark 11:23. Note the three times Jesus uses the word “says.” What are you currently trusting God for? Who have you shared this with?

“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says” (Mark 11:23).

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When praying the prayer of faith, don’t let doubt shake your confidence. Read Mark 11:24. What is the relationship between faith and receiving an answer to the prayer of faith?

## Study 5      Learning from the Daniel Fast

This week, you have taken a closer look at the Daniel Fast. Before moving to the next discipline of fasting, take time to review what you have learned this week to identify important lessons God has taught you through the Daniel Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you have gained this week.

1.      Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you need to continue observing the Daniel Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?

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2.      Many of us struggle with a lifestyle which is detrimental to our long-term health. What things need to be changed to make our lifestyle healthier? Which of these changes will be made in the next month? Which will be made in the next week?

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3.      As you completed the study on how God heals, did you have a medical condition you wanted healed? How is God likely to heal your condition? What steps are you taking to secure your healing?

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4.      As you completed the study on the prayer of faith, was there something specific you felt God wanted you to pray for? How are you certain you are praying for the thing God wants to do? To whom are you placing yourself accountable in this process?

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5.      What is the most significant lesson God has taught you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the Daniel Fast?

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## PRAYER

Lord, teach me to trust you more and to doubt You less. Show me the causes for my unbelief and help me learn the biblical lessons that will strengthen my prayer life. Give me faith to “move mountains” and help me to obey you completely. Amen.

**Chapter Eight**  
**The John the Baptist Fast**  
**for an Influential Testimony**

**Study 1     Preparing to Fast the John the Baptist Fast**

As you prepare to fast the John the Baptist Fast, complete the following checklist. During your fast, take time to review the Bible studies associated with this fast and read the chapter on the John the Baptist Fast in the book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Regal, 1996). As you fast, be sensitive to the lessons God may be trying to teach you about yourself and the problems which concern you most.

*CHECKLIST FOR THE JOHN THE BAPTIST FAST*

Aim:            The John the Baptist Fast for testimony and influence.

Vow:            I will be free of alcohol, cigarettes, drugs and any influence that destroys my testimony because I want Christ to be magnified in my body (Phil. 1:20-21). I will be sexually pure for my life-partner because my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). I will keep my body under subjection so my life will communicate Christ to others (1 Cor. 9:27).

Fast:            What I will withhold \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Begin:          Date and time I will start \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

End:            Date and time I will end \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Decision:      I am fasting to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Basis:   My Bible promise \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Resources:    \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast for God's glory.*

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Signed

Date

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following things may be impacting my testimony negatively: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to affirm the following commitments to significant others in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Study 2     Recognizing the Value of a Good Reputation**

A young boy was left in the mountain to keep a herd of goats while the men went down the hill to work. He was instructed to watch the sheep and be on the lookout for wolves. If he saw a wolf, he was told to shout "wolf" as loud as he could and the men would come to help.

Shortly after the men left, the boy wondered if they would really come if he were in trouble. He decided to find out. Although there was no danger, he cried out "wolf" as loud as he could. The men came racing up the hill with their rifles to shoot the wolf. As they arrived out of breath looking for the wolf, they looked so funny the boy laughed. He explained he wanted to be sure they would come if there was a problem so he had cried "wolf" even though he had not seen one.

The men returned to their work in the valley and the boy continued to watch the sheep. Twice more he cried out when there was no wolf to be seen and each time the men came racing up the hill. Despite the warnings of the men not to do it again, he enjoyed the spectacle.

Then a pack of wolves arrived and began killing goats and eating them. In desperation, the boy cried out as he had previously. But this time the men did not come. They determined not to be fooled again by the boy who had proven himself to be a liar. The boy continued shouting as the wolves finished killing the herd. Then the wolves turned on the boy and killed him.

Although we cannot be certain of the historical accuracy of that story, it is one parents have used for generations to encourage their children to guard their reputation. Everybody understands the need to be reputable in their dealings with others (important for Christians).

At the heart of the Christian life is the issue of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). For many people, faith is an attitude we have toward God which has little or no impact on the way they live. The Scriptures have a different view of faith. Read James 2:26. How does faith impact the way you live?

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

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Although faith is important in our relationship to God, people are incapable of discerning our inner attitudes toward God. Read Proverbs 20:11. How do people around you make decisions about the reality of your faith? What conclusions do you think people have formed about you in the past month?

“Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right” (Proverbs 20:11).

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God never intended Christians to separate faith from the rest of their life. Rather, faith serves as the foundation upon which the Christian life is built. Read 2 Peter 1:5-7. Using this list as a guideline, evaluate your progress at developing these good habits.

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2 Peter 1:5-7).

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The character described in these verses is not only important to God, it is beneficial in our lives. Read 2 Peter 1:8-9. Based on these verses, how do you think God would describe your life? How would you like Him to describe you?

“For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:8-9).

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Read Proverbs 22:1. Based on this verse, how is the net worth of your reputation? What value would you like to be able to place on your reputation? What needs to be done to raise the value of your reputation?

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold” (Proverbs 22:1).

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Read Matthew 7:15-20. How can a Christian discern between a true and false teacher? If you applied this standard to your own life, what would you conclude about yourself? Are you comfortable with this conclusion?

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:15-20).

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Our reputation is the foundation of our ministry. Without a good reputation, we really do not have a ministry as Christians. As you conclude this study, take a few more minutes to ask yourself the question, “What do people really think about me?”

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Then ask, “What would I like people to think about me?”

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It takes time to build a good reputation so it is best to start work on it right away. As you pray today, ask God to help you take steps toward building the kind of reputation that will extend your influence and make you more effective in ministry.

## PRAYER

Lord, I want to be a great witness so others will praise You and serve You. Forgive me where I have failed You. Help me to be good testimony to the unsaved so they may come to salvation and help me to be a good testimony to Christians so they will worship You. Amen.

### Study 3 Remaining Faithful in the Face of Opposition

Thomas Edison, the man who invented the incandescent light bulb, was not successful in his first attempt. In fact, he was not successful in his first 780 attempts. When asked why he didn't quit after 780 failures, Edison replied, "I have not failed 780 times. Rather, I have discovered 780 things that will not work in an incandescent light bulb." Eventually his faithfulness paid off. Edison became known as one of America's greatest inventors.

Solomon lamented, "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?" (Prov. 20:6). The wise king understood talk was cheap. People can say many things, but comparatively few follow through with their actions. In this study, we will examine some of what the Bible teaches about faithfulness in the face of opposition.

Let's begin with 1 Corinthians 4:2. How are stewards evaluated? How does your stewardship to God measure up to this standard?

"Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2).

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The real test of faithfulness comes when we face opposition to the task in which we are engaged. Read Matthew 5:10-12. How did Jesus motivate His disciples to be faithful in the face of opposition? Which of these rewards for faithfulness are most appealing to you?

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).

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The early church experienced intense persecution in many communities. Read Revelation 2:10. How would you have felt as a member of the church that first received that appeal? Why do you think you would or would not have earned a crown of life?

"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

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Read 2 Timothy 2:2. How important are faithful people to the ongoing ministry of the church from generation to generation? Are you the kind of person who can be trusted to carry the message of the Gospel to the next generation?

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

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Faithfulness is not without its personal benefits. Read Psalm 31:23. What unique relationship do the faithful have with the Lord? In what ways is God’s preservation evident in your life?

“Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints! For the Lord preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person” (Psalms 31:23).

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If faithfulness is important to God, it should be important to us also. Read Proverbs 28:20. What are the marks of a faithful person in this verse? Are these marks evident in your life? How would your life be different if it possessed these marks?

“A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 28:20).

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Read Proverbs 11:13. What are the marks of a faithful person in this verse? Are these marks evident in your life? How would your life be different if it possessed these marks?

“A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Proverbs 11:13).

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Read Proverbs 13:17. What are the marks of a faithful person in this verse? Are these marks evident in your life? How would your life be different if it possessed these marks?

“A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a faithful ambassador brings health” (Proverbs 13:17).

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Read Proverbs 14:5. What are the marks of a faithful person in this verse? Are these marks evident in your life? How would your life be different if it possessed these marks?

“A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will lie” (Proverbs 14:5).

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Read Proverbs 25:13. What are the marks of a faithful person in this verse? Are these marks evident in your life? How would your life be different if it possessed these marks?

“Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters” (Proverbs 25:13).

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Read Luke 16:10. What are the marks of a faithful person in this verse? Are these marks evident in your life? How would your life be different if it possessed these marks?

