

Prayer and Fasting Guide

This guide will help you understand the reasons for fasting, what kind of fasting we recommend, and some precautions about fasting. This guide is not comprehensive, but is meant to be used as an introduction to fasting and to guide the members of TBC during this particular season of prayer and fasting.

What is fasting? To fast is to abstain from eating. Sometimes it involves abstaining from all food for a time; sometimes only certain foods are eliminated. In general, liquids are continued during the fast (usually only water or juice). The length of the fast can vary greatly. For the month of February 2014, we are recommending that our members fast once a week, and that they fast for at least one meal and at most three meals during a 24-hour period.

Why fast? Fasting brings us closer to God by humbling us. We become less self-sufficient when we fast, and the result is more dependence on God. This closer relationship leads to spiritual growth, wisdom, insight, and the ability for God to work powerfully in our lives to bring victory over sin, improved health, and spiritual fruitfulness. Here's what Bill Bright had to say about fasting:

Fasting and prayer are the only disciplines that fulfill the requirements of II Chronicles 7:14: *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* If you fast, you will find yourself being humbled as I did. You will discover more time to pray and seek God's face. And as He leads you to recognize and repent of unconfessed sin, you will experience special blessings from God.

"Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything - to sacrifice ourselves - to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God." Andrew Murray

What does the Bible say about fasting? Here are some references: Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9,18; 2 Samuel 12:16,17; Ezra 8:21-23; 10:6; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:16; Job 33:19,20; Psalm 69:10; 102:4; Isaiah 58:6; Daniel 9:3,20-23; 10:3; Joel

2:15; Jonah 3:5,10; Matthew 4:2; 6:16; 9:15; Acts 13:3; 14:23; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 11:27,28

What is the purpose of this fast? We are fasting to empower the church to successfully bring the lost into our church for My Friendship Connection on Nov. 4. We are fasting for clarity as we seek to establish God's vision for the future of Green Street Baptist Church. We are fasting so that the Holy Spirit will be free to work in us and remove barriers to commitment to Christian service. We are fasting after the example of Paul, who fasted after he was struck blind on the road to Damascus, and who received his sight after three days (Acts 9:9). We are also fasting after the example of Samuel, who called the people to fasting and repentance leading to revival (1 Samuel 7:6). We are also fasting after the example of Ezra, who led the people in fasting for protection and solutions for difficult problems (Ezra 8:23).

Why prayer and fasting? Successful fasting does not happen without prayer. We cannot do it in our own strength, and if we did the results would have no spiritual significance. We can pray without fasting, but fasting strengthens our prayers for all the reasons mentioned above.

Is fasting required? Fasting is not required by TBC or by any Biblical command. It is not necessary for salvation. It is voluntary. But if your health allows, we want to encourage you to participate in the month of prayer and fasting so that you can grow individually and so that the church can be blessed as a whole by your contribution in prayer and spiritual growth.

Are there reasons not to fast, such as health concerns? (from the Bill Bright website) There are certain persons who should NEVER fast without professional supervision. For example:

- Persons who are physically too thin or emaciated
- Persons who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders
- Those who suffer weakness or anemia
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs
- Individuals who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem such as hyperglycemia
- Women who are pregnant or nursing

How do I fast? We recommend the following plan for your fasting during the month of October. It recognizes that many people have not fasted for spiritual reasons and offers

a way to gradually build your confidence in fasting. If you are already experienced at fasting, you may wish to use a different plan.

For the first week, pick one day and skip one meal that day. Lunch would be a good choice. Drink as many fluids as you need, but avoid milk and limit caffeine. Try to pick a day when you will have time to pray during the day as well as fast.

For the second week, if you want to fast longer, skip two meals. Skipping breakfast and lunch would be a good way to do this fast. If you eat nothing from one supper until the next supper this will be a full 24-hour fast. Drink fluids such as water or juice. Pick a day when you will have time to pray and even to rest or nap.

For the third and fourth weeks you may want to continue the same pattern as the second week, or you may want to try a 36-hour fast. A 36-hour fast involves skipping three meals. Eat supper one day, skip all three meals the next day, and begin eating again at breakfast on the third day. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids, take time to rest, avoid strenuous activity, and take time to pray.

Do not try to eat extra amounts in advance of fasting, and resume eating gradually after a fast. Fast for the length of time that God leads you to fast. Remember that you are not fasting for fasting's sake; you are fasting in order to seek God's blessing on the church and to find clarity as we determine God's vision for the future of the church.

If you are not able to fast fully from food, you may want to fast from certain foods or fast from certain activities during this time. What will you do without during this time that will humble you, draw you closer to God, and give you extra time for prayer? Going without TV would be one choice. John Wesley fasted on bread and water.

How do I succeed in fasting? Plan to use the time you would normally use for food preparation and eating as an opportunity to commune with the Lord. Prepare to fast by picking a suitable day when your schedule allows time for prayer and rest. Keep a journal of your thoughts and prayers during the fast. Don't make a show of your fast. Try again if you don't succeed the first time. Try not to focus on your growling stomach and possible feelings of hunger. Use these feelings as a prompt to pray, meditate on God's Word, and focus on God and all of His incredible provisions. Your mind will drift quickly away from your physical feelings as you turn to God in praises, prayer and thanksgiving.