

A Day of Fasting & Prayer

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On the last Wednesday of every month we will be calling the Church to a day of Fasting & Prayer. We will be praying individually through the day, and then gather together in the evening for corporate prayer.

What is fasting?

Fasting is an intentional period of intense spiritual focus, where we abstain from food, drink and other comforts in order to focus our attention on God.

Essentially, when we fast, we live out the important truth that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The context of this passage is that Jesus had been fasting for 40 days (not something we are recommending!), and is confronted with temptation by the devil.

This shows us the intensity of the spiritual practice of fasting, but also clearly gives us a focus for fasting: Fasting is Feasting. It is no longer a feasting on the material concerns

of the world, but feasting on Jesus himself.

It is important that we realise that fasting is not just extreme asceticism, the belief that we can wrestle favours from God by punishing ourselves! It is simply a physical expression of a spiritual longing. We don't fast in order to get God's attention, we fast so that God gets our attention!

We have just learned of the danger of spiritual mediocrity from Ezra 5. Fasting is one of the ways we counteract that danger, by honestly declaring that our lives with God are not where we want them to be, and we refuse to settle for the status quo.

Why fast now?

This time of Coronavirus has been disruptive on so many levels in our lives. We believe that God uses times of great disruption in order to get our attention, and to accelerate his work of transformation in us. Thus while the circumstances around can be devastating, God can be doing a work of great renewal on the inside. Therefore there has perhaps never been a more important time to seek God intentionally through prayer and fasting than right now!

Generally, one would fast for one of the following reasons:

- Revival for the Church
- Personal Spiritual Renewal
- Guidance from God
- For peace when faced with threat

In this peculiar time in history all of these reasons come to the fore! This difficult season in our lives could be the catalyst for personal renewal, and corporate revival.

How do I fast?

There are many examples of fasting in the Bible. In fact a list of people who fasted becomes a list of the ‘who's who’ in the Bible:

- Moses fasted for forty days before receiving the commands of God.
- Elijah fasted for forty days on his journey to mount Horeb to meet with God.
- David fasted for seven days as he prayed for his sick son.
- Ezra fasted as he mourned the sin of his community.
- Esther fasted for the safety of her people.
- Daniel fasted for twenty-one days as he sought clarity on a vision from God.
- The apostle Paul fasted after his radical encounter with Jesus.
- The leaders of the church in

Antioch fasted before sending out missionaries, and as they prepared to appoint new leaders.

- Jesus spent the first forty days of his rather short earthly ministry in prayer and fasting, and taught that fasting was not just a past reality but also a future commitment for his followers.

However, while the Bible abounds in significant examples of people fasting, it doesn't prescribe any one particular way to fast. Jesus in particular deals with the motives of fasting, not the mechanics. This is important for us, as our emphasis must be exactly the same: focused on our motives and not getting tangled in any exact 'formula'.

However, based on the examples above we say that in general there are four types of fasting:

1. MAJOR FAST

- Abstaining from any food or drink (except water) for 24hrs, or longer. We don't recommend this for people starting out with fasting.

2. MINOR FAST

- Abstaining from food and drink (except water) for some time during the day. The most common form is a sunrise - sunset fast, where nothing is eaten in daylight hours.

3. PARTIAL FAST

- In this fast, certain items of food or drink are avoided, either for one day or longer. For many a simple fast from hot beverages (like coffee) is a serious start in learning to fast!
- Another common example of this is called a 'Daniel fast', based on the story of Daniel abstaining from any delicacies for three weeks (Daniel 10:2-3), or any meat for ten days (Daniel 1:8-12)

4. SOUL FAST

- This more modest fast involves abstaining from other material items, besides food. This could be abstaining from media (TV, social media etc), spending or any

other material habit that we have become dependent upon for a limited period of time.

Since our Prayer & Fasting time covers the duration of just one day, we suggest the minor fast, abstaining from food and drink (besides water) from sunrise to sunset. If you would like to increase the intensity, you can abstain from eating dinner until after our prayer meeting.

However if you're very new to fasting, or have a medical condition that may prevent you from abstaining from food, then consider the partial or soul fast.

In addition, be sure to be focused on prayer for the duration of your fast! Fasting will provide a clarity and intensity of prayer that is hard to obtain outside of fasting.

We suggest dividing up your day of Fasting & Prayer by focusing your prayers on the following:

1. MORNING:

Pray for your own personal Spiritual Renewal. This could include confession, praise, request for specific guidance, or just a general longing for more of God.

2. AFTERNOON:

Pray for corporate revival in our Church, and the Church around the world.

3. EVENING:

Pray for the effects of Coronavirus on our country, and the world.

At our corporate prayer meeting we will focus on intercessory prayer for our country, and for each other.

Conclusion: The Great Invitation

When Jesus taught about fasting he mentioned our 'reward' (Matthew 6:16-18). This reward is very different from a worldly reward (which is his point in verse 16), but rather a more heavenly reward, certainly one that involves

more of Jesus in our lives!

Isn't this what we, and what the world, most desperately needs at this time?

In closing, consider these words written by A.W. Tozer in his book 'The pursuit of God'. These words written back in 1948 ring as true today as they did then:

'In this hour of all-but-universal darkness, one cheering gleam appears: within the fold of conservative Christianity there are to be found increasing numbers of persons whose religious lives are marked by a growing hunger after God Himself.

They are eager for spiritual realities and will not be put off with words, nor will they be content with correct 'interpretations' of truth. They are athirst for God, and they will not be satisfied till they have drunk deep at the Fountain of Living Water.

This is the only real harbinger of revival which I have been able to detect anywhere on the religious horizon. It may be the cloud the size of a man's hand for which a few saints here and there have been looking. It can result in a resurrection of life for many souls and a recapture of that radiant wonder which should accompany faith in Christ, that wonder which has all but fled the Church of God in our day.'

For Further Reading:

- 'Revival Starts Here' (Dave Clayton) 2018
- 'A Hunger for God' (John Piper) 2016
- 'Habits of Grace' (David Mathis) 2016
- 'The Life You've Always Wanted' (John Ortberg) 2006