

"...so that your ways may be known on earth
, your salvation among all nations"

PRAYER + FASTING

Journal

I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.

Jeremiah 24:7

Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

Acts 2:8

Introduction:

Sometimes it seems there specific times in our lives when God is trying to get our attention. What if God is trying to get your attention? Are you in a place where you can hear His voice? What if God is calling your name? What if God is trying to turn your life in His direction? What if He is trying to take our Church on a journey that we never thought possible? In these 21 days of prayer and fasting, it is not only possible but also probable that God will speak into our lives and into the life of our Church to use this time as a turning point in the direction of our church.

This annual season of prayer and fasting will be aided and accompanied by several tools in this document, including: a Biblical guide to fasting, different fasting options, and a prayer guide for each of the 21 days that includes a central Biblical passage, a brief devotional thought, reflection questions, and a prayer and journaling section.

The purpose of these 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting is to seek God as He leads us into the future and as He guides us into where He wants us to be and what He wants us to do. One thing we always say at Connection is that we believe that the Local Church is God's plan A for reaching the world and our greatest desire is to be directly in the middle of His plan.

Our prayer is that God would move our hearts as a family to deepen our roots in this body, in this community and globally. That we would be led to invest in the mission and vision He is putting before us to see this generation reached with the hope of the Gospel! We believe that our mission of connecting people to a growing relationship with Jesus happens more than just on a Sunday morning and it will take all of us working together to accomplish it.

We eagerly wait for what the Lord will do in us and through us during these 21 days that we are setting aside to seek His face and His plan for our body, our city and our world.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.

// Ephesians 1:17-19a //

Fasting guide

What does the Bible teach about fasting?

Biblical fasting involves abstaining from eating (and/or drinking) for spiritual purposes.

In the Old Testament, Israel celebrated certain annual fasts, the most prominent being the Day of Atonement. There were also occasional fasts tied to specific historical events, sometimes individual and sometimes corporate. Here are a few of the occasions for fasting: at a time of grief (I Sam. 31:13; Nehemiah 1:4), at a time of repentance (I Sam 7:6; I Kings 21:27), as an expression of humility (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10), and as an expression of a need for God's guidance and help. What all of these fasts share in common is that they were an expression of dependence on God and a turning back to Him.

Several New Testament passages give us insight about fasting.

Fasting teaches us that it's God's Word that truly nourishes us:

Matthew 4:1-4 records the only example of Jesus fasting, just prior to His being tempted in the wilderness. He faced temptation with these words, "*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*" Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3-5 which talks about the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness, depending daily on manna to sustain them. He says that God humbled them and let them be hungry in order to teach them to depend on God's Word to sustain them. By His example of fasting, Jesus reminds us that food alone can't sustain us. We need to be nourished by God's Word.

Fasting teaches us that doing God's will sustains us:

John 4:31-35 records Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. When the disciples return, they encourage Jesus to eat. He responds by saying, "*I have food to eat that you know nothing about.*" Then He adds, "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*" Again, Jesus reminds us that food alone is not enough. We are sustained by doing God's will.

Fasting teaches us that Jesus Himself sustains us:

In John 6:48-50 Jesus says, "*I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.*" We see this pictured symbolically in the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper. Jesus is the source of eternal life. Fasting is literally feasting on Jesus.

Jesus assumed that fasting would be a part of His disciple's spiritual life. In Matthew 6:16-18, He says, "*When you fast,*" not "*if you fast.*" He warns us not to fast to impress people, but to be near to the heart of God.

What is the purpose of fasting?

Fasting is designed to intensify our dependence on God by weakening our dependence on food and other things. How does it do that?

Fasting reveals and heals our dependence on food (and other things) to fill the discomfort caused by low self-esteem, unsatisfying work, unloving relationships, uncontrollable circumstances, etc. It removes the false peace that comes from the pleasure of eating or filling our schedules with busy work or useless entertainment.

Richard Foster says, “More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David writes, “*I humbled my soul with fasting*” (Psalm 69:10). Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear—if they are within us, they will surface during fasting.”

Fasting teaches us that we can go without getting what we want and still survive.

Fasting can free us from having to “get” what we want. Therefore, fasting can teach moderation or self-control, not only in relation to food, but in other areas as well. It teaches contentment. (1 Timothy 6:6)

Fasting expresses and deepens our hunger for God.

Fasting reminds us that we are sustained “*by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matt. 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us. In Christ, “*All things hold together*” (Colossians 1:17). Therefore, in our experiences of fasting, we are abstaining from food or other activities and feasting on God’s Word and God’s presence.

Fasting must always, first and foremost, center on God. It must be about Him.

Step 1: clarify the purpose of your fast

As a church, we are fasting to gain perspective on where God is leading us and how we can better position ourselves to honor Him with everything we do. We are seeking God’s heart for clear direction going into a new year and for Him to receive glory in everything we strive to accomplish. Our heart is that you would join us in endeavoring to seek God’s heart for our body.

Why are you fasting? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer and fasting. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically. Fasting is God-led and God-initiated. That means that He fuels a desire to fast and pray. He loves it when we fast.

