FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

OF MANASSAS

Guide to Prayer and Fasting

Moving the Kingdom Forward Through Faith

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ORIGINAL EDITION 2016

Prayer and Fasting is a spiritual discipline of the Christian, in which the Holy Spirit transforms and renews.

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Jesus teaches us that a life of faith requires both prayer and fasting.

Prayer grasps the power of heaven, fasting loosens the hold on earthly pleasure and the pull of the flesh.

Jesus fasted for strength to resist the devil. He taught His disciples that our Heavenly Father (Matthew 6:1-18) rewards fasting. Abstinence from foods and/or moderation in taking it in helps to focus on God. Prayer is not easy work. For the real practice of prayer, taking hold of God and having communion and fellowship with God, it is necessary to sacrifice our selfish desires of the flesh.

When God's people pray and fast with a proper biblical motive, God hears and heals our lives, churches, communities, and guides our mission as light and salt (2 Chronicles 7:14-16).

Prayer and fasting can start a revival, a change in direction to fulfill the Great Commission.

God answers when we pray according to God's will.

> *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God ... if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him."*
>
> 1 John 5:14-15

WHAT IS PRAYER AND FASTING?

Prayer and Fasting is a discipline practiced in both Testaments. It is voluntarily going without food in order to focus on God. Prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, but not always. It is when the two disciplines are combined that they reach their full potential. It is not a way to manipulate God, but a way to force you to rely on God for strength and provision needed to hear from the Lord.

Prayer and Fasting gives God control of your mind, body, and soul in order to pray, read and meditate on the Word of God in a new and more powerful way. It ushers the believer into deeper communion with God.

WHY PRAY AND FAST?

As hope sustains us in suffering, so the Holy Spirit is our help in prayers:

> *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will*
>
> Romans 8:27

In prayer and fasting, you enter into a deep fellowship with God, freeing yourself to pray for God's will in all things. In prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit leads you and the church into new obedience and revelation of God's mission and ministry; to hear the Lord proclaim, as the Lord said through Isaiah,

> *"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland"*
>
> Isaiah 43:19

A believer who prays and fasts can become a mighty warrior in the spiritual war against evil, spiritual wickedness and temptation. In substituting prayer and God's Word for food, you compel your body to submit to the will of God, which opens the door for the Holy Spirit to reveal 'this is what the Lord says!'

A church body in prayer and fasting becomes a tremendous force to receive God's clear direction; each gift unified in a common focus that cannot be defeated.

- Fasting and prayer can restore the Lord as your "first love."
- Fasting humbles you before God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21).
- Fasting lets the Holy Spirit reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and renewal.
- The Holy Spirit revives the Word of God (truth) in your heart!
- Fasting transforms prayer time into a richer, personal experience.
- Fasting and prayer are the only disciplines that fulfill the requirements of 2 Chronicles 7:14.

OLD TESTAMENT SUPPORT

The Day of Atonement was the only regular fast day set (see Leviticus 16:29). Fasting became a sign of repentance and humility.

- Moses fasted during the 40 days and nights he was on Mount Sinai receiving the law from God (Exodus 34:27-28).
- Jehoshaphat called for a fast when the nation was about to be attacked by the Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chronicles 20:1-3).
- The Ninevites believed God and declared a fast as a sign of humility and repentance (Jonah 3:4-5).
- Daniel, upon learning the length of desolation for Jerusalem (70 years), turned to the Lord God in prayer and petition, in fasting and in sackcloth and ashes (Daniel 9:1-3).

NEW TESTAMENT SUPPORT

- Jesus fasted before Satan's desert temptation (Matthew 4:1-2).
- The church at Antioch was fasting when the Holy Spirit commanded the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work of the Lord. After praying and fasting, the church laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them off (Acts 13:1-3).
- During their missionary journey, Barnabas and Saul, with prayer and fasting, committed leaders to the Lord (Acts 14:21-23).

