

Humbled in the Sight of the Lord

As I write this article, I am overwhelmed by the disaster inflicted by hurricane Katrina. The governor of Louisiana has asked for prayer for the victims of the hurricane, and I humbly agree that we all have a responsibility to lift our prayers to Him.

But I wonder if we could all learn a lesson from this turn of events. Wouldn't it have been better to make a call for prayer before the hurricane struck?

And isn't it just like us humans to cry out for deliverance after the fact, rather than turning to Him when times are good?

From earliest recorded history the human story seems to ebb and flow between times of plenty when we drift away from God to times of anguish and need when we turn back and seek a relationship with Him. Perhaps what we need is not so much a day of prayer but a whole season of fasting and praying and seeking His opinion about our lives and what we should be doing with them.

We're quickly approaching a special time in the Hebrew calendar. Every fall there are a series of festivals that are jam-packed into a few weeks. You can read about them in Leviticus 23 or Deuteronomy 16. Some people mistakenly think they are obsolete harvest festivals of a primitive people trying to stay right with the God they created in their minds.

But if we really look at the meaning stitched into the fabric of these festivals, we see that, on the contrary, they are designed by God to help His people regain the focus on Him that we may have lost throughout the busy, warm, plentiful summer.

One of those High Holy Days is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On this day we are commanded to "afflict our souls." That means to fast. From sundown to sundown one does not eat or drink (except as required due to ill health). Special prayers are offered, no distracting work is allowed, and our entire focus is centered upon the Lord of Hosts.

Why fast? The purpose of a fast is never to coerce God to agree with us. The purpose of a fast is to put our hearts into a position where we can hear and agree with Him.

What would happen if, just once, all the believers in our nation really united in a fast before Him? What would change if, just once, we all stood silent and humbled and really listened to what He wants to say to us?

I'm not sure we're ready for that. After all, we might not like what we'd hear.