Step 2: specify the kind of fast you will do

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast. (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14,15) For Him it was a matter of when believers would fast, not if they would do it. Before you fast, decide the following up front:

- How long you will fast - one meal, one day, one week, several weeks, certain days (beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts)?
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake - discussed in the *Types of Fasts* section below.
- What physical or social activities you will restrict
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God’s Word Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life’s pressures tempt you to abandon it.

Step 3: prepare your heart, mind, and body for fasting

Fasting is not a spur-of-the-moment thing. It is planned. We must prepare. The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Un-confessed sin can hinder your prayers. There are several things you can do to prepare your heart

- Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.
- Do not rush into your fast. Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high fat and sugary foods. Eating raw fruit and vegetables prior to your fast is helpful. Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer.
- Prepare your heart and mind: Remember that God is your Father and He loves you and is for you.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3,4). Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ (Romans 12:1, 2). Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others. (Psalm 48:9,10; 103:1-8, 11-13)
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. (Hebrews 11:6)
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit. (Galatians 5:16,17)
- Finally, and of deep importance, Jesus instructs us in Matthew to not let others know about your fasting. The strict details of your fast should not be something you constantly talk about to others. It should remain between you and God.

Types of Fasts

Now that we have explored the Old and New Testament teaching and instruction on fasting, we can proceed to discuss specific kinds of fasts. Let's begin with the helpful words of Richard Foster in, *Celebration of Discipline*:

"As with all the Disciplines, a progression should be observed; it is wise to learn to walk well before we try to run."

Biblical fasting almost always concerns food. Since the purpose of fasting, as we saw above, is to focus on God, to humble ourselves and to remind ourselves that we are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, then the task in fasting is connecting our "going without" to "hungering for God." This takes time, focus and prayer. Please do not expect to be an "expert" at fasting right away. Fasting is a discipline that can take a very long time to understand well. Also, do not let this fact deter you or intimidate you.

Fasting is not unlike the writings in scripture. It is simple enough for a youth to understand and enjoy, and yet deep enough for the scholar to devote his/her entire life to.

Abstaining from certain types of foods (*meat, sweets, etc.*) - Daniel 10:3

This type is a good one for beginners to fasting or those with health needs and special or restrictive diets.

Choose to abstain from something like breads, sweets, sodas, coffee, or even red meat. Perhaps spend some time reading through Daniel's fast in Daniel chapter 1 and chapter 10. Stick to only fruits and vegetables like he did or something similar.

Determine the timing and duration of your fast and begin. You may choose to go without this specific type of food on only certain days like Fridays, or you may go without during the weekdays only or perhaps every day. Finally, choose the duration of your fast. This fast is 21 days (October 25th – November 14th) but that does not mean you must go without for all of the 21 days. Determine the timing and duration ahead of time and stick to it. Pray through this entire process.

Abstaining from all food - Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9

This kind of fast is more difficult but can be broken up by timing and duration. This seems to be the most prevalent of the fasts we see in the Bible. It is also the most intimidating, but refuse to let it scare you. Fasting from all food is not scary if you determine beforehand when you will do so and for how long. Here are some ideas.

- Start slowly. Begin with fasting for only a part of a day (lunch, or lunch and dinner). Do this for one day a week, or perhaps three days a week. You determine the timing and duration. Take a step of faith. Fasting is risky and involves our faith.
- Next, try fasting from food but not beverages. This means that according to your timing and duration, you would not eat any solid foods but only water, juices, smoothies, or perhaps simple soup broths.
- Do this for the first one or two weeks. Devote the time that you normally would eat to Scripture reading and prayer. Focus on Jesus' statements about food.
- Next, try a 24-hour fast. This means that you get up and eat a good breakfast and drink only water or juice until the following breakfast the next day. Set aside specific time, during normal meal times if possible, to pray and seek God.
- Finally, you may progress to a two or three day fast. For some, progression may lead to a multi-day, even multi-week fast. But remember the purpose of your fast.

Abstaining from entertainment - Daniel 6:18

The king's voluntary "fasting" from entertainment in the time of Daniel helps us further understand yet another type of fast. Fasting from entertainment can be particularly helpful and accessible to kids and teens.

Think of abstaining from television, mobile devices, video games, music, or texting, etc. for the duration of your fast. This can be a very powerful decision even as a supplement to food fasts.

Choosing your fasting plan is a very personal decision. We are all at different places in our walk with God and our spirituality should never be a cause for comparison or competition. There is nothing more "inherently spiritual" about one type of fast as opposed to another. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but know your body, know your options, and most importantly, seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. It's also important to not let what you eat or do not eat become the focus of your fast. This is a time to disconnect enough with your regular patterns and habits in order to connect more closely to God.

If you do not choose to fast, or no matter what kind of fast you choose, seek God with us in prayer.

About this Journal:

The purpose of this journal is to help you process each day of your fast. It will also help direct you in your times of prayer and reflection. The days are divided up into scripture for you to read through, a short devotional, some reflection questions and a place to journal your thoughts. There will be extra space at the end of each 7 days for you to continue journaling if you run out of space on the provided lines for a specific day.

