



International
FRIENDSHIPS

2025 EDITION

Prayer & Fasting

an IFI devotional

written by IFI staff

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FOREWORD

Dear Friends of IFI,

At the beginning of each year, our staff spends a period of time praying and fasting together. Why? Because we believe that the vibrant friendships and life transformation in our ministry do not occur except through the power of God. Yes, we are partners with God in his service to the nations-- what an amazing honor! But through prayer and fasting, we remember that we are not the ones in control of this ministry-- He is.

Whether you decide to fast for a meal each day or for several days, I invite you to join us this year as we reorient ourselves in a special way to our Lord Jesus. Not only will we have the company of each other during this fast, but we recognize that we join in a tradition that many Christians through the world and history have practiced - even Jesus Himself!

May God bless you abundantly as you seek to listen and obey Him. And may those blessings overflow like a river of living water, going out from you to the international students God will place in your and others' paths this year. Thank you for joining us in "Making the world feel at home."

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ryan Finke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ryan" and last name "Finke" clearly distinguishable.

Ryan Finke
CEO

What is Fasting?

Biblical fasting involves voluntarily abstaining from food for a period of time with a spiritual purpose. It can include expressions of humility, repentance, mourning, confession, or seeking deliverance; but ultimately, it is a time to draw closer to God, highlighting our dependence on Him. Fasting quiets our mind and body, creating space for the voice of the Holy Spirit to more fully occupy the throne of our heart.

If you are preparing for a time of fasting, consider reading “Prayer and Fasting” by David Roadcup and Michael Eagle. It is a helpful, concise resource offering practical suggestions on how to plan a fast.

Other resources at the QR code:



DAY 1

“The Send” by Rich Mendola

*“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:1-3)
*underlining added for emphasis**

The first sending out of cross-cultural workers through the church came during a time of fasting and prayer. This was not individual fasting; it was a joint fasting of the church. While we are not told why they were fasting, it seems they were listening carefully for direction– and God spoke. He spoke about the necessity of people being sent to those who had not heard the Gospel. And He specifically told them to send Barnabas and Saul.

One of the great needs to finish the work of completing the Great Commission is workers, laborers willing to go to the unreached nations. God in his wisdom has sent the nations to us, right in our backyards in the form of international students. But workers are still needed– to connect with new campuses in strategic cities, to expand our online ministries, and to strengthen already established teams. I do not mean just full-time staff– I mean volunteers who will respond to God’s command to love the stranger in our midst.

Let us listen to the Lord. Surely, God wants to speak to us.

We’re already serving international students because He has spoken to us, but there is more direction, more sending of workers, and more envisioning that God wants to do. As we fast and pray together, let us go before the Lord with confident expectation that He delights in leading His people into paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.

DAY 2

“Why Fast?” by Michele Kurfees

“It troubled the Lord to see them in trouble, and his angel saved them. The Lord was truly merciful, so he rescued his people. He took them in his arms and carried them all those years.” (Isaiah 63:9)

The spiritual discipline of fasting is practiced by all three major religions of the world. Each one includes a desire on the part of its followers to appease or remove God’s wrath for sin, and to increase their knowledge of God and gratitude for His mercy.

One of the pillars of Islam is fasting, most notably during Ramadan. During it, observants realize how weak their human body is and how dependent they are as created beings. In Judaism, fasting can be a voluntary act or an obligation during a certain time of remembrance. Fasting is believed to result in spiritual transformation, both individually and communally.

What about Jesus followers? We seek blessing, forgiveness, and increased devotion, too. A recurring time of fasting for Christians is during Lent. The Lenten Triodion says:

*Let us set out with joy upon the season of the Fast, and prepare ourselves for Spiritual combat. Let us purify our soul and cleanse our flesh; and as we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion. Rejoicing in the virtues of the Spirit, may we persevere with love, and so be counted worthy to see the solemn Passion of Christ our God, and with great spiritual gladness, to behold His Passover. *underlining added for emphasis**

So why fast? As Christians, we seek to behold our God and to see the Passion (suffering) of Christ. Isaiah 63 paints a beautiful picture of God coming to us with mercy, deliverance, and an abundance of loving-kindness. May we meet Him with devotion and thankfulness for His favor and His compassion towards us.