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10).

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Faithfulness is most often used to describe God in Scripture. When we are faithful, we are imitating the character of God. How much of that character do people see in your life these days? As you conclude this Bible study, ask God to make you faithful to the tasks and relationships to which He has called you.

## PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the privilege of being Your servant. Use my testimony for Your glory. Forgive me when I have failed You or sinned against You. Help me be a faithful witness to You. Show me weaknesses and help me strengthen every area of my life. Use my testimony for Your glory. Amen.

## Study 4    **Overcoming Habits that Hinder My Testimony**

Long before the world became aware of the famine in Ethiopia, evangelical Christian missions were conducting significant relief efforts as part of their evangelistic outreach. One missionary saw this as an opportunity to extend his mission's influence in a North African country and recruit new missionaries for work in Africa. He travelled throughout North America for several months urging college students to invest a summer in famine relief in Africa. He knew many who would come for the summer would consider returning as career missionaries.

After several months of effort, the successful missionary returned to Africa with over a hundred college students from across North America. When they arrived at the relief center, he knew the students would be tired from their trip. He urged them to rest that day and they would begin working the next day.

Because of the haste with which this project was undertaken, time had not been invested to adequately prepare these students for the culture in which they would be living for several months. Several college girls quickly learned an important lesson in cultural adaptation. They changed into their swimming suits intending to soak up the rays of the Sahara sun. When the Moslem men of the village saw the girls, they were offended by what was perceived as an open display of immorality. Moslem women in that region did not even uncover their face. An act that would have been acceptable at a youth meeting in their North American churches hindered their ministry in North Africa throughout the summer.

Many Christians struggle with habits that hinder their testimony. The habits themselves may not be evil in the mind of the Christian or in another cultural setting, but in certain situations they can be harmful. In this Bible study, we will look at the specific problem of drinking alcohol. This may or may not be a habit that hinders your testimony, but the principles we apply to this problem will help you as you apply them to other habits you may struggle with.

There are many reasons why Christians tend to discourage the practice of drinking alcoholic beverages. Read Ephesians 5:18. What is God's attitude toward the consumption of alcohol? What activity would Christians be better to engage in?

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit”  
(Ephesians 5:18).

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Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. What does the listing of “drunkards” on this list tell us about God's attitude toward drinking? Where do those in bondage to alcohol turn to find hope? How is that hope realized in one's life?

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

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Many Christians oppose drinking because of its harmful effects on the body. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. To whom does the Christian’s body belong? How do we glorify God in our body? Are you struggling with a habit that is detrimental to your health?

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

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Alcohol tends to remove people’s inhibitions about doing things they might otherwise avoid. Perhaps that is why alcohol is a factor in so many crimes and traffic accidents. In contrast, Christian maturity is marked by self-control. Read Galatians 5:22-23. How does the use of alcohol hinder the development of spiritual fruit in our life? Are you struggling with habits that hinder your spiritual growth in similar ways?

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

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Another reason Christians avoid the consumption of alcohol is because it is contrary to the example of Christ. Read 1 Peter 2:21. Jesus is never portrayed in Scripture as getting drunk or consuming alcoholic wine. What about the habit with which you currently struggle? Would Jesus engage in that activity? If so, what restraints would He place on Himself to insure the habit did not hinder His testimony?

“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

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A final concern of Christians who oppose drinking alcoholic beverages relates to its addictive nature. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12. What was Paul's attitude toward activities which tended to be addictive? Do you struggle with a habit that has become addictive? Even though the habit may not be wrong, it may also not be helpful. If you restricted your involvement to things that were helpful to your testimony, what would have to be removed from your present lifestyle?

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

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Although this Bible study has focused on the problem of drinking alcoholic beverages, the principles discussed reach beyond that situation. As you consider the things in your life that hinder your testimony, apply these principles to those situations. Then ask God to help you deal with those problems in your life as you seek to extend your ministry by improving your reputation.

### PRAYER

Lord, I will serve You through my body and I want You to be glorified in it. I will be free from the domination of alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. I will be sexually pure for my life-partner because my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. I will exercise self-control for Your glory. Amen.