This journal will be divided up into 3 sections. The themes will be inward focus, outward focus and a mission/vision focus.

Remember that this is a tool and should not be used in lieu of the Bible. As you fast, dig into scripture to find encouragement, motivation and wisdom to **sustain** you as you progress. There will be times as you read where you are asked to read a certain passage from scripture. Don't just read past these references, read them for context, and read them to allow the Holy Spirit to bring wisdom and understanding to your heart as you read.

FOCUS INWARD

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

Psalm 46:10

During these first 7 days we ask that you begin to turn inward and allow God to point out things in your heart and life that He is calling you to lay down or to bring to Him in surrender. Use this time to self evaluate. In life, it is so easy for us to become self-deceived. We may think we are in one place spiritually, but in reality we may have drifted far from the places that we think we are. Take these 7 days and come before the Lord in humble surrender and ask Him to reveal to you where you are, and where He wants to take you. You will be amazed at the answer.

FOCUS OUTWARD

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Philippians 2:3-4

During these next 7 days, begin to turn your focus outward and ask God to guide you individually and guide us corporately as a Church. That He would begin to cultivate a heart for those outside of the church. We will begin to see that God's hearts is for all people to be reconnected to Him and every follower of Jesus has a part to play in that plan. So many times in our faith we get so focused on what's right in front of us that we miss the bigger picture that God is trying to show us. Take these next 7 days and come before God and ask Him to begin to show you where He's working around you and then begin to get involved in His work that He's already doing all around you.

Day 13, November 6:

Scripture:

1 Samuel 16:7b: The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Proverbs 4:23: Above all else, guard your heart. For EVERYTHING you do flows from it.

Matthew 5:8: Blessed are the PURE in heart, for they will see God.

Reflect:

- Do you value integrity?
- Why does God choose to look at the heart of a person?
- How might God use your integrity to impact the people around you?

Journal: What is God revealing to you?

Prayer: What is your response to Him?

FOCUS ON THE MISSION & VISION

“Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction.”

Proverbs 29:18

There’s no doubt about it. We are better together. As the Church, God has empowered us to reach the world with the hope that is found in the Gospel message! What is your part in the larger mission and vision God has given our body? Like Abraham, is it to go to a foreign land that He will show you to share the Gospel with a people who have never heard? Or is it to stay here to defend the Gospel in a culture that doesn’t see God as important or even real? Whatever He is calling you to; we know from scripture that He is calling you there through the context of the Local Church. Spend these last 7 days praying for our Church Leadership. Also spend time praying that God would continue to pour a fresh mission and vision into our body as we seek to honor and follow Him into the future. We have seen God move in some incredible ways over the course of this year but He’s not done with us. Let’s ask Him to show us what’s next!

Day 15, November 8:

Scripture:

Psalm 78:24: He rained down manna for the people to eat; he gave them the grain of heaven.

Habakkuk 2:1: I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me.

Proverbs 29:18: Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction.

Reflect:

- Why is it important for the Local Church to be rallied together around the mission and vision God has given?
- Is there anything in your heart holding you back from jumping “***all in***” with the mission and vision God has given our Church? What will it take for you to jump all in?

Journal: What is God revealing to you?

Prayer: What is your response to Him?

Day 19, November 12:

Scripture:

2 Timothy 2:15: Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Proverbs 11:14: Where there is no guidance, a people fall, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13: Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

Reflect:

- Do you pray for the leadership of the Church? If not stop for a moment and pray for our Connect Group Leaders, the staff and the Elders that will soon be leading our body.
- How can you personally take ownership in the mission and vision God is leading our Church into?

Journal: What is God revealing to you?

Prayer: What is your response to Him?

Day 20, November 13:

Scripture:

Psalm 2:8: Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

Acts 1:8: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

1 Chronicles 16:24: Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples.

Reflect:

- Throughout scripture God has given a clear mission to His people; to spread His glory throughout the earth. Have you ever given thought to where you and your family might fit into this mission?
- Have you ever prayed an open ended prayer asking God to show you where He would have you go with not limits on His answer? Have you ever really put your “yes” on the table and told God to use you however HE wanted to, then listened?

Journal: What is God revealing to you?

Prayer: What is your response to Him?

You made it! As we conclude our 21 days of prayer and fasting, it is important to ask, “*Now what?*” How can you remain committed to seeking Him? Very simply, decide to love God and seek Him. That’s right, **decide**. Look for opportunities to spend time with Him and to learn from Him. Daily. Decide to chase after Him and not the things of this life that quickly distract us from Him. Daily. Give Him your whole heart. Daily. Look for Him in each day, through people, circumstances, the Bible, and creation. Daily. It will take intention, effort, desire, and time. But it will be so worth it as your relationship with Him grows, develops, and you fall more and more in love with Him. Hebrews 11:6 says that God will reward those who earnestly seek Him. Will you continue to earnestly seek after the God of this universe who loves you completely and desires to walk with you daily? The reward will be great because God is great!

We believe, that as we work together to see God glorified in our homes, in our communities and in the world, that **the BEST IS ALWAYS YET TO COME!**

