

PRAYER & FASTING

3 Days of Seeking the Lord

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible.

At First Baptist Church, we like to begin each year with a season of prayer and fasting. We want to be a church that worships and ministers in the power of the Holy Spirit, not in the power of the flesh. Our desire is to see the saving, guiding, intervening, delivering, providing, enabling, protective hand of God upon our lives, our families, and our church. When we fast, we put ourselves in a position to experience just that.

Fasting is one of those spiritual disciplines we don't hear much about. We often hear sermons on praying, giving, serving, witnessing, and loving. But we don't hear as much about fasting.

Jesus assumed that fasting would be a normal part of the Christian's life. In consecutive verses in the Sermon on the Mount, He used the phrase, "When you fast..." (Matthew 6:16-17). He didn't say, "**If** you fast..." He said, "**When** you fast..." In the same sermon, He said, "When you do a charitable deed..." (Matthew 6:2). And, "When you pray..." (Matthew 6:6). Just as praying and giving

are normal and natural parts of the believer's life, Jesus assumed that fasting would be as well.

So what is fasting? Well, in the Bible it is clear that **fasting is going without food for a specified amount of time for spiritual reasons.** Notice that fasting is not just going without food. That is called dieting or even starving. Fasting is going without food **for spiritual reasons.** When a person fasts, he is denying himself the benefits of food so that he may devote himself more fully to God.

The Bible is filled with examples of people who fasted. Moses fasted. Elijah fasted. David fasted. Daniel fasted. Esther fasted. Jeremiah fasted. Jesus fasted. Paul fasted. On certain occasions, entire nations fasted. And every time anybody fasted, God honored it. God has promised, "Those who honor Me I will honor" (I Samuel 2:30). There is something about fasting that honors God. As a result, there is something about fasting that God always honors.

Throughout the Bible, we find people fasting for different reasons. Moses fasted for forty days so he could hear from God more clearly. As a result of Moses' time of fasting, God gave him the **Ten Commandments** (see Exodus 34:28). Daniel fasted from certain foods for ten days so "he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies" (Daniel 1:8). At the end of those days, he appeared "better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies" (Daniel 1:15). Esther fasted for three days when she learned of an evil plot to destroy the Jews (see Esther 4:13-17). As a result, God preserved the Jews and destroyed their enemies. Nehemiah fasted when he was given the seemingly impossible assignment of rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 1:4). God honored that fast by enabling Nehemiah and his men to rebuild the walls in only fifty-two days (see Nehemiah 6:15). Jesus fasted for forty days before He began His public ministry (see Matthew 4:2). After that fast, He was able to resist the temptations of the devil (see Matthew 4:3-11). The early church fasted and prayed,

seeking the will of God. In response to their time of fasting, God called Barnabas and Paul to become missionaries thus expediting the spread of the gospel (see Acts 13:2). The people living in Nineveh fasted as an expression of sorrow over their sin (see Jonah 3:5). As a result of their fasting, God sent a revival to their city (see Jonah 3:10).

It is clear that God has always honored fasting. Do you need a clear word from God? Are you facing an impossible situation? Is something or someone threatening to destroy your future? Do you need to know God's will about something? Are you beginning a new season of your life? Do you long for God to send a revival to your life, your family, our church, and our nation? If you answered, "Yes!" to any of those questions, I have another question for you. **Have you ever considered fasting?** If you haven't, would you be willing to consider it now?

When we fast, we enter into a deeper awareness of the presence of God. When we fast, our hearts become more sensitive

to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. When we fast, we are able to hear the voice of God with greater clarity. When we fast, we place ourselves in a position to experience miracles. When we fast, our bodies actually become healthier. When we fast, we see things happen in our lives that would otherwise not happen. And when we fast, doors that were previously closed begin to open supernaturally.

In the Bible, we read about different types of fasts. Moses did what is called *an absolute fast*. For forty days, he had no food and no water. He was under the direct command of God to do such a fast, and unless God audibly gives that command today, no one should attempt an absolute fast. Jesus did what is called *a normal fast*. For forty days, He had no food, but He did drink water. Daniel did what is called *a partial fast*. For ten days, he only ate vegetables and drank water. Obviously, there are different ways to fast.

Unless you are in excellent health and on no medication, you should not do any type of “food fast” for any amount of time

without first consulting your physician. If he gives you the go ahead, and if you feel led to fast, you should determine the type of fast you will do. Will it be a fast of one meal, one day, three days, seven days, ten days, twenty-one days, or forty days? Will it be a certain type of “food fast” or another type of fast altogether?

In the Bible, we read of people fasting from food, and that is obviously still a viable type of fasting in our day. But we also recognize that God may lead us to fast from things other than food. He may lead us to fast from television, computer games, music, the telephone, or facebook.

Remember, the purpose of fasting is to take your focus **off of something** so you can focus more clearly on God. Historically, that “**something**” has been food. But God may reveal to you that there is another “**something**” that needs to be sacrificed on the altar and surrendered to Him.

At First Baptist Church, we set aside three days in January for a time of prayer

and fasting. We do this in January because January is the first month of the year, and we always want to give God the first part of everything. We give God the first part of our money. And we want to give God the first part of our time as well. Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). As we give God three days in January, we know that He will honor that throughout the year. We are putting some seed in the ground. And we are confident that a harvest will come.

