

## BETHEL AME CHURCH BOSTON: CORPORATE FAST

DEVOTIONAL – WEEK 4 (January 23, 2022)

### FASTING AND PRAYING

**Scripture Reading:** Jonah 3:1-10 (NRSV)

**Key Scriptures:** (Jonah 3: 6-7,9) When the news reached the king of Nineveh, **he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.** Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ***Who knows? God may relent and change his mind: he may turn from his fierce anger so that we do not perish.***”

**Insight:** Many of us know this all-familiar story of **Jonah and the whale**. God gives Jonah a message to give to the people of Nineveh (Assyrians who destroy Israel, the northern kingdom about a decade later). He tells him to go to them immediately and cry out against the city because their wickedness was so great. Since Jonah did not believe God should show mercy to the Assyrians, their enemies, in disobedience, he tries to run away from the presence of the Lord only to find himself in the belly of a whale. After his commitment to obey God, he is rescued from the belly of the whale and given another opportunity to do what God initially told him to do, which was to tell the people of Nineveh that God was not pleased with their lifestyle, and as a result, they were going to be destroyed. However, because of the people’s response, God extends grace and mercy to Nineveh, the Assyrians.

No matter who you are or what you’ve done, God is able and willing to extend grace and mercy.

According to the bible, the people of Nineveh wasted no time in responding to God in prayer and fasting. Their situation was so urgent that the king proclaimed an absolute fast (abstaining from eating or drinking) for the nation, including, humans and animals.

The bible says that Nineveh was a great city and according to some of the commentaries of the bible, this was no ordinary king. This king was a mighty king. He conquered many nations, yet he took off his robe (vs. 6), his mantle so to speak, his position and, humbled himself. He traded his robe for sackcloth, and he sat in ashes, which was as a sign of great humility. The king also put aside his god(s). He was willing to go to great extremes to try to change God’s mind.

**Reflection:**

1. What would it take for you to drop everything and respond to God in urgency with praying and fasting?
2. Could you, at a moment's notice, give up your position, house, or valuables to obey the voice of God.
3. Reflect on a past, or present situation that impacted your entire family, was praying and fasting your first response? Looking back, what would you do differently, as it relates to praying and fasting?
4. The bible says in Matthew 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. What treasures, be it things, people, food or, unforgiveness, have been getting in the way of a closer relationship with God.
5. Several weeks ago, I decided to do a cleanse. I needed to change my eating habits and felt this would be a good place to start. As we continue our time of praying and fasting what additional things would you like God to remove or eliminate from your physical and emotional appetite.