OTHER TIMES OF FASTING IN THE BIBLE

> **FASTING IN ANXIETY.**
>
> *"Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating (fasting) and without entertainment being brought to him. Moreover, he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions."*
>
> Daniel 6:18-22a

FASTING IN AFFLICTION.

"After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground."

2 Samuel 12:15-16

FASTING IN BEREAVEMENT.

"[A]ll their valiant men journeyed through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days."

1 Samuel 31:12-13

FASTING IN DEFEAT.

"This time, when the Benjamites came out from Gibeah to oppose them, they cut down another eighteen thousand Israelites, all of them armed with swords. Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the Lord. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord."

Judges 20:25-26

FASTING AS A HABIT.

"There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying."

Luke 2:36-37

MEANING OF FASTING.

"Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not? Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast."

Mark 2:18-20

FASTING IN PERIL.

"When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord."

1 Samuel 7:6

FASTING AND PRAYER.

"In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. ... Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Esther 4:3, 15-16

FASTING IN PREPARATION.

"Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water (fasted), because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles."

Ezra 10:6

FASTING IN PENITENCE.

"When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."

1 Kings 21:27-29

PATRIOTIC FASTING.

"They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."

Nehemiah 1:3-4

SINCERE FASTING.

"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

VISION AFTER FASTING.

"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions (did not anoint myself) at all until the three weeks were over."

Daniel 10:1-3

> **VISION DURING FASTING.**
>
> *"Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying (and fasting) at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor."*
>
> Acts 10:30-31

HOW LONG AND WHAT TYPE OF FAST IS RIGHT FOR ME?

Jesus' Church, throughout history, has emphasized prayer and fasting.

Fasting is about the condition of the heart and spirit, not the number of days.

Start slow; build up your spiritual muscles so that you will be prepared in a period of weeks to pray and fast for a 7-day period. If you cannot fast for 7-days, try fasting every other day or for two or three (2-3) days.

ARE THERE DIFFERING TYPES OF FASTS?

The Bible recounts various fasts.

Daniel went on a partial fast in which he only abstained from "choice food;" no meat or wine (Daniel 1:11-16; 10:3). **Paul** went on a fast for three days without eating or drinking, following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:9). **Jesus, Moses, and Elijah** engaged in supernatural fasts of forty days (Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8).

> **THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH FAST**
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> **First Baptist Church will move into a 'partial fast' in which we abstain from choice foods: no meats** (beef, poultry, fish, including seafood, soy and veggie burgers), **no sweets/candy** (e.g. cakes, pies, cookies, chips, chocolates, etc.), **no artificially sweetened drinks or sodas, caffeinated drinks, cigarettes, or alcohol.** All of these are off limits from dawn to dusk.

This type of fasting provides your body with the necessary nutrients and still humbly denies your flesh its desire for choice foods and ushers you into a deeper presence with God and control by the Spirit of God.

REMEMBER! The purpose is to deny the flesh full satisfaction, so that the Holy Spirit may have first place in your prayers and meditation. That means do not eat until you pop! ☺ Stay away from your personal choice foods that you may struggle to give God first place.

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

In preparation for this special time with God, examine your heart and detect any un-confessed sin. God requires repentance of sins before hearing our prayers. Confess obvious sins as well as less obvious ones (sins of omission as well as sins of commission). Examples are leaving your first love (the Lord), worldliness, self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, and an unwillingness to share your faith, not spending sufficient time in God's Word, a poor relationship with a spouse, child, parent, pastor, church member, co-worker, or friend.

There are other creative ways we can welcome Jesus' healing touch into our prayer time and daily living during the time of prayer and fasting.

1. **Fast from Anger and Hatred!** A fire burns and consumes. It is called anger: smoldering, flaming, and at times white hot. Unrighteous anger is a negative, lethal passion that has the power to fuel hatred and suffocate love. It is a self-righteous, prideful, self-centered anger. Give your family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers an extra dose of love each day.