During these three days, we will not be fasting from food, although you certainly may do that if God so leads. You may want to fast one meal a day. You may want to fast from food for one of the three days. You may want to fast from food for the entire three days. But that is not the focus of this fast. We are asking all of our members to **fast from the media** for three days. Obviously, if you have to use your computer and telephone to do your job or fulfill your school or family responsibilities, we are not asking you to fast from that. But we are asking you to fast from the **personal**

use of your computer, including the internet, e-mail, and computer games. We are also asking you to fast from the **personal use** of the telephone, and all social media including facebook, twitter, and texting. You may certainly use these devices to stay in touch with family members, but give your friends a three-day break! In addition, we are asking you to fast from the television, radio, and movies. The average person spends multiple hours a day engaged in these activities. For three days, we are asking you to give them up so that you may more clearly focus on God.

The Bible says, “The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Habakkuk 2:20). During these three days, we will spend a significant amount of time in silence before the Lord. Most of us don’t like silence. When we get into our cars, we turn on our radios. When we get home in the evening, we turn on our televisions. But during these three days, we are going to change those habits. And as we block out the excess noise from the media, we will be able to hear from God more clearly.

Each day of our “media fast” will have a different emphasis. On the first day, we will be praying for ourselves. On the second day, we will be praying for our families. On the third day, we will be praying for our church. Remember, the whole idea behind any kind of fasting is that we can spend the time we would have spent doing other things on God. If you normally listen to talk radio on your commute to and from work, spend that travel time listening to God instead. If you normally watch television for an hour every night before you go to bed, spend that hour in prayer. If you normally watch television all day, spend the whole day in prayer!

In an attempt to provide some structure for your prayer time, a prayer guide has been prepared. Let this guide help you get started, but let the Holy Spirit direct your mind and your heart as you come before the Father in prayer. I encourage you to use your Bible along with the prayer guide as you pray. You will find a good number of Bible verses in the daily prayer guide. I encourage you to look them up in your Bible and underline them as you read them

each day. God's Word and prayer always go together.

My prayer is that God would speak to your heart during these three days. May He do supernatural things in your life, in the life of your family, and in the life of our church. And may this year be the best year you have ever had. May you experience the blessings of God throughout the year because you were willing to make a sacrifice for Him at the beginning of the year!

Prayer Guide

Day #1—Praying for Myself

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).

It is always wise to begin our prayer time by asking God to search our hearts. Spend thirty minutes or so letting these

“prayer-starters” guide your prayer time today.

- Ask God to reveal any and all sin in your life (sins of the flesh, sins of the mind, sins of unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, jealousy, etc.).
- As the Holy Spirit brings certain sins to mind, confess them to the Father and receive His forgiveness (see I John 1:7, 9).
- Now that you are emptied of sin, ask God to fill you with His Spirit (see Ephesians 5:18).
- Ask Him for wisdom for the new year (see James 1:5).
- Ask Him to guide your steps this year (see Psalm 37:23).

- Ask Him to fulfill His purpose and His plan for your life this year (see Jeremiah 29:11 and Psalm 138:8).
- Thank Him in advance that everything that happens this year will ultimately work out for your good and for His glory (see Romans 8:28).
- Ask God to supernaturally bless your finances this year. If you are not already a “tither” (one who gives 10% of his or her income to God), I encourage you to make a commitment now to become one. In addition, ask God what “extra gifts” He might want you to give to the church or to others who have special needs. Be a giver. And be wise. Set a budget, and stick to it throughout the year. Begin this year by honoring and trusting God with your money. And then watch what

He will do in your life as you obey Him in this way (see Luke 6:38 and Malachi 3:10).

- Pray for His protection over your life throughout the year (see Psalm 91:11).

Day #2—Praying for My Family

“I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers” (Philemon 4).

One of the greatest things you can do is to pray for your family. Today, we will be praying specifically for the members of our families. This includes our spouse, children, grandchildren, parents, brothers, sisters, etc.

- Ask God to reveal to your family members any sin in their lives that would prevent them from honoring Him. Ask God to bring them to

genuine repentance (see II Corinthians 7:9-10).

- Ask God to give your family members a heart for Him (see Acts 13:22).
- Ask God to help your family members to walk uprightly (see Psalm 84:11).
- Ask God to fill your family members with the knowledge of His will for their lives (see Colossians 1:9-10).
- Ask God to bring about “divine connections” in the lives of your family members (see Proverbs 16:9).
- Ask God to give your family members the dual blessings of grace and peace (see Philemon 3).

- Ask God to supernaturally bless the finances of your family members this year. Ask God to lead them to tithe if they don't do so already (see Proverbs 3:9-10).
- Ask God to protect your family and keep them safe throughout the year (see Psalm 91:11).

Day #3—Praying for My Church

“I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

These are exciting days in the life of First Baptist Church in Pasadena! The Spirit of the Lord is here. The love of God is here. The presence of Jesus is here. Our desire is to know Him and to make Him known. Let's pray that God would be honored and that Jesus would be magnified in all that we do.

- Pray that Jesus would be the sole focus of our church (see Matthew 17:8).
- Pray for God to send a revival to our church (see II Chronicles 7:14).
- Pray for our members to grow in their relationship with the Lord. Pray that we will become spiritually mature (see I Peter 2:2).
- Pray for our members to develop a passion to see people saved (see Matthew 28:18-20).
- Pray for the unsaved and unchurched in our community to be drawn to our church by the power of the Holy Spirit (see John 12:32).
- Pray for a spirit of unity and love in our church family (see John 13:35).

- Pray that God will meet all of our needs as a church family (see Philippians 4:19).
- Ask God to supernaturally bless the finances of our church this year. Ask Him to supernaturally provide the resources we need. Ask Him to lead all of our members to faithfully tithe (see Malachi 3:8-12).
- Pray for God's protection to be upon our church (see Psalm 91:11).