



21

**DAYS OF PRAYER  
& FASTING**



## INTRODUCTION

**Here is a guide to use for the next 21 days of prayer and fasting. Join us as we learn the benefits of the spiritual discipline of fasting and seek God's direction for the future of First Baptist Church Forest Park.**

## READING

## WHEN

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

**Lunch Break:** The sanctuary will open everyday from 11:00am - 1:00pm. We are inviting all who can attend to join us daily for a time of silent prayer and personal Bible study. As we begin our journey of fasting we believe this time together will provide some much needed encouragement and accountability. Prayer journals and reading topics will be provided for all who attend.

**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, you are in a place where you can focus and reflect on God's Word.

## WHAT

**Bible Reading Plan:** A 50-day reading plan is provided below. 50 days? I thought this exercise was only 21 days... Well, we are trying to develop good spiritual habits. Our expectation is that you will find this time spent with God so beneficial you will not want to stop!

**Journal:** We are providing you a sample journal to help you get started. We have used this format as a church family before and found it to be tremendously beneficial. If you have a journal you prefer then please continue to use whatever you are comfortable with.

## 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, ask a friend, Sunday School Teacher, Pastor, or other trusted source.

**Journal:** We have provided a journal outline below. This simple structure guides you through your personal Bible study and prayer time with God. Begin in section one by "casting your cares before the Lord." Tell Him everything that is on your mind. This may be a long process the first time you do it. Second, go to scripture and read the passage for the day. Write down what stands out to you as you read. Next, pray. After you have spent time in God's word spend time at His feet. And finally, listen. Stop and listen for awhile and then continue to listen throughout your day. This is what Paul means when he encourages us to "pray without ceasing."

## 50 DAY READING PLAN

# OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

|               |                                   |   |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>DAY 1</b>  | Genesis 1:1-3:19                  | The Creation and Fall of Humanity       |
| <b>DAY 2</b>  | Genesis 12, 28:10-15, 32:22-28    | God Calls a People His Own              |
| <b>DAY 3</b>  | Genesis 37, 39-46                 | The Story of Joseph                     |
| <b>DAY 4</b>  | Exodus 1-6                        | The Call of Moses                       |
| <b>DAY 5</b>  | Exodus 7-14                       | Moses and Pharaoh                       |
| <b>DAY 6</b>  | Exodus 19-20:21                   | The 10 Commandments                     |
| <b>DAY 7</b>  | Deut. 6:1-7:26, 11:13-21          | Obedience Flows From Love               |
| <b>DAY 8</b>  | Judges 1:1-2:19                   | Cycles of Disobedience in God's People  |
| <b>DAY 9</b>  | 1 Samuel 7-9, 15-17               | The Fall of Saul and Rise of David      |
| <b>DAY 10</b> | 2 Samuel 5, 7-9, 11-12            | Tales of David's Life                   |
| <b>DAY 11</b> | 1 Kings 2-3, 6, 11                | Solomon's Reign                         |
| <b>DAY 12</b> | 1 Kings 11:9-14:31                | The Dividing of the Kingdom             |
| <b>DAY 13</b> | 1 Kings 17-19, 2 Kings 2, 4       | The Prophets Elijah and Elisha          |
| <b>DAY 14</b> | Job 1-2, 38-42                    | How the Righteous Respond to Hard Times |
| <b>DAY 15</b> | Psalms 1, 23, 139                 | Psalms that Enrich Your Soul            |
| <b>DAY 16</b> | Psalms 6, 22, 38, 51              | Psalms for the Suffering and Sinful     |
| <b>DAY 17</b> | Proverbs 3, 16, 5, 7 & 31         | Wisdom for Everyday Life                |
| <b>DAY 18</b> | Jeremiah 11-12, 31:31-40          | The Covenant Broken and New Covenant    |
| <b>DAY 19</b> | Jeremiah 23:1-6, Isaiah 9:6-7, 53 | Jesus the Promised King                 |
| <b>DAY 20</b> | Jonah 1-4                         | The Story of Jonah                      |
| <b>DAY 21</b> | Daniel 1-3                        | Exile in Babylon                        |
| <b>DAY 22</b> | Daniel 4-6                        | The Life of Daniel                      |
| <b>DAY 23</b> | Nehemiah 1-2, 4-5, 8-9            | The Rebuilding of Jerusalem             |
| <b>DAY 24</b> | Esther 1-8                        | The Story of Esther                     |
| <b>DAY 25</b> | Malachi 1-4                       | Final Words on the Old Testament        |