DAY 3

“Yearning for the Groom” by Ryan Finke

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” (John 14:1-4)

During this time of fasting, I wonder if you’re experiencing the feeling of “yearning?” Likely, you may be experiencing hunger pangs and craving food. Like me, you may feel uncomfortable, anxious, and wish it were over.

In our spiritual lives, we may think we should “feel” totally connected to Jesus all the time. We may feel guilty when we don’t “feel” close to Him. But what if the aching for satisfaction is evidence of a right relationship with God?

A few years ago, I read the book “Blessed Are the Misfits” by Brent Hansen. The author explained the marriage analogy in the Bible and the natural yearning of being “engaged” to Christ. In Biblical times, the Jewish marriage custom began with the “covenant” between the groom and the bride’s father. Once the father blessed the marriage, the groom would return to his father’s home to prepare a room(s) for him and his bride. This could take months or even a year! All the while, the bride is waiting, preparing, yearning for the groom to return, and she doesn’t know exactly when he’ll come back to get her.

There’s a yearning for Christ to return that’s normal for us to experience because we long to be with him. We’ve been promised in marriage to Jesus and we’ve received the down payment of the Holy Spirit– but when will He return to come and get us?

May your yearnings during fasting today remind you of the yearnings for your “groom” to come and take you to His Father’s house.

DAY 4

“Cancel the Noise & Have Faith” by Phil Foell

Read 2 Kings 6:24-7:20

Have you ever been so busy working on a project that you forgot to eat? I remember working on a project so intensely that I didn't realize the time-- when I looked at the clock, I was astonished that it was already 4 p.m. and I had worked straight through lunch!

In today's reading from 2 Kings, we read the story of a famine that occurred because the king of Aram laid siege to Samaria. The key point is that during this unintentional fast, they cried out to the Lord for deliverance.

An interesting side note is that the king of Aram is named Ben Hadad. Ben means “son of”, so his name means son of Hadad. What's Hadad? The Bible dictionary I consulted said Hadad means noise, meaning the king of Aram was named the “son of noise”. In our culture, noise is all around. Perhaps there's a point here for us to ponder: is the noise in our lives preventing us from experiencing our daily bread?

In chapter 7, Elisha said the famine would end the next day, but the king's officer did not trust God to provide. Unfortunately, his unbelief became his downfall, as he died before he could enjoy God's generous provision. Lord, increase our faith!

How big is our faith? Is our faith limiting God? Are we crying out for provision from Him as much as for the air we breathe?

May we ask the Lord to open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing that is pressed down, shaken together, and running out all over (Luke 6:38).

DAY 5

“Raise Up Oaks” by Rich Mendola

“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven... Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’” (Nehemiah 1:5-6, 8-9).

What caused Nehemiah to weep, fast, and pray? The broken-down walls of Jerusalem, the disgrace of God’s people, and the marred glory of God. Although Nehemiah was away from Jerusalem in the worldly capital city of Susa, his heart was set on heavenly things. He had a good job as the King’s cupbearer, but he was more concerned about the purposes and Kingdom of God.

There are many broken lives, many broken places, and many people where the glory of God has not yet been seen. There’s a great need for nation-builders. Nehemiah represents international students who can get good positions because of their education but mostly need a vision from God to see his glory extended. If they seek God, some will be burdened like Nehemiah to return home and do something to address the problems of their nation.

One of the promises we have claimed in IFI for the work he has called us to do is in Isaiah 61, which talks about “raising up oaks of righteousness”. It also says in verse 5: “They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated, they will renew the ruined cities.”

As we fast and pray, let us ask God to break our hearts for the nations of this world, asking Him to raise up Nehemiah’s in the form of international students who will restore the broken cities of this world through the Word of God and their training.

DAY 6

“Humble Yourself” by Wen Cao Duhon

There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions... The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him... So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. (Ezra 8:21-23)

About 60 years after the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt, Ezra returned with the purpose of teaching and implementing the law of God in Jerusalem. He received permission and great favor from his king for his journey back there. As they were getting ready to embark on the journey, Ezra “proclaimed a prayer and fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey...” (Ezra 8:21)

We too are on a journey-- to follow God and be faithful in the assignments He gave us along the way. The assignment for many is to reach international students for His Kingdom, as Ezra’s assignment was to implement God’s law to build up God’s people.

