

## Priorities of Faith

### **DAY 4 — THE FREEDOM OF A FOCUSED LIFE OF SIMPLICITY**

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“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites who pretend to be holy. They make their faces look very sad. They want to show people they are fasting. What I am about to tell you is true. They have received their complete reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face. Then others will not know that you are fasting. Only your Father, who cannot be seen, will know it. Your Father will reward you, because he sees what you do secretly.” (Matt. 6:16–18)

#### **Fasting Makes Time and Space With God**

One way of making time to live a life focused on God is fasting. Fasting means clearing our minds and lives by deciding to make room in our hearts for the Holy Spirit by focusing on God and His Word. The Bible often connects fasting with prayer. Jesus fasted before He started His ministry (Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:2). The apostles fasted and prayed to be guided by God (Acts 13:2, 3), and in the Old Testament people who believed in God often fasted (1 Kings 21:9, 12; 2 Chron. 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:3, 16; Isa. 58:6; Jer. 36:9; Dan. 9:3; Joel 2:12; John 3:5; etc.).

Bible fasting is not the same as fasting for health when people follow a specific diet for weight loss and good health. Bible fasting is when you decide to avoid food and distractions for a time to pray and talk with God. When we give up food and distractions for a short time, we benefit from a new spiritual freedom. When we fast and pray, our daily focus changes from our own work and meeting our own needs to listening to and obeying God. Bible fasting shows our desire to depend more on God and to focus on important spiritual things. Bible fasting is more than not eating; it challenges every part of our lives. In fasting, we show that we want to make space for God by removing distractions that fill our attention and desire. We show that God’s presence is most important in our lives.

#### **Avoid and Add**

How can we live simply and focus on things that are really important? The same as we need to be careful about the food we eat, we need to also be careful about what we see and hear. What we see and hear affects our thinking. What kinds of music, books, stories, or websites do you watch and read that make you think negative or waste your precious time? In addition to avoiding specific things, you may need to decide to add new habits to help you create healthy thinking.

The world says that a simple life and calm mind is not important, but when we trust God, our heart is content. When we learn to focus on God, and not focus on what other people do, and when we let go of distractions, we find a simple life of rest and peace with our Creator and Redeemer.

Let’s pray together.

## Prayer Time (30–45 Minutes)

**All prayer groups have different ways of praying together. We want you to spend the next 30-45 minutes praying together, however the Holy Spirit leads you. Short informal prayers (1-3 sentences) are good. This way, more people can pray many times. Below are some examples of praying with Bible verses based on the theme. You may also pray through other Bible verses and include other topics in your prayer time. See the Leader's Guide and World Church Prayer Requests for other prayer ideas.**

### Praying God's Word — Matt. 6:16–18

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#### “When You Fast”

*Our loving Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us what we truly need. Having too much extra, we often forget that too much of something is never good. Lord, fasting does not come naturally, so we ask for Your strength to choose to avoid too much extra and to avoid anything that can hurt us, whether food, music, movies, shopping, etc. Also, show us how we can better decide to replace what is not good for us with what is good for us. Help us to choose a healthy lifestyle. Amen.*

#### “Like the Hypocrites”

*Dear God, we want our hearts to change. Forgive us for our hypocrisy [being false], when we say, teach, or preach one way, but live a different way. We want to do things for You from a heart surrendered to You, a heart inspired by love, renewed by Your mercy and grace and full with the Holy Spirit. May our fasting, and all our spiritual and daily activities, truly show Your holy presence in our hearts. Amen.*

## More Prayer Suggestions

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

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

**Guidance:** Ask God to give wisdom for today's challenges and decisions.

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

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

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

## Song Suggestions

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

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