2. **Fast from Judging Others!** Before forming a negative opinion about someone without adequate basis for the opinion … stop! Prejudice judges and condemns without adequate facts or fairness in the court of personal and public opinion. We are not to be prejudicially judgmental, but loving. We are not to be overly suspicious, but inviting. Before making any judgments, recall how Jesus forgives your faults, debts, and transgressions each day.

3 **Fast from Discouragement!** When strength fails and we grow weary, when understanding and commitments are missing, when friends and family turn against us, do not discourage, but encourage. Be someone who will come alongside, lift up, and comfort. Encouragers bring a beautiful gift, often a spiritual gift, when they bring renewal through encouragement. Hold on to Jesus' promise that He has a perfect plan for your life.

4 **Fast from Complaining!** The Bible compares complaining to a dripping faucet: it gets very annoying. Complaining is expressing dissatisfaction with something or someone; but more than that, there tends to be a self-centered bent to it.

Determine and imagine making decisions that encourage you to believe nothing is going to spoil your moment or decision about a relationship, job, day in the week, or whatever. When you find yourself about or in the midst of complaining, stop … close your eyes and recall some of the little moments of joy Jesus has given you. Focus on what you do have, instead of what you do not have.

5 **Fast from Resentment or Bitterness!** Bitterness is anger that has settled in for the long term. This anger can birth resentment, ill will, and the feeling that you have been treated harshly, unfairly, or carelessly. Left to itself, it eats into your mind, emotions, and body. Bitterness can turn you into a hostile, hardened person. Work on forgiving those who may have hurt you.

6 **Fast from spending too much money!** Money is neither good nor bad. If you are not careful, money can become what determines your wealth, power, and status.

Yet, the love of money, as the Bible proclaims, is the root of all evil. Jesus identifies money as a potential rival to God (Matthew 6:24). Money, like natural resources, material goods, or time itself, is yours to be used for the glory of God, not to take the place of God. Fast from the lotteries (daily/mega, etc.) this week.

Try to reduce your spending and give those savings to the Lord (church or other Christian organizations that support the care and love for the poor, homeless, or hungry).

7 **Fast from TV, Radio, Video and Internet entertainment, crosswords, horoscopes, etc.!** Spend time actually talking with your family and friends face-to-face.

Play board games with family and friends. Spend time reading God's Word (Scripture) together and alone; use books of Christian meditation (e.g. Our Daily Bread and others) to grow in your understanding of the Bible and its importance in your life.

Before there were video systems, television, radio, satellite, DVDs, VCRs, etc. there was the Lord God! **Get to know the Lord!**

◊ TAKING YOUR MEDICATIONS ◊

Continue to take all medications as prescribed and directed by your doctor during your time of praying and fasting. If your medication requires food or drink, take as directed and then resume your fast when possible. Always consult your doctor before beginning any change in your diet (including fasting), if you have any health concerns!

REMEMBER! Your health may prevent you from fasting from foods, but you can always pray! Furthermore, please pray for those who are able to fully participate in the time of Prayer & Fasting.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION

Fasting is primarily a spiritual discipline, but it begins in the physical realm.

Do not fast without physical preparation. If you plan on fasting, you will find it helpful to begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether.

Resist the urge to have one "last big feast" before the fast. Cut down on meals a few days before the fast to signal your mind and appetite that less food is okay. Wean yourself down or off caffeine, cigarettes, sugar products, and alcohol to ease initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast.

MANAGING YOUR SCHEDULE WHILE FASTING

How you adjust your work schedule depends mostly on your occupation. Some may work in occupations that require strenuous physical labor, if so, you may wish to fast less days of the week, limiting yourselves.

Throughout your fast, you may feel somewhat weaker than normal. During the first few days, you may feel tired and irritable. If possible, easing your workload and strenuous exercise would be a good idea to maintain your health and your morale. Usually your energy will return.

Fasting is not just the denial of food. It is exchanging the needs of the body for those of the spirit. Prayer and reading God's Word will be essential if you are to enter into intimate communion with God.