In hindsight, we know that Ezra made a long-lasting impact in God’s Kingdom. For us, reaching the lost with the Gospel also has a great impact in the long run, whether we’re involved in the front lines of ministry or behind the scenes.

Like all other matters that relate to God’s plan, there will be “enemies and bandits” who want to steal, kill, and destroy. Let us be prepared so that no enemy frustrates God’s plan for us and those we work with. Let us continue to be reminded of where our true help comes from: the Lord.

As we prepare for the future, may we humble ourselves before our God, asking Him to prepare the way so that we may successfully reach and make disciples for His Kingdom.

DAY 7

“The Battle is His” by Michele Kurfees

*And Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the Lord; and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah... for we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on you... do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's... put your trust in the Lord your God, and you will be established... give thanks to the Lord, for his loving-kindness is everlasting... and when they began singing and praising... they (enemies) were struck down.” (2 Chronicles 20:3, 12, 15, 20-22)
*underlining added for emphasis**

Jehoshaphat had just received a report that a great multitude was coming against him and the people of Judah. In his prayer, he reminds the people that God is the ruler over all kingdoms and nations and no one can stand against him. He remembers how God drove out the inhabitants of the land and gave it to Abraham.

We all have a Kingdom assignment– to bring God’s Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven.

Let’s pray together with our eyes on Him, and boldly ask God to bind the enemy, remove evil, and bless our sphere of influence.

May we continue to let His Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven. May international students here in the US come to know about this Kingdom and join God’s family; then may they be empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the news of heavenly citizenship to the rest of the nations. May the bucket of our prayers be filled to overflowing and spill out blessings over our land.

DAY 8

“Song of Faith” by Cindy Jordan

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen... And without faith, it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:1, 6)

Imagine: you're living with 12 years of some debilitating ailment. You've visited multiple doctors and tried every remedy, yet no healing ever came. But then you learn of a man who's coming to your area, and he's healed many. A bubbling belief rises in you— that this was it. He'd be the man to heal you, if only you could see him. You decide to travel to him, but a humongous crowd blocks you. It keeps you far away; however, the hope to receive is greater than letting the crowd keep you away. So you draw near with great expectation, thinking to yourself if you just touch a part of his clothing you'd be healed because his clothing touches Him.

We might be familiar with the passages in the Gospels of Jesus healing the woman's disease because of her faith. We're in awe of it. Yet if you're like me, we fall short in our faith when confronted with an unexpected obstacle that blocks us in some way, leaving us hopeless. So we start doubting. We start singing a song of unbelief. But the LORD responded to them, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea’ and it would obey you.”

Fasting is a spiritual discipline: it helps us grow in our faith. Fasting is a tangible way to deny ourselves—to declare before God that we know it's all about Him, not about us. How often are we truly expectant to witness God take our mustard seed of faith and produce a greater story that points to His glory? Can we continue pressing in to touch Jesus or even just his garment? Can we, like the woman above, focus on the object of our faith— Jesus Christ— to produce and provide what we're hoping for?

May God enable us to be steadfast in singing the song of faith.

DAY 9

“Unexpected Answers” by Jonathan Putnam

Read 2 Samuel 12:15-23

As we continue reflecting on fasting, many passages focus on the benefits of prayer and fasting. But what about the times when it doesn't seem that God answers our prayers as we had hoped?

In 2 Samuel 12, we discover a deeply humbled man who has just learned that the child conceived as a result of his adultery will not live. Here, we find David seeking the Lord, fasting, and lying on the ground before the Lord pleading for mercy, for life, and for the child. But God says, “No.”

