

March 13, 2022 - Prayer & Fasting to Repent

Scripture Reading: Jonah 3:1-10

When we look at the third chapter of Jonah 3, we see that our God is revered, feared, and respected even by the pagans in Nineveh. This would have been considered nothing short of miraculous at the time, that a God -“the Lord”- could bring evil doers from other religions and lands to fast and pray. We can learn a lot from these Ninevites, and even more from God’s response to the people. It is amazing to think that the Israelites, God’s children heard the prophets tell them God messages over and over and yet they refused to repent. The people of Nineveh only had to hear it once and everyone from the greatest to the least repented. Reading this chapter, I started thinking about how this reflects in my life. I honestly can't count how many times I have unconsciously acted like the Israelites, wanting God’s blessings while ignoring His messages. How many times have I heard of the message to do something that would take me out of my comfort zone and almost immediately searched for a convenient reason, that would keep me comfortable? We learn over and over in scripture that God is not pleased if we merely listen to His word. He calls us to be doers of the word. Jesus tells us in Matthew 12: 39-41 that these men from Nineveh are held in high regard, even more so than the Israelite men.

I know for me as a believer through the years, my flesh has struggled with the concepts of blind faith, self-sacrifice, and giving freely of everything I have. On the day the Lord calls me home I want to hear, “Well done My good and faithful servant”, and reading this story reminds me that while fasting and praying are amazing tools, adding repentance to my tool bag pleases God.

As someone who came to Christ as an adult, I often compare myself to people who have been believers most of their lives. Satan tries to convince me that I’m not good enough, and that many of the choices I made as an unbeliever are unforgivable. I was fortunate to have several people in my life to teach me about the difference between shame and guilt, conviction, and commendation. I remember when my “spiritual mom” (mentor from the church) told me “Satan calls you “by shame”, he tells you that what you have done is who you are, and it will never be enough, but he is a liar! There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ. God may convict you but only to grow you. What you have done is “*not who you are.*”

I still remember how free I felt and the weight that was removed from me when I first invited God into my heart and life; how amazing it was to give all that guilt, shame, and pain to God. Regardless of how long we have known God, we all struggle and need his grace, mercy and forgiveness. One of my favorite verses is Isaiah 57:15 “*I restore the crushed spirit of the humble and revive the courage of those with repentant hearts.*” This verse reminds me every day that perfection is not what God wants from me. He wants the real me... broken, imperfect, willing, forgivable, loveable me! I am His child; I know as a parent how meaningful the relationship I have with my children are. No matter what they do I will still love them. I will still want a relationship with them.

How wonderful it is that we can call ourselves children of God. He loves us and He is willing to meet us wherever we are: all we have to do is ask. He will show us mercy and forgiveness just

like He did with the people of Nineveh. If we are willing to respond to His message by humbling ourselves and repenting, I know that each time that I repent, He hears me, He loves me, and He thinks I am enough. I also know He feels the same way about you!

Dear Jesus, as we are nearing the end of our fasting season, we ask for the strength and willingness to repent and receive Your mercy. We have been stretched outside of our comfort zones and are growing closer to You every day. Thank You for sustaining us and showing us Your grace and mercy as we continue to fast. Please remove anything You notice within us that stands in the way of us being of maximum service to You and others. Help us be as bold as the people of Nineveh. Help us as a church seek your will and as individuals receive your strength. Regardless of how we feel about ourselves, remind us of how You see us, as the perfectly beautiful messy people we are. Amen

By: Bill & Heather Smart

Pray the 4 prayer points on page 1 or stop by the war room at the church building for prayer.