While fasting, if you waste energy on errands or busy-work to the neglect of spending special time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually. You will become discouraged and frustrated, instead of being uplifted, and blessed. I don't want that to happen to you.

DEALING WITH THE RESPONSES OF OTHERS

Many are reluctant to tell others they are fasting to avoid the sin of the Pharisees: fasting just to gain recognition for them. Taken to an extreme, it results in a wrong interpretation.

Fasting is not isolation. By isolating ourselves from the support of other Christians, we will be more susceptible to doubts and negative influences (both human and demonic). We need the prayer shield of our Christian family to help us continue when we feel alone and when the enemy tempts us to give up.

Find a prayer partner or partners. There is strength and encouragement in numbers.

> *"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"*
>
> Ecclesiastes 4:12

If you are asked, nonbelievers may be satisfied with, "*I have other plans for lunch today.*" Christians should be satisfied when you answer that you are fasting. If friends and family express concern for your health, ease their fears by telling them

that you will stop fasting the moment you feel you are harming your body or if the Lord leads you to end your fast. Fasting under your doctor's care **(which I urge you to do if you have any question concerning your health)**.

There is usually no reason for telling strangers or casual acquaintances that you are fasting.

MAKE YOUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE THE BEST

Receiving God's best from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is crucial. Devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable.

Read God's Word and pray during what were snack or mealtimes. Meditate on God when you awake in the night. Sing praises to God whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware the Enemy will do everything to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, go to God in prayer and ask for strength in the face of temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because the enemy knows that fasting is a powerful Christian discipline and God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon the Lord and seek God's face.

The Enemy 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 work to stop you.

> **Make prayer your shield. Bring your personal needs before the Lord; more importantly, intercede for loved ones, friends, your church, your pastor, your community, your nation, and world. By your prayers, as you fast, you will help the Great Commission be fulfilled.**

*However, do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on God, your attitudes, your actions, motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God (Father, Son, & Holy Spirit) are the center of our attention.

WHAT PHYSICAL EFFECTS TO EXPECT DURING THE FAST

Although fasting can be an indescribable blessing, it is not always easy for everyone. In this time of discipline and sacrifice, do not be surprised if you experience mental and physical discomforts. Any sort of fast may sometimes leave you feeling impatient and irritable.

The most difficult days are usually the initial 1-2 days. That seems to be a favorite time for the "self" to rise up and say, '*This is as far as I want to go. I have done enough.*'

During your fast, you may have struggles, discomforts, spiritual victories, and failures. In the morning you may feel like you are on top of the world, but by evening you may be wrestling with raiding the refrigerator and counting the days left in your fast. ☺

To counteract temptations like these, take extra time with the Lord, step outside for fresh air. And frequently sip on water or juice.

FINISH THE FAST IN A HEALTHY WAY

"Breaking the fast" is a critical phase of fasting.

While your stomach is in the resting mode, it shrinks and your 'inner workings' become idle, so solid food must be re-introduced slowly to avoid distress to the body.

Reintroduce solid foods through salads, soups, and fresh fruits. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full.

You may want to stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread, and avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils on the first day. If necessary, introduce them very slowly and in small amounts.

Illustrations from the original 2016 edition are omitted from this edition.

PRAYER

> *Heavenly Father, help me to joyfully give up earthly pleasures and the desires of the flesh so that my prayers may be more powerful and effective. Lord Jesus, I wait expectantly for You to reveal Yourself to me. Holy Spirit, please make Your fruit reach perfection in me. Then may I be able to pray as I should, always asking according to Your will. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

> *"Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off"*
>
> Acts 13:3 NRSV

Spiritual discernment is not a private matter, but comes to the church from the Holy Spirit.

Gaining God's vision and wisdom becomes clear only when the church is engaged in spiritual practices: worship, fasting, and prayer.

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Moving the Kingdom forward through Faith

OUR KINGDOM MANDATE

"Discipled People, Serving People into a Love Relationship With Jesus Christ"

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