What can we learn from this passage? Here are a few observations:

1. God doesn't always answer our prayers and fasts the way we desire. Sometimes he says, “No,” even when our prayers honor him.
2. Instead of being angry, self-absorbed, or disillusioned for God's answer, David goes and worships the Lord. He recognized God didn't owe him anything; he saw God as his rightful Creator and King. He trusted that if God had relented to his prayer and fasting, it wasn't because he deserved it, but because of God's extra grace and mercy.
3. Though God said, “No” at that time, He decided to send his own son into the world a thousand years later. God wouldn't spare this son either, and through him, God would answer David's cry and the cry of all who ask for mercy. God honors David in that this Messiah would be called “son of David.” Through this son, God was going to extend abundant mercy and the gift of eternal life, not just to one child, but to all people, from every tribe and language, who would ask for it. God may have said no to David's immediate request, but his ultimate plan would be a resounding, “Yes” that would echo through eternity.

As you pray and fast, don't become discouraged if God doesn't answer in just the way you had hoped. Pray and fast, not to place God in a position of indebtedness to you, but because he is honored by your request. His answer may not be as you expect, but it may be more beautiful and more global than you can now imagine.

DAY 10

“God of More Than Enough” by Gloria Jacob

Read Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:1-14

One of my favorite miracles is the feeding of the 5,000, which is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. In the book of John, Philip, Andrew, and a nameless boy who gives up his lunch are featured. Although Philip and Andrew had seen Jesus’ miracles up close, they still doubted. But Jesus tells them to sit back while he takes care of the crowd with the boy’s five loaves and two fish. Looking up to heaven, he takes the bread, gave thanks, and broke it. And by the end, they still had 12 baskets leftover!

I wonder what went through the boy's mind when he gave up his lunch. Was he worried he'd go hungry? Did he feel foolish giving up his lunch? Was there pain in the offering? Do you identify with this boy? Do you feel like your resources are limited and wonder what the future holds?

I challenge you to be like this boy, surrendering your little and trusting God to multiply whatever we give him. May we notice that it is in the offering up to heaven, in giving thanks, and in the breaking of the bread that the miracle occurs. Many times in our lives, we need to surrender things to the Lord, giving thanks, and maybe even experience a breaking. But can we trust that these hands are more than able to multiply and provide?

Let us ask the Lord to show us what we need to offer up to Him. What can you give thanks for in faith even before experiencing the breakthrough? Where can you practice gratitude for how the Lord has already provided?

I love that one of the many names of God is Jehovah Jireh– Lord our Provider. May you encounter Him as Jehovah Jireh this season.

DAY 11

“Slow Down” by Rich Mendola

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. (Galatians 4:4)

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6)

Slow is a relative term. Dictionary definitions include:

- Not quick or fast
- Not prompt to understand, think, or learn
- Uneventful and rather dull

Doesn't sound good, does it?

Yet in order to listen to God, we often have to slow down. We need to stop the normal routine of fulfilling responsibilities. We need to make space and room in our hearts to be still and listen.

Fasting gives us the chance to slow down. In fact, when I'm fasting, time seems to slow down. It seems a long time since my last meal and I wonder when my next meal is coming!

Here is the good news: God is not slow. He always shows up at the right time and He always keeps his promises.

Let us continue to seek and listen to Him, sharpening our focus. God will lead us by His Holy Spirit into paths of righteousness after he makes us lie down in green pastures and stay by still waters.

DAY 12

“Rest Upon Him” by Florence Yuan

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Weary and burdened hearts—how does that happen anyway? As I grow older, I begin to understand why.

In her book, “Gracelaced”, R. C. Simons wrote: “Oftentimes, it might not be caused by singularly traumatic events or experiences, but the ones that have slowly chipped away, overstayed their welcome, or festered into painful wounds.”

After experiencing the complexities of our hearts, enduring ongoing pain, and facing unresolved conflicts, we might find ourselves saying, “God, I am just tired of this.”

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar to you?

- “I don’t see change or motivation for spiritual growth in my discipleship relationships, though I’ve been trying and praying”
- “I still feel misunderstood by this person despite many attempts at reconciliation”
- “I’m being persecuted by my family members for my faith and Christian lifestyle, despite praying for them for years”

We’re not meant to carry those burdens and figure things out by our strength alone. As we continue to bring our discouragement and burdens to Jesus, He can exchange them for a lighter yoke. Whether the situations we’re praying for change right now or not, we can rest knowing burdens will be lifted. Take a deep breath, listen to Him, and remember His promises.

