

FASTING

Dear Church,

As we begin our Next Step series, the leadership of the church really believes this can be a very strategic year for our church both personally and corporately. We have set aside November 2nd through November 16th as a time of prayer and Fasting. As you pray about your involvement, we have put this document together for your education and preparation. Because this time period is only two weeks and because the fast is a Daniel Fast (fruit, vegetables and grains) I pray that many of will participate with the church family in this timely spiritual journey. Remember, fasting is not just about food, but about our focus. May God bless you and lead you according to His perfect will!

I love you!
Pastor Alex

In the Bible, we observe the people of God fasting for a variety of reasons:

- They were facing a crisis.
- They were seeking God's protection and deliverance.
- They had been called to repentance and renewal.
- They were asking God for guidance.
- They were humbling themselves in worship.

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:16-18

This passage comes right in the middle of Jesus' teaching on prayer and giving in Matthew 6. In this sermon, Jesus uses phrases like: "When you give" (v. 2), "When you pray" (v. 5), and "When you fast" (v. 16). Jesus assumes that his audience will give, will pray, and will fast. Fasting is not an option. It is not an oddity. Fasting, according to Jesus, is a given.

WHY FAST?

Fasting gives you more time for prayer. You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer for what God wants to do among us during this Campaign. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer.

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'. So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."

Acts 13:2-3

Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something. It shows you mean business with God – that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.

"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord."

Joel 1:14

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."

Joel 2:12

Fasting releases God's supernatural power. It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among us. United prayer and fasting has always been used by God to deal a decisive blow to the enemy!

"So we fasted and prayed to God about this, and He answered our prayer."

Ezra 8:23

"God says, 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?'"

Isaiah 58:6

- ❖ Fasting is not so much about food as it is about focus.
- ❖ Fasting is not so much about saying no to the body as it is about saying yes to the Spirit.
- ❖ Fasting is not about doing without, it is about looking within.
- ❖ Fasting is an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul.

When John Wesley spoke of fasting, he said "First, let it be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in Heaven."

When we decide to set aside time to fast, here is what I think would please the heart of God. Let's talk about this time of spiritual discipline not as a day of fasting, but a day of feasting on Jesus.

There is an orphanage in India where the staff and the children all fast every Friday. And you know what they call it? They call it their day of feasting on Jesus. And do you know what they do during their day of feasting? They pray for the American church. Now, that is humbling.

MAKING YOUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE THE BEST IT CAN BE:

Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. Be devoted in seeking God, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. When possible read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. If you should awaken in the night, pray and meditate on Him. This may be a good time to practice "praying without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you realize the enemy is trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen you in the face of difficulties and temptations. If you fail, don't give in to condemnation. The too fast or not too fast dilemma can be a major tool of the enemy. Even though you may fail several times, God always extends grace.

Prepare for opposition from directions you would least expect it. During your fast, donuts may appear in the class room or office break room. Your spouse or your mom may suddenly be inspired to cook your favorite meals. Press through. You may feel more tension at home – fasts are just as difficult for those around you as they are for you. Satan tempted Jesus on the fast, and we must expect the same. Discouragement may come like a flood, but recognize the source and take your stand in the victory of Jesus Christ.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is a powerful Christian discipline and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His will. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

Don't get so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget to reverence and praise God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, your actions, your motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and the Holy Spirit are at the center of our attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the results of a fast. Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience". Some who have completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known, but others who have honestly sought His will report no particular outward results at all. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally, and spiritually grueling, but they knew they had been called by God to fast, and they completed the fast unto Him as an act of worship.

Our motive in fasting is to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When our motives are right, God will honor our seeking hearts and bless our time with Him in a very special way.

TWO CAUTIONS:

1. Remember that fasting is not “earning” an answer to prayer. God cannot be blackmailed by human effort. God wants to answer our prayers and He answers out of grace. Fasting simply prepares us for God’s answer.
2. Fast only if your health allows it at this time. If you are able **only** to do a partial fast - do it in faith and God will honor your intentions.

Maintaining Nutritional Balance:

There are many types of fasts, and the option you choose depends upon your health, the length of the fast, and your preference:

- A Water Fast – means to abstain from all food and juices
- A Partial Fast – means to eliminate certain foods or specific meals
- A “Juice” Fast – means to drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times

I know the prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be of concern to some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast.

If you are beginning a juice fast, there are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. You may find the following daily schedule helpful during your fast:

5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended, diluted in 50 percent distilled water if the fruit is acid. Orange, apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, grape, peach or other fruits are good.

10:30 a.m. - noon

Green vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts.

2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Make sure that it is not black tea or tea with a stimulant.

6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Broth from boiled potatoes, celery, and carrots (no salt).

We suggest that you do not drink milk because it is a pure food and therefore a violation of the fast. Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or cola. Caffeine is a stimulant, and has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This works both against the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to limit your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as needed - this especially applies to extended fasts. Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health, and on a juice fast. However, when on a water fast consult a fasting specialist or physician prior to exercising.

HOW TO FINISH YOUR FAST IN A HEALTHY WAY:

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread (except for "Melba toast"). Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils. Introduce them slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts which need to be ended with caution. Even a 3-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup - something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, and carrots - and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.