## THE STORY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

|               |                       |   |
|---------------|-----------------------|---|
| <b>DAY 26</b> | Luke 1-2              | The Birth of Jesus                          |
| <b>DAY 27</b> | John 1:1-18           | The Identity of Jesus                       |
| <b>DAY 28</b> | Luke 4:14-44          | Jesus Begins His Ministry                   |
| <b>DAY 29</b> | Matthew 5-6           | The Core of Jesus' Teachings                |
| <b>DAY 30</b> | John 3                | God's Love for the World                    |
| <b>DAY 31</b> | John 5                | Jesus' Miracles and Authority               |
| <b>DAY 32</b> | John 11               | Jesus Power Over Death                      |
| <b>DAY 33</b> | John 15               | The Christian Life Defined                  |
| <b>DAY 34</b> | Matthew 26-27         | The Arrest and Crucifixion of Jesus         |
| <b>DAY 35</b> | John 20, Luke 24      | The Resurrection of Jesus and His Ascension |
| <b>DAY 36</b> | Acts 2                | The Coming of the Holy Spirit               |
| <b>DAY 37</b> | Acts 9, 16-19         | The Conversion of Saul and His Ministry     |
| <b>DAY 38</b> | Acts 26               | Paul's Defense of the Christian Faith       |
| <b>DAY 39</b> | Romans 3              | Justification by Faith Alone                |
| <b>DAY 40</b> | Romans 7-8            | The Battle with Sin: Life in the Spirit     |
| <b>DAY 41</b> | I Cor. 13, Eph. 5     | The Way of Love                             |
| <b>DAY 42</b> | I Corinthians 15      | The Power of Resurrection                   |
| <b>DAY 43</b> | Gal. 5, Eph. 4        | Freedom and Unity in Christ                 |
| <b>DAY 44</b> | Ephesians 6           | The Whole Armor of God                      |
| <b>DAY 45</b> | Philippians 1:18-2:18 | Christ's Example                            |
| <b>DAY 46</b> | Colossians 3:1-17     | Putting on the New Self                     |
| <b>DAY 47</b> | Hebrews 4:14-5:10     | Jesus the Great High Priest                 |
| <b>DAY 48</b> | James 1, 1 Peter 1    | Pure Religion                               |
| <b>DAY 49</b> | 1 John 4:7-21         | God is Love                                 |
| <b>DAY 50</b> | Revelation 21-22      | The New Heaven and Earth                    |

