



# Spring Study Discussion Guide #1

**Sermon Title:** Fasting

**Biblical Reference:** Nehemiah 9:1-3, 32-38

**Date Preached:** Sunday, January 15th, 2023, @ 11am

**Fall Study Date:** Wednesday, January 18th, 2022

## Sermon Summary

Nehemiah was Jewish leader who supervised the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the mid-5th century B.C. after his release from captivity by the Persian king Artaxerxes I. The returning Jews endeavor to rebuild the city were plagued by many problems. Enemies from without tried to hinder them from reestablishing themselves in the land. They also had fighting's within. Certain of the Jews were taking advantage of their countrymen's financial distress and economically abusing them. Although they had made significant headway, much remained to be done. Yet we find them doing something that seems odd. Instead of redoubling their efforts they stop, they take some time away from work to fast and pray to God.

There is something to be learned here. Like the Jews, we have many things to accomplish, and we also face both external and internal pressures. We rush blindly forward working hard to try to accomplish everything in the power of our own efforts. We try harder attempting to strengthen our own power. Many times, we can accomplish more by stopping and weakening our own power. We need times in our lives when we stop and recognize the weakness our own efforts and depend on the mighty power of God. We need to remind ourselves and communicate to God that our dependence is on Him. One way we can do this is by fasting.

## Quick Review

### Ice Breaker:

Since this is the first time together as a group let's go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves. And answer the ice breaker question.

What is a hobby or activity that you currently enjoy outside of work?

### ***Ask a volunteer to read:***

*Neh 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.*

*Neh 9:2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.*

*Neh 9:3 And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.*

- In thinking about the spiritual discipline of fasting from this week's sermon, were there any insights the Lord showed you or anything that caught your attention, challenged, or confused you?
- How did the Holy Spirit speak to your heart from this passage/sermon?

## My Testimony

Fasting has been the practice of Christians throughout time. Many Christians have reported their relationship with the Lord strengthened. Many have testified about spiritual breakthroughs and answers to prayer.

- Please share with us some significant answers to prayer you either experienced or heard about in the lives of others as a result of fasting?

## Digging Deeper

### 1. What is Fasting?

*Ask a volunteer to read:*

*Neh 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.*

#### Discussion Questions:

- How would you define fasting?
- Did you participate in the church fast this year?
- Did you fast from something other than food, i.e., social media, certain pleasures, entertainment, etc.?
- If you were not able to complete it in its entirety, what did you learn? What got in your way? Did you make more progress than last year? Was this your first-time trying fasting?
- What were some benefits/learning points over these last three days?

- What are some obstacles or things that got in your way?
- What would you do differently next time/year?
- Spending dedicated time in prayer, do you feel your relationship with God enriching, even outside of fasting?
- What are the benefits of fasting in a group?
- Maybe fasting is new to you, or you do not believe you are able to do it. What would your reasoning be for not doing a modified fast like Daniel?

*Dan 10:3 I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.*

## **2. Why Do We Fast?**

In the following verses we see the Jews separated themselves by fasting to spend time worshiping the Lord. We can see at the conclusion of their prayer what they were asking for during the fast.

***Ask a volunteer to read:***

*Neh 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.*

*Neh 9:2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.*

*Neh 9:32 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepeth covenant and mercy, **let not all the trouble seem little before thee,** that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.*

*Neh 9:37 And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, **and we are in great distress.***

### Discussion Questions:

- What, in this passage, is the most significant to you? Please explain.
- Can you share with us some things you face, that are not little to you, that cause you great distress?
- Here is a partial list of Biblical reasons to fast which reason is the most significant to you and why?

**1. To strengthen prayer- *Ezra 8:23***

**2. To seek God's guidance- *Judges 20:26***

**3. To express grief- *1 Samuel 31:13***

**4. To seek deliverance or protection- *2 Chronicles 20:3 – 4***

**5. To express repentance and a return to God- *1 Samuel 7:6***

**6. To humble oneself before God- *1 Kings 21:27 – 29***

**7. To express concern for the work of God- *Nehemiah 1:3 – 4***

**8. To minister to the needs of others- *Isaiah 58:3 – 7***

**9. To overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God- *Matthew 4:1 – 11***

**10. To express love and worship for God- *Luke 2:37 & Acts 13:2***

- Number 10 shows us that fasting is an act of love and worship (Acts 13:2) shows it is a ministry to God Himself. How would you explain this?
- What are some prayers you need strengthened?
- Some people look at fasting as a way to get what they want and when they do not, they are very disappointed. How do guard our hearts against this sin?
- What is the difference between a hunger strike and fasting?

### **3. What Should We Do When Fasting**

In the following verses you can read specific things the Jews did during the fast.

*Ask a volunteer to read:*

*Neh 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.*

*Neh 9:2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.*

*Neh 9:3 And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.*

**Discussion Questions:**

- Which one of these things did during the fast is the most significant to you? Please explain
- Can you give us an example of how you separate yourself to be with the Lord?
- If our sins are already paid for, why is it still important to confess them?
- The Jews were showing the Lord they were serious about getting God's attention for their present distress. Why do you believe they started with confession?
- A good way to confess your sins is reading through the lists of sins in Roman 1:29-34 ,2 Tim 3:1-7, Galatians 5:19-21. What did you learn when you did this?
- The sins of their forefathers led to the trouble they were in. How could it help us in our prayer life to confess the sins of our fathers? What troubles are we having today because of the sins of our forefathers?
- Can you give us an example of why it is important to read the Bible along with prayer and fasting?
- Verse three speaks about worship. How could you help a person who came to you and asked, what does it mean to worship the Lord? Can you show me?
- Can you tell us about a time you connected with the Lord in private worship?

## Taking It Home

The following questions are intended to be open-ended and encourage members to consider how they felt and what they can do because of discovering the truths and principles in the text:

1. What truth or principle in this text was most impactful for you?
2. How did this truth or principal challenge, change, or affirm your thinking?
3. How will you put into practice what you have learned today?