21

DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING

INTRODUCTION

Here is a simple guide for you to use during the next 21 days. To start off the new year right, we are encouraging you to grow in your walk with Christ in three areas: reading, praying and fasting. We desire for this to be helpful to you as you pursue Jesus daily.

WHEN

Morning or Evening: Jesus and the psalmists are often found praying in the morning (e.g., Psalm 5:3; Luke 4:42). The evenings less so, but choose a time when you are at your best and most attentive.

Lunch Break: If you have time during your workday to read during your lunch or another break, this might be a perfect way to spend your time.

Anytime: Some of you may have such busy lives that you need to fit it in whenever you can. This is totally normal. Make sure that whatever time you decide to read your Bible that you are in a place where you can focus and reflect on God's Word.

WHAT

Bible Reading Plan: Choose a plan and work the plan. If you miss some days, do not try to catch up. Simply pick up where you left off.

Journal: We recommend using a simple journal that's easy to use. You can find these at just about any store, especially book stores or online.

Pen: Take notes within your Bible or a journal.

HOW

Pray: Ask God to speak to you through his Word. And then expect God to speak. Your approach to God's Word will greatly impact your times of personal worship. Ask God to search your heart and to transform your life.

Read: Take notes as you read. If you have a question or have difficulty understanding something, use the study Bible notes to explore answers.

Journal: (try to limit it to one page per day to start): Start a new page and record the date and Scripture you read on the top line. Write down a verse or two that stood out to you. Stay focused on what God is saying through his Word that intersects with your everyday life. This is not about speculation, private interpretations or manipulating God's Word to say what you want it to say. This is about bringing Christ to your everyday life based on the truth of God's Word rightly interpreted.

50 DAY READING PLAN

THE STORY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

DAY 1	Luke 1-2	The Birth of Jesus
DAY 2	John 1:1-18	The Identity of Jesus
DAY 3	Luke 4:14-44	Jesus Begins His Ministry
DAY 4	Matthew 5-6	The Core of Jesus' Teachings
DAY 5	John 3	God's Love for the World
DAY 6	John 5	Jesus' Miracles and Authority
DAY 7	John 11	Jesus Power Over Death
DAY 8	John 15	The Christian Life Defined
DAY 9	Matthew 26-27	The Arrest and Crucifixion of Jesus
DAY 10	John 20, Luke 24	The Resurrection of Jesus and Hls Ascension
DAY 11	Acts 2	The Coming of the Holy Spirit
DAY 12	Acts 9, 16-19	The Conversion of Saul and His Ministry
DAY 13	Acts 26	Paul's Defense of the Christian Faith
DAY 14	Romans 3	Justification by Faith Alone
DAY 15	Romans 7-8	The Battle with Sin: Life in the Spirit
DAY 16	I Cor. 13, Eph. 5	The Way of Love
DAY 17	I Corinthians 15	The Power of Resurrection
DAY 18	Gal. 5, Eph. 4	Freedom and Unity in Christ
DAY 19	Ephesians 6	The Whole Armor of God
DAY 20	Philippians 1:18-2:18	Christ's Example
DAY 21	Colossians 3:1-17	Putting on the New Self
DAY 22	Hebrews 4:14-5:10	Jesus the Great High Priest
DAY 23	James 1, 1 Peter 1	Pure Religion
DAY 24	1 John 4:7-21	God is Love
DAY 25	Revelation 21-22	The New Heaven and Earth

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

DAY 26	Genesis 1:1-3:19	The Creation and Fall of Humanity
DAY 27	Genesis 12, 28:10-15, 32:22-28	God Calls a People His Own
DAY 28	Genesis 37, 39-46	The Story of Joseph
DAY 29	Exodus 1-6	The Call of Moses
DAY 30	Exodus 7-14	Moses and Pharaoh
DAY 31	Exodus 19-20:21	The 10 Commandments
DAY 32	Deut. 6:1-7:26, 11:13-21	Obedience Flows From Love
DAY 33	Judges 1:1-2:19	Cycles of Disobedience in God's People
DAY 34	1 Samuel 7-9, 15-17	The Fall of Saul and Rise of David
DAY 35	2 Samuel 5, 7-9, 11-12	Tales of David's Life
DAY 36	1 Kings 2-3, 6, 11	Solomon's Reign
DAY 37	1 Kings 11:9-14:31	The Dividing of the Kingdom
DAY 38	1 Kings 17-19, 2 Kings 2, 4	The Prophets Elijah and Elisha
DAY 39	Job 1-2, 38-42	How the Righteous Respond to Hard Times
DAY 40	Psalm 1, 23, 139	Psalms that Enrich Your Soul
DAY 41	Psalm 6, 22, 38, 51	Psalms for the Suffering and Sinful
DAY 42	Proverbs 3, 16, 5, 7 & 31	Wisdom for Everyday Life
DAY 43	Jeremiah 11-12, 31:31-40	The Covenant Broken and New Covenant
DAY 44	Jeremiah 23:1-6, Isaiah 9:6-7, 53	Jesus the Promised King
DAY 45	Jonah 1-4	The Story of Jonah
DAY 46	Daniel 1-3	Exile in Babylon
DAY 47	Daniel 4-6	The Life of Daniel
DAY 48	Nehemiah 1-2, 4-5, 8-9	The Rebuilding of Jerusalem
DAY 49	Esther 1-8	The Story of Esther
DAY 50	Malachi 1-4	Final Words on the Old Testament

