

Focus: The Journey to Easter

Lesson 3



Fasting for Spiritual Break Through

The Widow's Fast

St. James Baptist Church

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THE WIDOW'S FAST

I KINGS 17:7-15

The Widow's Fast is named after this poor woman of Zarephath because she was willing to go without food to meet a humanitarian need in the life of another.

The Widow's Fast was not a long fast. Just as Elijah had promised, God intervened in her situation. She was able to continue feeding her son and new houseguest throughout the remainder of the famine. The prophet's promise was fulfilled and the flour and oil were not consumed. In expressing a willingness to deny herself to meet the needs of Elijah, the widow of Zarephath modeled a unique approach to the discipline of fasting.

THE WIDOW'S FAST IN THE BIBLE

The Scriptures reveal a strong emphasis about the concerns of God's people for the physical needs of those around them. It is not surprising that providing for people in need should become an important aspect of the discipline of fasting. Israel's need for reform had prompted God's question:

Is this not the fast that I have chosen... to share your bread
with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor
who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover
him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? (**Isaiah 58:6,7**).

The Widow's Fast enables us to see God meet the needs of others, especially humanitarian needs such as food and clothing.

The New Testament introduces us to other widows who fasted. Anna is described as a prophetess who "never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying" (**Luke 2:37, NIV**).

Jesus identified another dedicated widow while teaching in the Temple. As He saw a poor widow place her last two mites into the Temple treasury designated for the care of the poor, Jesus said,

Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had (**Luke 21:3,4**).

She gave all she had. This widow was willing to sacrifice everything, probably including her next meal. The Widow's Fast describes this widow who gave up necessities to help others.

Widows were not the only ones mentioned in the New Testament who fasted in order to provide for the physical needs of others. The apostle Andrew found a young boy who was willing to give up his lunch consisting of five barley loaves and two small fishes so that 5,000 hungry people could be fed (**see John 6:9**).

Someone else must have been fasting for three days (**see Mark 8:1-9**).

(2 Corinthian 8:2-4).

Although the discipline of fasting is not specifically mentioned here, the spirit of their giving is consistent with that of those who use the Widow's Fast to sacrificially give to meet the needs of others.

HOW TO OBSERVE THE WIDOW'S FAST

Step 1: Become Others Oriented

Develop sensitivity to the problems of others by researching the needs of the underprivileged living in close proximity to you.

Step 2: Recognize Your Own Blessings

Most Christian in this country are far better off than the poor of this world. Yet most of us find it easier to complain than to rejoice. Instead of complaining about not being able to purchase an expensive dessert with our restaurant meal, we should rejoice in God's provision of food for us.

Step 3: Use Some of Your Grocery Money

The purpose of the Widow's Fast is to help release your giving to meet the needs of others by using resources that would normally be consumed for yourself.

Step 4: Fast and Pray for Guidance

Rather than giving up in frustration because you are not able to feed all the hungry people in the world, ask God to burden you with a manageable portion of need.

Perhaps your family could provide food for a hungry family by fasting one day a week. Another family may designate the money saved through their Widow's Fast to purchase Christmas toys for poor children. Other families may contribute to a food bank...

Step 5: Pray for Those You Help

After you have identified the specific need of your Widow's Fast, set aside special times – perhaps mealtimes – to pray for the needy who will directly benefit from your Widow's Fast gift.

Step 6: Identify with Others' Suffering

If you find it difficult to endure the afternoon without a candy bar, think of those who must survive the day or week on a small bowl of rice.

Step 7: Consider a Long-Term Investment

Consider making significant lifestyle changes that would enable you to continue contributing to others.

Eliminating excessive sugars and salt from your diet could be translated into savings for the ongoing support of needy people.

PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

Learn to identify other specific human needs.

Learn the monetary value of the food you would consume in a typical day.

If a family spends \$140 a week on groceries and other food purchases, that family will save \$20 in a one-day Widow's Fast. In this way you not only help feed the hungry, but you also get a better grasp of your own food budget.

Note the value of spending the money to meet the need before you begin fasting.

Set specific goals.

Set a goal of how much you would like to contribute....

Learn to identify with those you serve.

Look for specific ways to reduce your personal cost of living to enable you to contribute more to meeting the needs of others.

Many Christians have chosen to live simple lifestyles so they can give more to missions and meet the needs of others.