## Study 5     Learning from the John the Baptist Fast

This week, you have taken a closer look at the John the Baptist Fast. Before moving on to your final discipline of fasting, let's take time to review what you have learned this week to identify important lessons God has taught you through the John the Baptist Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you have gained this week.

1.     Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you need to continue observing the John the Baptist Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?

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2.     As you considered the importance of a good reputation, how did your own reputation stand up? What do people think of you? What do you want people to think about you? What are you doing to improve your reputation?

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3. Faithfulness is an important part of establishing a good reputation. In light of what you learned about faithfulness, how would you evaluate yourself in this area? In what areas are you most likely to be faithful? When are you likely to slip in this area?

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4. What hinders you in your desire to improve your reputation? What steps are you taking to remove those hindrances from your personal lifestyle? Where do you need help to accomplish this goal? Where will you turn for that help?

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5. What is the most significant lesson God has taught you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the John the Baptist Fast?

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### PRAYER

<p>Lord, I want to be a good testimony for You and my church. Forgive me where I have failed You. Help me to overcome my weakness and be a good witness for the Kingdom. Help me live a pure life in all good conscience before You. Use my reputation for Your glory, the conversion of the unsaved, and the edification of other Christians. Amen.</p>
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Signed

Date

During my fast, I learned the following about myself: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about God and His protection in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about Satan and his activity in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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During my fast, I learned the following about evil spirits and their activity in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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In light of my fast, I need to make the following changes in my life: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Study 2     Recognizing the Work of Satan in the World**

When a Sunday school teacher was asked for a good book on angels from the church library, he thought the request was a little unusual. The lady who asked attended services irregularly and used the library even less. The wise teacher took a little extra time to discuss the matter with her.

As they talked, the lady told the teacher about a new game she had been introduced to in which people communicated with real angels. As the lady explained her experience playing the game a few nights earlier, the teacher realized she was being lured into an occult game that could bring her into spiritual bondage. He explained briefly his concern that Satan may be appearing as “an angel of light” and that playing the game could have serious consequences in their family. He asked if it would be possible for him to come by with the pastor Tuesday evening to talk with her further about the game.

That Tuesday evening, she and her husband met with the pastor and Sunday school teacher. As the pastor shared what the Bible taught about Satan and his work in the world, the couple came to realize the spiritual danger they had exposed themselves to. Before the pastor left that evening, they prayed together and recommitted themselves to God. The next Sunday morning they were present for both Sunday school and the worship service. It was the first of many changes that would take place over the next few months as they got serious about their relationship with Christ. From the very beginning, Satan has been in conflict with God. Read

Isaiah 14:12-14. This passage describes the fall of Satan from heaven. What were Satan's personal goals and ambitions before being cast out from heaven? How do they compare to your personal goals and ambitions in life?

“How are you fallen from the heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

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Read Matthew 13:38-39. All of us are involved daily in sowing a harvest. How would you evaluate the seeds you have sown in the past month? Based on this verse, whose son do you most resemble? What needs to be done in your life to become more apparently a son of the kingdom?

“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way . . . The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.’ The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one” (Matthew 13:24-25, 38-39).

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Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. How is Satan described in this verse as hindering the work of evangelism? What can be done to minimize Satan's effectiveness in this area of his work?

“But even our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

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Read Luke 8:12 for another description of Satan at work. How does Satan hinder people from coming to Christ in this verse? What can be done to minimize Satan's effectiveness in this aspect of his work?

“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it—Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:5, 12).

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How is Satan described in 1 Peter 5:8? How does that make you feel? What should be your response to that danger?

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

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Read John 10:10. How is Satan like a thief? Has he been operating in this way in your life or that of someone close to you? Where can one replace the things Satan has stolen?

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

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How is Satan described in Revelation 12:10? What are the things he could accuse you of in the past week? Have you dealt with those sins by confessing them to Christ? If so, how does it make you feel to know you have an Advocate with the Father?

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down’” (Revelation 12:10).

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Satan’s strategy in opposing Christians has not changed much since the beginning of time. Read 1 John 2:15-16. In what areas of our life does Satan appeal in temptation? Which of these areas do you find hardest to deal with personally?

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16).

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Understanding the work of Satan around us does not mean we must retreat. Read 1 John 4:4. How can the Christian live confidently in spite of opposition from Satan? How does that make you feel about the prospects of spiritual warfare?

