

For Such A Time As This

Fasting, prayer, and advocacy for those who are poor and vulnerable.

#ForSuchATime

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.

—Esther 4:14-17

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STARTS: Sunday, May 21, with a three-day fast

ONGOING: Day of Fasting on the 21st day of each month

ENDS: Dec. 21, 2018

HASHTAG: #ForSuchATime

ADVOCACY: U.S. Capitol Switchboard - (202) 224-3121

Starting with a three-day fast on May 21-23, we will observe a day of fasting on the 21st of each month until the end of the 115th Congress in December 2018. We are fasting to call for the protection of poor and vulnerable people from funding cuts and other harmful policies. We will use our time of prayer and fasting to prepare for advocacy with our elected officials.

In the book of Esther, Mordecai tells Esther that God has put her in a position of influence “for such a time as this.” As a wife of the Persian king, she has access to the one person who has the power to save the Jewish people from destruction. We find ourselves in a similar moment—with a president and Congress pushing for deep cuts to programs that are vital to hungry, poor, and vulnerable people in the U.S. and around the world. We have the power to influence our leaders.

The president’s budget blueprint proposes deep cuts to foreign assistance—even as four countries in Africa and the Middle East are falling into famine. The health care plan that President Trump supports would increase hunger and other suffering among tens of millions of people. We expect more proposals to cut anti-poverty programs over the course of the year to pay for the stated priorities of the president and many members of Congress.

Budgets are moral documents. They reveal our priorities, who and what is important, and who and what are not. As Christians, we must speak out against these dangerous policies and cuts. From the example of Esther, we call for a time of public fasting, prayer, and petitioning political powers to change unjust actions. We, too, are called for such a time as this.

The president's budget proposes deep cuts to foreign assistance—even as four countries in Africa and the Middle East are falling into famine.

This is a fast before God, to whom we turn in prayer and hope to change hearts—our hearts, the hearts of our lawmakers, and the heart of the nation. We will pray and fast, each of us in our own ways, for mercy, compassion, wisdom, strength, and courage as we make the critical budget choices about who and what are most important.

“Is not this the fast that I choose,” says the prophet Isaiah (58:6), “to loose bonds of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” Through the sustained spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting, we will prepare ourselves for action and advocacy, speaking out against budget cuts and policies that would be harmful to those who are hungry, poor, and vulnerable.

Fasting 101

Fasting is a spiritual practice that affects our entire being: heart, soul, mind, and might. Like any discipline of the spirit, it should be entered into prayerfully. This is a time of entering into deeper relationship with God, being changed by that relationship, and then being sent out into the world.

It is important to recognize that there are no biblical laws regarding regular fasting. At the same time, Jesus seems to operate under the assumption that this practice is part of life. In Matthew 6:17, he says “When” you fast, not “if.” The lack of specific guidance indicates, however, that embarking on a fast can mean any number of things.

For example, it is rare that anyone undertakes an absolute fast, one in which not even water is consumed (see Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9). That type of fast is the exception, not the rule. More common is what might be considered a partial fast, in which there is a restriction of diet, but not total abstention. Such restrictions may be in regard to the time of eating and not eating (how long, when during the day), the quality of food, or the quantity of food.

Some Possibilities to Consider

- Fast only during daylight hours, as Muslims practice during Ramadan.
- Fast from a single meal on the 21st and donate the money you saved on food.
- Fast from solid food but drink fruit or vegetable juice.

- Fast from social media or from your phone for the day.

Some Essentials to Fasting

Fasting from food should be avoided by those with diabetes, expectant mothers, and heart patients. Anyone with questions about their health should see a doctor before beginning. For those unable to fast from food for health reasons, find other things from which to abstain in a prayerful manner, such as nonessential foods or media stimulation—for example from social media, television, or your phone.

Preparing for a Fast

- Do not fast if you are sick or traveling.
- A day or two prior to a fast, reduce your intake of food, especially heavier meals, and stop drinking caffeinated beverages.
- Begin your fast prayerfully, mindful of the blessings you may receive rather than the deprivations you may feel.
- Do not underestimate the effects of your fast.

While Fasting

Include worship opportunities to keep your focus on God. Consider reflecting on a text appropriate to your reason for fasting. Take time throughout the fast to thank God for the chance to fast and for the opportunity you will have to break it. Make this a time of special attention to the poor and needy with whom you share this hunger. If the purpose of the fast is spiritual, then it is important to keep your inner attitude in the forefront. Consider keeping a journal, even if only during your times of fasting. Devote the time you would have been eating to prayer.

Drink two to three quarts of water per day, preferably at room temperature. Lemon juice might be added for taste. If something more is desired and appropriate to the fast, consider bouillon, vegetable or fruit juice, or unsweetened beverages. Avoid caffeinated beverages. Avoid alcohol and any drugs not prescribed by a doctor, including aspirin.

Avoid manual labor, and keep physical exercise to 20 minutes a day.

As Christians, we must speak out against these dangerous policies and cuts.

