

2019

Prayer and Fasting

**First Church of God
Greensburg, Indiana**

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Over the next 12 months we will be talking about prayer and fasting. The third Thursday will be a day of Prayer and Fasting. We will provide a guide to assist you in this experience. You will do this on your own. And then, once each quarter, or four times throughout the year we will gather in the sanctuary on the third Thursday for one hour at 6pm to pray together. There is power in being together!

The reason that I have called for a time of prayer and fasting is for us to ask, beg and invite God to move upon us as individuals and as a congregation and do something amazing all for His honor and His glory. We want to experience a mighty moving of the Holy Spirit and for something to happen that is beyond what we could do or ever imagine happening.

Some may have heard about fasting...but really have no clue as to what I am talking about. Some may even feel that fasting is something that fanatics do. Fasting is not a hunger strike! It is not a diet!

Fasting is a spiritual discipline of refraining from food for a period of time to focus on God.

Fasting can also be refraining from things other than food. The purpose is to focus on God.

Throughout the year, information pieces will be provided to help you in this journey. This booklet consists of two sermons that I have preached on prayer and fasting. It focuses mainly on fasting from a food stand point. In future months we will talk about other kinds of fasting.

Thanks for being a part of this journey. I firmly believe that God has something special in store for us...let's claim it!

Sincerely,

Pastor Terry

2019 Monthly Theme

- February.....Prayer for God’s Presence to dwell
among us.
- March.....Pray for Your neighbors.
- April.....Pray for our Easter services
- May.....Pray for the Names on the Cross.
- June.....Pray for the Church building
neighbors.
- July.....Pray for our Back to School Bash.
- August.....Pray for our Block Party.
- September.....Pray for “Church Outside the Walls.
- October.....Pray for the Names on the Cross.
- November.....Pray for the person sitting next to you.
- December.....Pray for our Christmas Toy Outreach.

Quarterly Pray Gathering at Church Building

The third Thursday at 6pm – 7pm.

Thursday February 21st

Thursday May 16th

Thursday August 15th

Thursday November 21st

Fasting is the most feared and most misunderstood of all spiritual disciplines. Jesus referred to food when He talked about fasting. Just think for a moment about the power that our stomach has over our life and our decision-making process.

What is the most common question in your home?

- What's for breakfast?
- What's for lunch?
- What's for dinner?

It seems like all of the commercials on TV have to do with food. How about when you are sitting at home and are bored...you think about "what snacks are in the cupboard?" Right now, anyone thinking about lunch? For many our stomach is top priority in our lives.

I think from time-to-time God has to say to us, "I want you to remember that I'm top priority in your life." Anytime God's position of being first in our life is replaced by something else, it is an idol. We will find that our life begins to go in the wrong direction.

Jesus taught about fasting....

Matthew 6:16- 18 *"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others 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.*

Going without food in order to spend time in prayer is difficult. When we fast and pray it teaches us self-discipline and reminds us that we can live with a lot less. Jesus did not condemn fasting. He condemns hypocrisy. Fasting in order to gain the approval from people is wrong.

Leviticus 23:32

32 It is a day of Sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your Sabbath.”

Fasting was mandatory for the Jewish people only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. The Pharisees however, voluntarily fasted twice a week to impress people.

Matthew 9:14-15

Jesus Questioned About Fasting

14 Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”

15 Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

John’s disciples fasted to repent of sin and prepare for the coming Messiah. Jesus’ disciples did not need to fast to prepare for the Messiah’s coming because He was with them. Fasting must be done for the right reason.

Matthew 4:2

2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Jesus was not tempted in the Temple, but in the wilderness.

He was alone, tired and hungry...and most vulnerable. Satan often tempts us when we are most vulnerable. But

he also tempts us where we are strong. We must be on guard at all times.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline of refraining from food for a period of time to focus on God.

- Jesus fasted for 40 days.
- Moses fasted on 2 different occasions for 40 days.
- Joshua fasted for 40 days.
- Paul fasted for 3 days.
- Peter fasted for 3 days.
- Daniel fasted for 21 days.

The Bible teaches about half-day fasts and 24 hour fasts. The ultimate goal of fasting is to deepen our intimacy with God. It is a time when we put God back at the center of our life and as the top priority of our life.

God I'm so serious about you being in the center of my life that I'm going to deny my most basic need so I have more time to focus on you.

We reap many benefits...spiritual and physical from fasting.

Here's a challenge....

Pray and meditate...seeking God's guidance in what you are willing to do in order for that prayer to be answered. Imagine what that answered pray will look like.

Transforming Hearts...Transforming Lives

This is going to be an amazing journey.

Dr. Sam Bruce writes...

When I was a child, Dad was president of Wesley College.

When I was eight years old, Dad made me a member of the worship team and paid me ten cents each time I sang in a service.

I kept my dimes in a little bank the size of a dime coin roll.