Take time to reflect-- what challenges are you facing in your life right now? Is there a scripture or a promise Jesus spoke to you that you can hold on to and rest upon?

DAY 13

“Blessed is the One” by Jesse Cook

Read Luke 7:18–23

While imprisoned by Herod, John the Baptist’s disciples reported to him some of the amazing works of Jesus– demon possession, leprosy, blindness, sickness of all kinds...none of these were a match for Jesus!

Imagine John in prison listening to these stories. What tension must have existed! Not that long ago, John announced Jesus as “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Now, as he’s rotting away in prison, he hears many reports of Jesus’ miracles. On one hand, he must feel incredible satisfaction to hear that Jesus is fulfilling the prophecies; but on the other, he must be thinking why he’s still in prison. So he sends two disciples to Jesus with a question, “Are you the one, or should we look for another?”

Jesus’ response is fascinating– “blessed is the one who is not offended by me”. This certainly wasn’t the reply John was hoping for.

Disillusionment with God will happen for all honest followers of Jesus. We can’t help but have expectations of God to work in specific ways. At times he works as expected, but often it seems he doesn’t. We feel the tension, like John, with the truths and voice of God and our current realities.

When facing disillusionment with God, we’re primarily left with two choices– we can work through it and gain greater understanding, love, and growth in God, OR we can bail. I’m glad that God can handle our disillusionment. Scripture and history are replete with brothers and sisters who have gone before us, trusting the goodness of our Heavenly Father in the darkest and most bewildering of times.

Do you currently have any disillusionment to work through in your life? If so, how might Jesus be using the tension of your current reality to grow you? If not, is there a dear brother or sister you expect to be? How might you encourage them? May we turn our disillusionment into a fast, waiting for the promised redemption that is coming.

DAY 14

“Pushing Mattresses to the Wall” by Jonathan Putnam

“Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, and confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.” (Andrew Murray)

In my first years of university, I experienced a deep pit of bondage to sin but found Jesus’ strong hand pulling me out. His mercy was fresh and powerful. I was eager to give all I had— which wasn’t much as a graduate student— to follow him. My heart was set on serving him overseas and I took several trips abroad. One trip included visiting a remote Chinese village. I slept on a bed of wooden planks with a rough wool blanket and pebble-filled pillow. I could hear the pigs feeding just beneath the floor. A rat rattled the bedpan. It was a miserable night. But it felt like being on the front lines of something amazing with Jesus. I was resolved— I would do anything and go anywhere to serve him.

After returning to the States, my parents decided to bless me with a new mattress. They had no idea how that mattress nearly put my spiritual life to sleep. The bed was unbelievable— probably the most comfortable bed I’ve ever slept in. I loved it, and one day a thought crossed my mind, “I don’t think I can give this up.” I know it sounds funny, but honestly, the thought of going anywhere with Jesus didn’t seem desirable anymore in comparison to resting on that mattress.

By God’s grace, I recognized the spiritual danger I was in and knew I had to take action. So I decided to lean the mattress against my bedroom wall and use a 1” thick camping mat for the next 30 days instead— it was the best decision I could’ve made! It was a declaration of war against the idol that wanted to capture my heart. This declaration led to a great renewal of my love for Jesus. In many ways, letting go of that mattress is similar to fasting, as we declare to our bodies that our desires for instant gratification cannot rule us.

Take an honest assessment of your heart. What sins are crouching at your door? Are there things, even good things, that are exerting an inordinate amount of control over your thoughts and desires? Are there comforts you’re starting to believe you can’t live without? Pray about finding ways to make fasting from food, (or pushing “mattresses” of your world to the wall) a regular part of your life. As you do so, you may just find a new sense of freedom and space for Jesus to fill you with more of himself.

WHO WE ARE



International students often struggle with culture shock, stress, and loneliness when leaving their homes to study in the US.

International Friendships, Inc. (IFI) is a national organization partnering with local churches, universities, and volunteers to provide life-changing hospitality and friendship to international students. We work strategically to make the world feel at home and extend God's love globally — right where we are.

You can learn more about us at our website:

ifipartners.org