In Matthew 6:17, Jesus says, “when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face.” Bathe regularly, keeping the water at body temperature. Extremes of hot or cold can lead to dizziness. Use mouthwash or chew sugarless gum to aid in controlling bad breath associated with fasting.

Keep your body warm, as fasting can lead to chills because of a lowered blood pressure and metabolism. Recognize that you may experience light-headedness

or feel additional energy, or feel more alert or overstimulated.

Breaking the Fast

In celebration of what has been and what will be, break bread with your family, church community, or co-workers. Whether alone or with others, take time to lift up prayers of gratitude. Remember those people for whom the lack of food threatens their survival.

Bible Verses about Fasting

Judges 20:26

Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went back to Bethel and wept, sitting there before the Lord; they fasted that day until evening. Then they offered burnt-offerings and sacrifices of well-being before the Lord.

2 Samuel 1:12

They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

Ezra 8:21-23

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might deny ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king that the hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all who forsake him. So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Ezra 9:5

At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to the Lord my God.

Nehemiah 1:4

When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Esther 4:15-16

Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, 'Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night

or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.' Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Psalms 69:10

When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so.

Psalms 109:24

My knees are weak through fasting; my body has become gaunt.

Isaiah 58:3-6

'Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?' Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day, and oppress all your workers.

Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.

Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Daniel 6:18

Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no food was brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

Daniel 9:3

Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Budgets are moral documents. They reveal our priorities, who and what is important, and who and what is not.

Joel 2:12-15

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain-offering and a drink-offering for the Lord, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly.

Jonah 3:5

And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Zechariah 8:19

Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace.

Tobit 12:8

Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold.

Judith 4:13

The Lord heard their prayers and had regard for their distress; for the people fasted for many days throughout Judea and in Jerusalem before the sanctuary of the Lord Almighty.

Judith 8:6

She fasted all the days of her widowhood, except the day before the sabbath and the sabbath itself, the day before the new moon and the day of the new moon, and the festivals and days of rejoicing of the house of Israel.

Ecclesiastes 34:31

So if someone fasts for his sins, and goes again and does the same things, who will listen to his prayer? And what has he gained by humbling himself?

2 Esdras 6:31-32

If therefore you will pray again and fast again for seven days, I will again declare to you greater things than these, because your voice has surely been heard by the Most High; for the Mighty One has seen your uprightness and has also observed the purity that you have maintained from your youth.

Matthew 4:2

He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished.

Matthew 6:16-18

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 9:14-15

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

Luke 2:37

...then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

Luke 18:12

I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.

Acts 13:2-3

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.'

Acts 14:23

And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.



Make Your Voice Heard

Sojourners' guide to contacting—and influencing—your elected representatives.

Personal stories and meetings with constituents are among the most powerful ways to impact legislators. Whether you're a seasoned lobby veteran or a first-time advocate, your discussion with a member of Congress or their staff is essential “for such time as this.”

REMEMBER: Meetings are better than phone calls; phone calls are better than e-mails; e-mails are better than social media outreach; social media outreach is better than nothing!

Setting up a meeting:

- 1) Look at a congressional calendar to see when your member of Congress is likely to be in your district for an in-district work period.
- 2) Call your local office at least two weeks before your preferred meeting date. You can find your member [here](#).
- 3) Explain that you are a constituent, your particular concerns, and any group you are representing (Church, school board, non-profit, etc.)
- 4) Agree on a meeting time.

** Some offices have an online form to schedule an in-district meeting. These are easy and convenient. However, talking to a real person may connect you with a staff member who works directly on your issue.

Preparing for a meeting:

- 1) Know what you want to say and carefully review your talking points.
- 2) If possible, compile information about the impact of specific legislative issues on your district/state. (Do not compile a long list of statistics; your elected officials will not remember them and they will lose their impact.)
- 3) Prepare a few dramatic numbers or anecdotes to illustrate your points. Collect recent local news articles that illustrate the issue. Or even better, consider bringing individuals who would be affected by the policy change.

4) Most importantly, be ready to share your story and why these legislative issues have a personal impact on your life.

During a meeting:

- 1) Begin by introducing yourself.
- 2) Explain to the legislator/staffer why you asked for the meeting.
- 3) Present your concerns simply and directly. Get to your “bottom line” immediately. Be brief, direct, courteous and positive.
- 4) If you do not know the answer to a question, say so, and promise to send a follow-up email with the answer. Be sure to follow up with your answer as quickly as possible after the meeting.
- 5) Be sure to ask for the policy maker's support. If he or she is already very supportive, ask him or her to cosponsor the relevant bill and/or take a leadership role in moving the bill through the process, getting additional cosponsors, or other methods.

Follow up

- 1) Send a note thanking the member or staff person for meeting with you. Briefly summarize the main points of the meeting. Remember to follow up with responses to any questions the member or staff person asked but you could not answer at the time.
- 2) Thank them/acknowledge them on the member's Facebook page or Twitter handle.
- 3) Do not think of the meeting as an isolated event. Think of other ways to maintain the relationship.
- 4) Stay informed, and stay involved!