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

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God’s promise of victory is more than mere survival. Read 2 Corinthians 2:14. How would you describe the character of our victory in Christ? How do you anticipate your life being changed into a sweeter fragrance as you emerge victorious from this present spiritual conflict?

“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

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Much of this Bible study has been necessarily negative as you have considered the work of Satan, but perhaps Paul’s response in the last verse is a good way to conclude. Before leaving this study, thank God for the insights you have gained and the spiritual victory you anticipate as you work through this process.

### PRAYER

Lord, I thank You that You have provided a “Way of escape” when I am tempted to sin, and You have promised victory in this life. Forgive me where I’ve been defeated. Help me to understand Satan’s attack on me and help me to successfully defeat him. Thank You for victory. Deliver me from the Evil One. Amen.

### Study 3     **Preparing for Spiritual Warfare**

In the early days of World War 2, one country after another quickly fell under the attack of Germany. Before long, Britain stood alone against the Nazi war machine. Years of poor military planning had left the nation sadly lacking in weapons to defend herself. At the time, America was reluctant to get involved in a war so far from the American soil.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill realized he was lacking the weapons needed to defend the island against Nazi aggression. He also understood the reluctance of the American

Congress to commit to involvement in the war effort. He began an intensive effort to transform English factories to make planes, ships, and weapons needed for the war effort. To get through the short-term crisis the nation faced, he appealed directly to the American president. "Give us the tools and we will do the job," he promised.

The problem Churchill faced at the beginning of that war was the result of years of failing to prepare for conflict. Christians struggle in spiritual conflict because of their failure to prepare for battle. Read Ephesians 6:11-13. Why is preparing for spiritual conflict important? What is the key to being prepared for battle?

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:11-13).

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Read Ephesians 6:14. What are the first two parts of the armor needed for spiritual conflict? How do you use these pieces of armor in battle?

"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness" (Ephesians 6:14).

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Read John 17:17. How can we "gird our waist with truth?" What particular truth would help you in the spiritual conflict in which you are presently engaged?

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

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Read 1 Corinthians 1:30-31. Where do we find a "breastplate of righteousness"? What aspects of Christ's righteous life could help you secure victory in your present conflict?

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-that as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

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Read Ephesians 6:15 and identify the next piece of armor. How is this piece of armor used in battle?

“And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15).

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Read Ephesians 6:16. How is this next piece of armor used in battle? What kind of “fiery darts” has the wicked one been using in your battle recently?

“Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Ephesians 6:16).

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Read James 1:6-8. How would you contrast faith and doubt? What causes you to doubt the promises of God? What are the consequences of being double-minded in this area of your Christian life?

“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

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Read Ephesians 6:17. Describe how these next two parts of the Christian’s armor are used in spiritual conflict.

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

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Read 2 Corinthians 10:5. How important is our thought life in spiritual conflict? What aspects of your thought life give you the greatest personal concern? How are you working to bring those thoughts “into captivity to the obedience of Christ?”

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

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Read Hebrews 4:12. How can God’s Word be effective in spiritual conflict? What specific verses or biblical principles are you using in your present spiritual conflict? Has God been making a particular verse especially real in your life recently?

“For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

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Read Ephesians 6:18-20. What is the role of prayer in spiritual warfare? How do you use prayer as a weapon in your present conflict?

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:18-20).

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God never intended that we should engage the enemy alone. Read Romans 8:26-27. How does the Holy Spirit assist us in our conflict?

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the heart knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27).

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Before you conclude this study, take inventory of your spiritual armor. Which pieces are missing? Which are in need of repair? How do you intend to acquire or repair your armor? Discuss these needs with God as you conclude with prayer.

## PRAYER

Lord, I want to be victorious over the temptation of Satan. Give me spiritual wisdom to understand his methods of tempting me. Help me to overcome temptation. When I forget what spiritual weapons will help me win the battle, remind me how to fight the Devil. Each day give me victory for that day. Amen.

### Study 4 Claiming the Victory Which Is Mine

During the final days of World War 2, the allied soldiers found themselves fighting a different kind of war. For years they had struggled against a seemingly insurmountable enemy. Gains made one day in battle could be, and probably were, lost the next day. Even when troops finally landed in Normandy and the final invasion of Europe began, the fighting was intense. But all that changed as the allied armies moved closer to Berlin.