DURING THE FAST, WE WOULD ASK YOU TO SEEK GOD ON THE FOLLOWING TOPICS—BOTH FOR YOURSELF AND FOR OUR CHURCH.

PRAYING

WEEK ONE: HEART FOR THE HOUSE

We believe our local church has an incredible opportunity to reach and serve our community. As we begin this new year, and move toward Easter, take time to pray for our congregation. Pray that we would be a place of love. Pray that no hypocrisy would slip into our church family. This is also an important time to pray over the church's resources. Pray that this new year would see financial stability and growth. We must all learn to be good stewards of the time, money, and resources that God has given us. We do all of this for his kingdom and his kingdom alone!

WEEK TWO: FILL THE HOUSE

We believe that we will see our House filled to capacity by Easter. For this to be a reality, we must be a people of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of men, women, and children so they might have new life in Christ. We believe this for our neighbors, co-workers, families, and friends. Pray for opportunities to invite people to Wake and for the opportunity to disciple someone this new year. We believe that a move of God only happens through the power of prayer from his children who have hearts postured in humility and repentance. Together, let's trust that God will fill the house!

WEEK THREE: WAKE UP

We refuse to be a people who fall into a spiritual slumber. In this new year seek God to spiritually awaken you in areas of your life that might be asleep. Together let's pray that God would wake us up to see the beauty of who He is so that anything in our lives that does not have value would fall away. Getting rid of worthless, sin-filled desires only happens when we truly delight in Christ. So wake up, enjoy God and be alert for the mission that God has called us to in our city and community.

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. All of these fasts express a common dependence on God. Several New Testament passages give us insight about fasting.

Fasting teaches us that God's Word 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 not of," then He adds "My food is to do the will of the Father." 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 fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it 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 feasting on Jesus. Jesus commanded 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.

FASTING IS DESIGNED TO INTENSIFY OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD BY WEAKENING OUR DEPENDENCE ON FOOD AND OTHER THINGS.

THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

Fasting reveals and heals our dependence on food (and other things) to fill the discomfort caused by low self-esteem, unfulfilling work, unloving relationships, uncontrollable circumstances, etc. It removes the false peace derived from the pleasure of eating. Richard Foster, in His Classic Celebration of Discipline, 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 we can go without getting what we want and survive.

Fasting can free us from having to have 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.

Richard Foster says, “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” (Col. 1: 17). Therefore, in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God and on Christ Himself. Fasting is feasting.” Fasting for other reasons, such as a “spiritual disguise” for losing weight, is an aberration to Biblical fasting. Fasting to even appear spiritual to others is more akin to the Pharisees than Jesus’ instructions. Fasting must always, first and foremost, center on God. It must be about Him.

Step 1: Clarify the Purpose of Your Fast

Why are you fasting? (For the purpose of the 21 Days, see above.) Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. 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 Nature of Your Fast

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

Step 3: Prepare Your Heart, Mind, and Body for Your Fast

Fasting is not a spur-of-the-moment thing. It is planned and we must prepare. The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Un-confessed sin can hinder your prayers. Here 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. Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast. 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 remembering 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, 1 O; 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 us begin with the helpful words of Richard Foster:

> **"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 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 in itself. 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 a beautifully written masterpiece of literature. It is simple enough for a youth to understand and enjoy, and yet magnificently rich enough for the scholar to devote his/her entire life to.

ABSTAINING FROM CERTAIN TYPES OF FOOD (MEAT, SWEETS, ETC.) - DANIEL 10:3

This type is a good first step for beginners to fast 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 Daniel, or try 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 community wide fast is 21 days but that does not mean you must go without for all of the 21 days. Determine the timing and duration ahead of time and pray through it.

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 eating 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 THINGS BESIDES FOOD (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 non-food items like entertainment can be particularly helpful and accessible for everyone.

Think of abstaining from television, social media, video games, all reading except the Bible, music, texting, etc. for the duration of your fast. This can be a very powerful decision even as a supplement to food fasts.

CONCLUSION

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.

NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF FAST YOU CHOOSE, AND EVEN IF YOU CHOOSE NOT TO FAST, PLEASE SEEK GOD IN PRAYER AND READING.

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