

21. Days of Fasting and Prayer

Contributed by LG Parkhurst Jr
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But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast. -- Luke 5:35.

God taught the Schaeffers to set aside every Monday as a Day of Prayer for L'Abri. Edith would begin the day by teaching those staying at L'Abri about prayer, and giving some examples of the answers to prayer they had received to encourage everyone to persevere in prayer. She made a Prayer List with some Bible verses at the top, so people could begin praying after first hearing from God and thinking about how they could pray in the context of His Word. Then she listed some of the needs of others and L'Abri so each person could pray privately, but in unity with all the rest. These prayer requests might be for the individual guidance and protection of others, for someone to embrace the truth of the Gospel, or for some specific needs of the community. In this way, the Schaeffers taught those at L'Abri that God intended prayer to be centered on Him and intercessory, rather than primarily focused on our self-centered needs. And they also emphasized that prayer could be for things in the material realm as well as the spiritual. At Susan's suggestion, Edith divided each Monday's Prayer list into 28 half hour periods. Then people could sign up to pray for a half hour or more so the entire day would be covered in prayer.

The L'Abri Family Prayer Letters are similar to these lists, so the Praying Family of L'Abri can join in the Monday Day of Prayer or pray throughout the week wherever they live. Beginning in June of 1955, Edith began sending Prayer Letters to those who had promised to pray specifically for L'Abri each day. At first, she sent out about twenty-five letters, but soon the numbers grew to a few hundred.

Sometimes, those in L'Abri were amazed to learn about prayer groups that prayed specifically for them, groups they knew nothing about for several years. For example, from their travels to Cambridge, England, in 1967, they learned of 8 students who met together each Tuesday for breakfast to pray for L'Abri and especially for its purchase of Chalet les Sapins so they would have more room for guests and students. This group also prayed for the expansion of L'Abri into their own country.

God's teaching those at L'Abri about prayer through the Monday Day of Prayer remains highly effective, because people set aside time to spend with God alone in the context of a larger number of people praying with one heart for many things. After seeing much persevering prayer, those new to L'Abri begin to recognize God's answers to prayer and praise Him for His love and faithfulness. Sometimes God sends His answer that very day, but usually in the days ahead, in order to teach people to pray and not give up. God works out the timing of each answer to encourage different people and meet the unique needs they have for an intelligent faith. Sometimes He answers the specific prayer of one person for a specific amount of money to be received on a specific day to meet a specific need of that person and to encourage everyone in L'Abri to keep on praying.

On July 30, 1955, L'Abri also began setting aside one day each year as a Special Day of Fasting and Prayer. These special days were similar to the Monday Day of Prayer, except the whole day was dedicated to prayer alone, and only a light meal was left out on a table for those who physically needed to eat or for those who chose not to fast.

Jesus said His disciples would fast after He returned to heaven, and the early Church fasted and prayed and left us their example to follow. Through prayer and fasting, God revealed to the early Christians who they should commission to serve Him and the Church. In the Book of Acts we read: "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'" (Acts 13:2). Barnabas and Saul continued this practice. In the churches they founded, they only commissioned elders after fasting and prayer: "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23).

Those in L'Abri sometimes fasted more than one day a year. In times of crisis or for special needs, such as the need for more room or food for desperate seekers, they would call for another Day of Fasting and Prayer or individuals would fast quietly and privately. If the need were especially grave, they would sometimes have two or more days of fasting in one month. They were not being legalistic when setting special days for worship and prayer. They loved God and were calling upon Him, because He had promised to give special attention to their prayers when they came to Him in some of the special ways He has prescribed. Fasting indicates to God that we are serious about Him and His ability to help us and others. Fasting indicates that we are willing to deny ourselves to follow Him. Fasting indicates that we are at the end of our ability to meet our own needs and recognize that He is the only One who can help. There is nothing meritorious in fasting, and God does not give us "extra credit" for fasting and prayer. Times of fasting and prayer are opportunities to

draw near to God and prepare ourselves to receive Him when He draws near to us. Fasting simply tells God (and sometimes others) that we are serious about serving Him and Him only, and that we are relying upon Him and Him only to do His work in our lives in His way. Fasting should indicate our absolute submission to the will of God. And it can reveal to us any rebellious spirit that we may still have within us. As we pray and fast, we must continually remind God and ourselves, "Thy will be done," and be satisfied with the answer to prayer God gives--whether He gives us the exact letter or only the spirit of our request.

Days of Fasting and Prayer should indicate to God and others that we have supreme confidence in Him. Observing these special days does not mean that we are trying to manipulate or extract blessings from a stingy God. Rather, they indicate the value we place on spending time with God, and show that we want to do all that we do in submission to His will. Just as the early Church did not dare to commission anyone to service without spending time in prayer and fasting, today, prayer and fasting indicates to God that we do not want to do anything but His will and that we are willing to take the time to find out what He wants. Fasting indicates that we are willing to sacrifice our comforts and make any other sacrifices that God may require to further His Kingdom on earth. Fasting and prayer indicates to God that we delight in being with Him more than anyone or anything else, and that time spent with Him and the spiritual food He feeds us is of far more value to us than the material foods we eat daily. Fasting should lead us to recommit ourselves to God and assure Him and us that we have no other will than that His will be done. Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, show me when I need to spend some special times in fasting and prayer. Help me to always put you above the desires of my flesh. Use my days of fasting to free me from any cravings or unwholesome desires that are keeping me from desiring your presence, knowing you fully, receiving your guidance, or being an effective servant. Keep me from thinking that you owe me something on the basis of anything I have done. Refresh me with your presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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