

Prayer & Fasting



Prayer Supper Friday, Jan. 22

As a congregation we are about to embark on a four-week spiritual journey into the study, “**Just Walk Across the Room.**” As part of our preparation for this journey we will complete a 24-hour period of Prayer and Fasting. On Friday evening **22 January 2010** we will kick-off our period of fasting and prayer with a soup and bread prayer dinner in the First Pres Center starting at 6:00 pm. After our soup and bread we will commence our fast. We will fast and pray for the next 24 hours and will break our fast with a Pot Luck Dinner in First Pres Center on Saturday **23 January 2010**.

In Bible times, fasts were generally one day in length. Judges 20:26 says, "Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD."

Fast Facts

Many People have questions about fasting and there are many types of fasts. In order to answer these questions we have researched prayer and fasting. The following information is offered for your consideration.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please keep in mind that a food and water (liquids) fast is not for everyone and certainly should not be attempted if you have any doubts or health concerns. **If you have health concerns PLEASE consult with your doctor before attempting this type of fast.** Other types of fasting can be accomplished that are just as effective, for instance elimination of watching TV or not participating in a favorite activity during the fasting period can be completed in lieu of a food fast. Remember, fasting is about focusing on Jesus, not about abstaining from food.

Fast and Pray

Prayer and Fasting - A Definition

Prayer and fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. Prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, but this is not always the case. You can pray without fasting, and fast without prayer. It is when these two activities are combined and dedicated to God's glory that they reach their full effectiveness. Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is not a way of manipulating God into doing what you desire. Rather, it is simply forcing yourself to focus and rely on God for the strength, provision, and wisdom you need.

What does the Bible say?

Prayer and Fasting - What the Bible Says

The Old Testament law specifically *required* prayer and fasting for only one occasion, which was the Day of Atonement. This custom became known as "the day of fasting" (Jeremiah 36:6) or "the Fast" (Acts 27:9). Moses fasted during the 40 days and 40 nights he was on Mount Sinai receiving the law from God (Exodus 34:28). King Jehoshaphat called for a fast in all Israel when they were about to be attacked by the Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chronicles 20:3). In response to Jonah's preaching, the men of Nineveh fasted and put on sackcloth (Jonah 3:5). Prayer and fasting was often done in times of distress or trouble. David fasted when he learned that Saul and Jonathan had been killed (2 Samuel 1:12). Nehemiah had a time of prayer and fasting upon learning that Jerusalem was still in ruins (Nehemiah 1:4). Darius, the king of Persia, fasted all night after he was forced to put Daniel in the den of lions (Daniel 6:18).

Prayer and fasting also occurs in the New Testament. Anna "worshipped night and day, fasting and praying" at the Temple (Luke 2:37). John the Baptist taught his disciples to fast (Mark 2:18). Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:2). The church of Antioch fasted (Acts 13:2) and sent Paul and Barnabas off on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:3). Paul and Barnabas spent time in prayer and fasting for the appointment of elders in the churches (Acts 14:23).



Is Fasting Effective?

Prayer and Fasting - What Does it Accomplish?

Spending time in prayer and fasting is not automatically effective in accomplishing the desires of those who fast. Fasting or no fasting, God only promises to answer our prayers when we ask according to His will. 1 John 5:14-15 tells us, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that 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." In the prophet Isaiah's time, the people grumbled that they had fasted, yet God did not answer in the way they wanted (Isaiah 58:3-4). Isaiah responded by proclaiming that the external show of fasting and prayer, without the proper heart attitude, was futile (Isaiah 58:5-9).

The Bible describes several types of fasting:

Traditional Fast

A Regular Fast - Traditionally, a regular fast means refraining from eating all food. Most people still drink water or juice during a regular fast. When Jesus fasted in the desert, the Bible says, "After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." This verse does not mention Jesus being thirsty.

Partial Fast

A Partial Fast - This type of fast generally refers to omitting a specific meal from your diet or refraining from certain types of foods. Daniel 10:2-3 says, "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 at all until the three weeks were over." In Daniel 1:12, they restricted their diet to vegetables and water: "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink."

Full Fast

A Full Fast - These fasts are complete - no food and no drink. Acts 9:9 describes when Paul went on a full fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus: "For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything." Esther also called for this type of fast in Esther 4:15-16: "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.'" It is recommended that this type of fast be done with extreme caution and not for extended periods of time.

To prepare your spirit for your fast, draw close to God through prayer and worship. Let God reveal Himself to you and why He is taking you through this time of fasting. The key to any spiritual preparation is intimacy with Jesus. John 15:7 says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."

Finally, your body can be prepared for fasting through pragmatic considerations and planning. A few days before your fast, get your body ready by reducing your food intake, eating raw fruits and vegetables, and avoiding foods high in sugar and fat. Also adjust your activities to ensure that you will persevere through the fast.

Christian Fasting - Tips to Consider

When deciding the to fast, take into consideration the following ideas:

- What type of fast are you planning? *If you are planning to limit your liquid intake to water, it is important not to fast for more than 1 or 2 days without medical supervision.*
- Drink plenty of water even if you are taking some food and juice.
- Brush your teeth periodically to freshen your mouth.
- Do not plan strenuous activity on your fast day.
- Try to complete your fast, but don't feel guilty if you need to cut it short.
- Consider your schedule and obligations.

Tips

Plan fasts so you can spend quality time praying and being with your Savior.