

Prayer and Fasting on the 1st Monday of the Month

One of the initiatives coming out of Project Nehemiah's Prayer Team is a recommendation that we set aside some time on the first Monday of each month and the first week of the year for prayer and fasting.

We'd like to offer some suggestions on things that you can do on that first day of the month.

1. If this is a new experience for you, acknowledge that to God from the start. And ask God to guide you in it. For this to be a spiritually meaningful and productive activity, your heart will need to be engaged at some point. The Holy Spirit calls to us to set our hearts on the kingdom of God. How do we do that?
2. Let's begin by praying. You can use your own words or a familiar prayer like "Our Father who art in heaven..." or "Glory be to the Father..." or even the Apostle's Creed or the 23rd Psalm. There's also the prayer of St. Francis of Paul or David. As you focus on the words you are praying, let them sink into your whole being. You will be distracted by the worries of your day, or someone wanting your attention, but keep coming back to the words. Try to pray for five minutes.
3. Then you'll want to read a paragraph or chapter of Scripture. This may be a continuation of a study you are already doing or an entry from a devotional like *Knowing the Heart of God* by John Eldredge, *Bread for the Journey* by Henri Nouwen, *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young, the revised version of *My Utmost for His Highest* or *Heart Journey* written by Intowners James Reiman and Jimmy Locklear, respectively. If those don't resonate with you, we suggest reading the prayers of Nehemiah (see notes below).
 - a. The main idea is to read enough from God's Word until you feel a connection to God's voice. That you hear the words you are reading and sense God is speaking to you through them.
 - b. You might want to write down anything (good or bad; positive or negative) that comes to mind as you pray and read.
4. It is important to remember that this time is for you and Jesus. This is not for Intown. It is for you to relate to the your Heavenly Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit who lives in your heart. We are not looking for 100 people to be praying for Intown on the first Monday of the month. We desire for 100 people to be opening their hearts to God at the beginning of the month. One thing is certain, this will help heal you and the Intown community will grow qualitatively.
5. You may do this every day already. Great! So, on this day, why don't you do this activity two or three times? Pick a couple of times throughout the day when you can take 10-15 minutes and walk through this time of prayer and reading.

Concerning Fasting

1. Fasting is a multi-dimensional exercise and can be applied to almost any activity that involves regular consumption. While most commonly referring to abstaining from food, it could also refer to shopping, working, playing, entertainment or physical activity. You will have to determine what makes the most sense for yourself, but it would be good to engage in some sort of fasting.
2. Benefits of fasting:
 - a. Helps us to focus on the spiritual and non-physical dimension of our lives
 - b. Gives us a way to bring a feeling of hunger or thirst to God and illustrates our weakness
 - c. Re-directs or thinking about what is most valuable. Jesus often spoke about giving money or treasure away and then come and follow. Material things, while not inherently bad, can weigh us down and keep us occupied on things of this world and not the heavenly treasure that Jesus spoke of
 - d. And there are many health reasons that make fasting beneficial, but we are looking at how it can enhance our prayer times and actually give us more time to be with Jesus
3. Please make a few notes or journal entries to describe your feelings as you fast.

The Prayers of Nehemiah

As the weeks pass, you may find that you want to set aside more time to pray and fast. You may decide that you want to pray for the mission and vision that the Lord has led Intown Community Church to pursue. I would recommend looking at the prayers of Nehemiah. Most have to do with building a community and seem appropriate for Intown. We also love the conversational nature of his prayers and his emotional transparency.

The prayer in chapter 1 is stunning in its passion and intimacy. In chapter 2 verse 4, we see the intimacy and the dialogue he has with God so that he could pray immediately. In chapter 4 and verses 4 and following again portray a man of faith who knew that he had access to the presence of God and could ask whatever he desired. Just an amazing confidence to approach the Lord and to speak with a collaborative attitude. And Nehemiah chapter 9 has one of the greatest congregational prayers recorded. It is grand, but heartfelt.

Nehemiah often addressed God with the introductory acknowledgement, "You are my God." He submitted his will to God and then spoke from his heart.