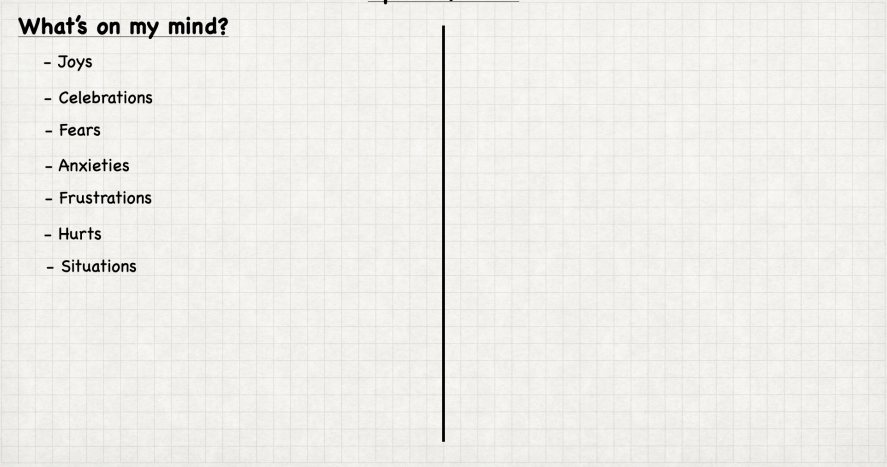
SAMPLE PRAYER JOURNAL

## Section One: What's on your mind?

April 19, 2020

**What's on my mind?**

- Joys
- Celebrations
- Fears
- Anxieties
- Frustrations
- Hurts
- Situations



## Section Two: Scripture for today. What did you notice?

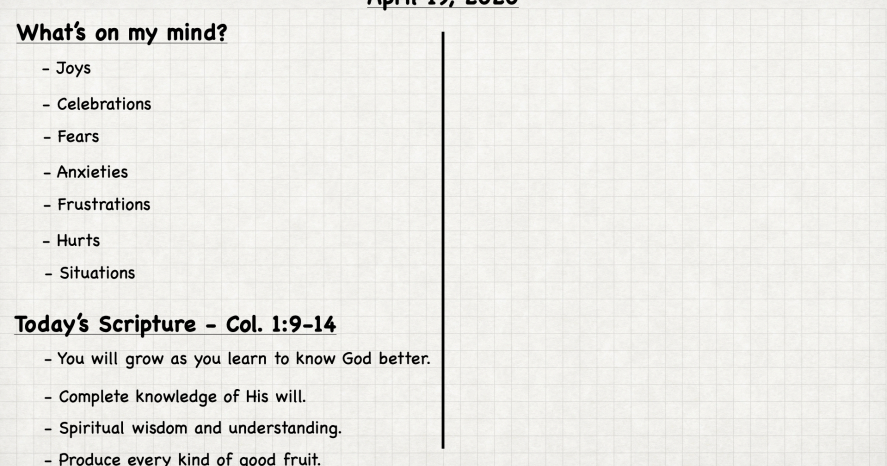
April 19, 2020

**What's on my mind?**

- Joys
- Celebrations
- Fears
- Anxieties
- Frustrations
- Hurts
- Situations

**Today's Scripture - Col. 1:9-14**

- You will grow as you learn to know God better.
- Complete knowledge of His will.
- Spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- Produce every kind of good fruit.



## Section Three: Prayer

**April 19, 2020**

**What's on my mind?**

- Joys
- Celebrations
- Fears
- Anxieties
- Frustrations
- Hurts
- Situations

**Today's Scripture - Col. 1:9-14**

- You will grow as you learn to know God better.
- Complete knowledge of His will.
- Spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- Produce every kind of good fruit.

**Prayer**

- Teach me how to pray.
- Help me get to know you better.
- Help me grow.
- Take away my anxiety. Give me peace.
- Help me understand.
- Help me learn to hear your voice.

## Section Four: Listen

**April 19, 2020**

**What's on my mind?**

- Joys
- Celebrations
- Fears
- Anxieties
- Frustrations
- Hurts
- Situations

*- Cast your cares on me.*

**Today's Scripture - Col. 1:9-14**

- You will grow as you learn to know God better.
- Complete knowledge of His will.
- Spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- Produce every kind of good fruit.

**Prayer**

- Teach me how to pray.
- Help me get to know you better.
- Help me grow.
- Take away my anxiety. Give me peace.
- Help me understand.
- Help me learn to hear your voice.

**Listen**

- Trust me.
- You will grow.
- Seek and you will find.
- Draw near to me and I will draw near to you.

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

## PRAYING

### WEEK ONE: ALIGN OUR HEARTS

When God begins to lead His people in a new direction He always begins by changing their hearts. This week we will focus on the fundamentals of our relationship with God: **Forgiveness, Repentance, and Obedience**. We encourage you to deal honestly with God and let Him search your heart. Let Him encourage you where you are doing well and correct where you are out of step with Him. We cannot move forward until we are walking with God in all areas of our lives.

### WEEK TWO: WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

This week we will seek to understand what God expects of His church. There are three simple commands in scripture that establish who we are to be as Christ's ambassadors. **Love God. Love People. Make Disciples**. We are asking God to reveal to us how we can best implement those simple commands (His General Will) in our modern culture. We are also praying God will place a specific call (His Specific Will) on your life and on our church as we work together to live out His General Will.

### WEEK THREE: FIRST STEPS

God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and light unto our path. Lamps and lights don't often reveal more than the next step. This week we are simply asking God, "what do we do next?" "What are our first steps of obedience?" This week is going to be exciting! We are expecting God to do what only He can do to grow First Baptist Church Forest Park and move us into our next 150 years!



## FASTING

# 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, 10; 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.**



# First Baptist Church

— Forest Park —