I had saved almost five dollars.

I counted and stacked them in dollar-size piles and put them back in the bank.

One day, a lady where we were having dinner held out her tightly closed hand and said,

“I’ll trade what I have in my hand for your bank and dimes!”

I was curious to know what was in her hand, but I knew what was in my bank and how long it took me to accumulate my treasure; fifty dimes represented fifty songs!

After much inner struggle, I decided to keep my dime bank and five dollars.

When the lady opened her hand, I saw a hundred dollar bill!

I was so disappointed that I cried.

He did not know what she was offering in exchange for his bank. Sometimes we are like that with God.

What do you want God to do?

What is God asking you to do in order to receive what you want Him to do?

Fasting is the spiritual discipline of refraining from food for a period of time to focus on God.

Fasting is the voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. It is not just missing lunch because you are too busy. Fasts have a spiritual purpose.

While there are many different types of fasts, the most typical is to go without food. You can fast from anything habitual in your life. It is good to fast from the things that we obsess about. Remember, the purpose of a fast is to focus on God.

Fasting reveals the things that control us. Richard Foster said *that our stomach is like a spoiled child, and spoiled children do not need indulgence, they need discipline.* God wants us to seek Him.

There are so many different ways to fast. I am going to focus on some of the nuts and bolts of fasting. While I am going to be sharing some of the how-to aspects of fasting, never forget that fasting is a spiritual discipline. Each one of us needs to spent time with God asking for His guidance in what we are to do...and why.

What do you want God to do?

Let's look at three types of fast found in the Bible.

1. *Absolute Fast*

An absolute fast is an extreme type of fast.

When Queen Esther knew that she had to confront the king about a decision he had made and she knew that she could lose her life for confronting the king, she declared an absolute fast.

Esther 4:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ "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 attendants 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."

From the human standpoint, everything was against Esther and the success of her mission. The law was against her because nobody was allowed to interrupt the king. The government was against her because the decree said that she was to be slain. The king's attitude toward women was very bad. Even the fast could go against her...causing her to be weak.

Romans 8:31

If God is for us, who can ever be against us?

An absolute fast is when you don't eat or drink for three days. While we see this type of fast in the Bible, it is an extreme fast. This type of fast happens when the crisis is so great, you aren't even remotely thinking about food because every fiber of your being is concentrating on God.

WARNING...This type of fast should only be done under the supervision of your doctor.

There are two more common types of fasting.

2. Normal Fast

A normal fast is when you only drink water and you refrain from all food for a period of time. This is a fast of a lot of water and no food at all. Jesus practiced this fast right after He was baptized.

LUKE 4:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted^[a] by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

A normal fast is when you remove all food from your diet and you stay hydrated on water...lots and lots of water. It is okay, depending on how long your fast is to drink juice or chicken broth. The goal of fasting is not to be legalistic, but to be drawn closer to God. Sometimes our lack of energy can hinder our ability to focus on God.

Again, the goal is to deepen your focus on God and not to be able to say, “*I made ___ days on water only.*” A normal fast for you might be 24 hours...it might be three days. The Bible records different lengths of fasting.

3. Partial Fast

This is when you decide to give up certain types of food for a period of time.

DANIEL 10:2-3 (NIV)

² At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. ³ 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.

Daniel was committed to God and felt a burden from God. He was always seeking God and God’s direction. After receiving a vision about the future...Daniel began to fast. He fasted for 21 days by not eating any choice food or meat.

What is choice food? Things like desserts, cakes, cookies, donuts ...breads and croissants, pastas...rice and other types of carbohydrates. What does that leave...fruits and vegetables. A partial fast is not refraining from all food, just certain types of food. It’s more difficult than you might think.

Again, the purpose of a fast is not a diet, but a focus on God. Many people give something up for Lent...and for many it is a partial fast. It is important to make sure that we do something with what we are giving up. How will your partial fast draw you closer to God?

Several years ago, on Fat Tuesday our Schwan’s man told us that he was giving up heroin for lent. He said, I never used it, but I am giving it up...he was kidding.

Whatever you eliminate from your diet, if it means something to you, it is going to mean something to God.

The two most common types of fasts are normal and partial fasts. The length of time varies. If you have never fasted....take it slow.

Some things to remember....

- It's going to take your appetite some time to learn that it's not going to get its way.
- The hunger pains and stomach growls can be a reminder to pray.
- When you experience hunger pain, drink water.
- When you fast, your body is detoxifying...expect headaches and bad breath.
- When fasting, try to avoid watching TV. The commercials will drive you crazy with the food ads.
- Set a goal for your fast. Be very specific about the reason(s) for fasting.
- Establish a schedule...make it more than an endurance. Replace meal times with reading the Scripture, praying, singing, journaling, etc.
- Anticipate that God will move in your life in some amazing ways.