Before long it became apparent that the German army was retreating. As army units were commissioned to secure a city, they arrived to cheering crowds. In some cases, the enemy had retreated when they realized the soldiers were coming. On other occasions, the people of the city rose up against the occupation army and held German leaders in their own jails while they waited for the “liberation army.” In many places in Europe, few shots were fired. The victory had been won in the minds of the people before German leaders agreed to the terms of surrender.

It is encouraging to realize that the spiritual battle in which we are engaged as Christians has already been won. The battle of the ages was won by Christ on the Cross. The skirmishes in which we are now involved are minor in comparison to that battle. It is only a matter of time before the terms of surrender are forced on the reluctant enemy and Christians everywhere celebrate Victory Day.

As Christians, we engage in spiritual warfare, confident of the Lord’s ultimate victory. Still, we have responsibilities as soldiers in the Lord’s army. Read Isaiah 54:17. What promise can the Christian claim as he or she engages the enemy? On what basis is this promise secure? How does that make you feel as you think about your present conflict?

“No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me,” says the Lord” (Isaiah 54:17).

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In his final comments to His disciples prior to His arrest, Jesus also commented on the battles we face in the world. Read John 16:33. How can one experience peace in the midst of a spiritual battle? How often is this a part of your Christian experience?

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

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Paul also approached spiritual warfare with a deep confidence in God and our ultimate victory. Read Romans 8:38, 39. What sort of things cause you to doubt God’s unconditional love in your life? How do they relate to the things Paul speaks of in this verse?

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

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Read 1 Corinthians 15:57-58. In light of the ultimate victory guaranteed to us as Christians, how should we respond in our daily life? How would you evaluate your progress in this area?

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:57-58).

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On a personal level, victory is guaranteed in the smaller battles in which we are engaged. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. How can we be confident of this victory over temptation? What resources are available to us in that struggle?

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

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## Four Principles to Defeat the Enemy

1. Respect
2. Removal
3. Resistance
4. Readiness

Let's take a closer look at that way of escape and the principles which will help us secure the victory in spiritual warfare. The first principle for securing victory over Satan is the principle of respect. Read Jude 9. How did Michael demonstrate his respect for Satan in the conflict over Moses' body? What should we respect regarding Satan as we engage in spiritual warfare?

“Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’” (Jude 9)!

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The second principle for securing victory over Satan is the principle of removal. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:22. List some of the things and places from which you should remove yourself to help insure continued victory over temptation.

“Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

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Read Titus 3:10-11. Who are people that tend to influence you to sin? What is the best way for you to remove yourself from them?

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11).

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The third principle for securing victory over Satan is the principle of resistance. Read James 4:7. In which areas do you find it easiest to resist the devil? In which areas do you find it harder to resist the devil?

“Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

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Read 1 Peter 5:9. How does your knowledge of how others overcome struggles in their life help you continue resisting the devil? Is there someone in particular who tends to be a real source of encouragement to you in your spiritual conflict? How are you encouraging others to continue resisting the devil?

“Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Peter 5:9).

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The fourth principle for securing victory over Satan is the principle of readiness. Read Mark 14:38. Which weaknesses of the flesh appear to be most ready to yield to temptation in your life? What are you doing to protect yourself from yielding in those areas?

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38).

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Read Ephesians 6:11. In the last Bible study, we took a closer look at the armour God provides for us in battle. Which piece of armor do you find most helpful in spiritual conflict? Is there a piece you have been neglecting that could help you in your conflict?

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).

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Although the victory has been won, we must still be diligent in winning the battles in which we find ourselves. As you conclude this Bible study, thank God for the victory He has achieved and ask Him to help you to faithfully apply principles of spiritual warfare in the battles in which you are engaged.

### PRAYER

Lord, I thank You for providing a “way of escape” against the temptations of Satan. Show me how to be strong and teach me how to use the weapons of spiritual warfare. Deliver me from the Evil One and give me victory. Amen.

## Study 5     Learning from the Esther Fast

This week, you have taken a closer look at the Esther Fast. As you conclude your experience in this discipline of fasting, take time to review what you have learned this week to identify important lessons God has taught you through the Esther Fast. Use the following questions to help you prepare to share the insights you have gained this week.

1.     Briefly describe your experience of fasting. Review the checklist you completed for your fast. What do you believe was accomplished through your fast? Do you need to continue observing the Esther Fast to accomplish the purpose you had in mind? What did you learn about yourself and your problem as you fasted?

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2.     As you considered the work of Satan, what caused you to feel frustrated in the spiritual battle? How can you encourage yourself in the midst of a difficult spiritual conflict?

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3.     In the Bible study on our spiritual armor, which piece of that armor did you find most necessary in your present battle? Which pieces of armor are you missing? Which pieces of your armor need work to bring them up to a quality suitable for battle?

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4.     How much easier is your spiritual conflict in light of the knowledge that Jesus has already won the victory? As you studied the four principles dealing with our response to the devil, which principles do you think will be most helpful in winning your present battle? How are you applying that principle to your battle?

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5.     What is the most significant lesson God has taught you this week? How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life? In what way can your small group hold you accountable to make the changes you need to make in your life as a result of your study of and experience in fasting the Esther Fast?

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## PRAYER

Lord, I want to be victorious in every part of my life. Defeat Satan's present attempt to destroy my Christian testimony and even destroy my life. Put a protective shield around my life and my family so that Satan can't harm me. Deliver me from the Evil One. For Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

## **EPILOGUE**

### **(A Conclusion That Interprets)**

#### **A. What Fasting Will Not Do.**

1. Is not \_\_\_\_\_.

“You humble yourselves by going through the motions . . . is this what you call fasting?” (Isaiah 58:5).

2. Will not \_\_\_\_\_.

“What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling?” (Isaiah 58:4, ELT).

3. Will not \_\_\_\_\_.

“‘We have fasted before you!’ they say. ‘Why aren’t you impressed?’ . . . I will tell you why! It is because you are living for yourself even while you are fasting” (Isaiah 58:3).

4. Will not \_\_\_\_\_.

“David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted . . . neither did he eat bread . . . on the seventh day, the child died” (2 Samuel 12:16-18). “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious . . . but now he is dead, wherefore should I fast?” (2 Samuel 12:22-23).

#### **B. The Spiritual Basis of Fasting (Joel 2:12-32)**

1. Turn to God with \_\_\_\_\_.

“Turn ye even to me (the Lord) with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning” (Joel 2:12).

2. Repent of \_\_\_\_\_.

“Don’t tear your clothing, tear your heart” (Joel 2:13, ELT).

3. Call a \_\_\_\_\_.

“Declare a fast, call a solemn assembly” (Joel 2:15). A solemn assembly is not for joyful praise, worship, testimony or the preaching of the Word. A solemn assembly is to allow people to search their heart for sin . . . to confess and to examine motives.

4. Spiritual answers \_\_\_\_\_.  
 “Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people” (Joel 2:18).
5. Physical answers \_\_\_\_\_.  
 “He will cause to come down for you, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month” (Joel 2:23).
6. Spiritual breakthrough and \_\_\_\_\_.  
 “And I will restore to you the years the locust hath eaten” (Joel 2:25).
7. \_\_\_\_\_. The path to revival is fasting. Revival is defined as “God manifesting Himself among His people.” Joel offers, “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28).
8. \_\_\_\_\_. Because the people fast and pray, “That whosoever should call upon the name of Lord shall be (saved) delivered” (Joel 2:32).
9. \_\_\_\_\_. The church that is growing within (spiritual growth) has a foundation for outreach and attendance growth (numerical growth).

**C. Action Starters**

1. Would you be willing to become a PRAYER LEADER in your church?  
 O yes O no O consider
2. Who could be appointed PRAYER LEADER in your church?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Will you fast one day a month for your church/ministry  
 O yes O no O consider
4. Will you fast once for your church/ministry?  
 O yes O no  
 When? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Write what you want God to do because of your fast \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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6. How long will you fast? \_\_\_\_\_  
Begin? \_\_\_\_\_  
End? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What will you withhold? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Who will you ask to join you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What is your prayer promise? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### ANSWERS

- A1. Automatic  
A2. Overcome your failures  
A3. Make you spiritual  
A4. Always work  
B1. All your heart  
B2. Known sin  
B3. Solemn assembly  
B4. First  
B5. Next  
B6. Restoration  
B7. Revival  
B8. Soul-winning  
B9. Church growth