

21-Day
Prayer & Fasting Guide



plant 150

drawing near to God

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DRAWING NEAR TO GOD *Through Prayer & Fasting*

The Big Picture

The breadth of lostness keeps expanding. As Greater Richmond grows, so does the lostness. We are now at 1.3 million with 1 million of them un-surrendered to Jesus. That's our backyard. When you look over the fence at the global neighborhood of 7.5 billion and growing, lostness blurs. There are so many, we no longer see the lostness.

The depth of lostness keeps rooting deeper as well. We witnessed this recently in Charlottesville. We see it regularly in legislation passed without any fear of God. We hear it in comments made about mother nature, praising humanity in a crisis, without any acknowledgement of God. But again, peer over the fence at the world. See what fellow followers experience in countries closed to the gospel. The perspectives and passion of lostness everywhere is burrowing deeper.

As Jesus' followers, He tasks us to go and make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28:19) Overwhelmed by the expanding and deepening lostness around us, it's easy to make church our escape. It's our safe-place to gather with others who share our values. There, we huddle from the world forgetting we were sent to make disciples throughout it.

Regardless of the suffocating feel of lostness, Jesus' plan is still in place. Followers engage the lostness by making disciples and planting churches. It's easy for us to lose both focus and heart regarding this. That's why our prayerful aim is to plant 150 churches in the next 25 years, or more simply... **"PLANT 150."**



We say 150 because it's impossible for us. It requires us to follow Jesus dependently. We say 25 years, so it becomes the focus of a body of believers from one generation to the next. But don't be misled by the numbers. The real intent is to return to the only plan Jesus gave us for engaging lostness...making disciples and planting churches.

The immediate and constant challenge facing PLANT 150 is resources ...human, financial, and spiritual. Human resources are the followers willing to go and plant churches. Financial resources include the money needed to fund these new efforts. But the most important resource is spiritual. It all fails without a body of believers constantly seeking Jesus and living fully surrendered to Him. That's where prayer comes in.

We have members looking for where we might start our first new work, and members looking to equip members led by God to go. We even have members praying about how the church can financially give...not only to send members, but to repair these facilities so it continues sending for the next 25 years.

We can easily get so lost in our efforts, we forget the impossibility. Making disciples and planting churches is God's plan. It's fulfilled by His followers filled by Him and surrendered to Him. That requires the spiritual resource of prayer.

The late Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ said that he had never seen a movement of God that did not begin in prayer. Not just any prayer, but intentional, dependent, earnest prayer as seen in the effort of prayer and fasting. Leaders of previous awakenings, such as Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Whitefield, Finney and others, made prayer and fasting a spiritual discipline.

Therefore, before we go any further as a body, we are being called to an intense season of prayer and fasting. From October 1-21, our sole aim in praying and fasting together is to draw near to God. James 4:8 promises, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." God alone is our spiritual resource. Though He commands us to make disciples and plant churches, we cannot do it without Him.

Some in the body have prayed and fasted before. Others have not. This manual is a helpful tool for both. These introductory pages, as well as the appendices at the back of this manual, provide biblical and practical instruction regarding why and how to pray and fast. The aim is to prepare you for drawing near to God. The remainder of the manual contains daily Scripture encouragement as you pray and fast...as you draw near to God. It's also written so you can use this as your 21-day prayer journal. No doubt, praying and fasting becomes a revealing walk with God. Journaling is an important part of the journey.

Lastly, through prayer and fasting, we learn a simple but profound truth. Years ago I read this statement in John Maxwell's *Partners in Prayer*:



**"When we work, we work.
But when we pray, God works."**

--Partners in Prayer, Forward

I believe it's true. And, believe we will experience it together as we fast and pray. So, let's begin!



As You Get Started

As stated earlier, the aim of fasting is to draw near to God. Removing things you depend on or delight in resets your focus on Jesus alone. This prompts you to pray more frequently and earnestly. You also read how extended fasts affect you physically and spiritually. You may struggle with hunger pains, headaches and temptations. Knowing these challenges to prayer and fasting, here's some encouraging help.

Grove's Prayer Journal

This prayer journal assists your efforts by reminding you what to pray, encouraging you to pray each day, and to write down what you are learning as you pray. Let's look at each of these.

During our 21 days of prayer and fasting, we as a church are focusing our prayers on three requests of God. These three requests appear repeatedly throughout Paul's prayers. Since Paul is the primary church planter in the book of Acts, and since we want to follow Jesus in making disciples and planting churches, we will use his reoccurring prayer points. They include,

• **GOD, FILL ME!**

Paul constantly prays for Jesus to confront, strengthen, and shape who he is in Jesus. Therefore, from October 1-7, we each will ask Jesus to fill us with His Spirit. We want Him to confront areas we are not like Him, strengthen us to follow Him, and shape us in His likeness.

• **GOD, LEAD ME!**

Paul is consumed with spreading the gospel. You hear it in his prayers. That's why from October 8-14 each of us will pray for Jesus to lead us with His spirit. We need to see the lostness as He does and the opportunities before us to live and speak the gospel.

• **GOD, SHOW ME!**

Paul is also overwhelmed by God's glory and activity. Both encourage Paul to remain faithful in following Jesus...especially when it's painful and confusing. We need to see the same. That's why each of us will pray this October 15-21. It will also be good to record what you see in your journal.

Furthermore, your prayer journal contains verses to read and pray over each day. I'm grateful to Lee for this. Not only did he identify Paul's three reoccurring themes in prayer, Lee also highlights them in this twenty-one day prayer guide. You see the verse, read its context, and will be directed in prayer.

Finally, space is provided to journal your thoughts. Some already have and use prayer journals – either in notebooks, on your computer or on your mobile device. Feel free to continue using what you are already using. For others, journaling may be new. Simply write what you sense the Father sharing to you from His Word and your time in prayer with Him. As shared earlier, your journal may record you starting your conversation with God in one area. But after 21 days with Him, you'll be surprised what He reveals to you and where He has led you.



Others Praying for You

One other help when praying and fasting is having others pray for you. Jesus' prayer the night before His crucifixion does not involve fasting. However, He agonizes prayer that night. (Luke 22:39-44)

That's likely

why Jesus takes Peter, James and John with Him to pray for Him.

That also may be why Jesus goes back to them several times, waking them up and encouraging them to pray. (Mark 14:32-42)

Because fasting and prayer is taxing, and knowing Satan does not want us drawing near to God, we need others praying over us. That's why our small groups will each be selecting a night to come to the church to pray over us from 7-8 pm. As each of us are fasting and praying, groups will be praying over us for our strength, protection, and that we truly hear God.



FILL ME

Sunday, October 1

Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage the church in gospel understanding and gospel living. Paul asks God to strengthen them with power through His Spirit in their inner beings, meaning they will be spiritually strengthened by the FILLING of God's Spirit so that Christ may dwell in them and they may be more like Christ.

Prayer

"Father, Please FILL me with Your Spirit so I may be strengthened inwardly. May You dwell in every aspect of my life so that I desire what You desire, love what You love, and live like You lived. FILL me so I may decrease and You may increase. Please Father, FILL me!"

NOTES



FILL ME

Monday, October 2

Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to help the church understand the connection between understanding the Gospel and living out the Gospel. Paul asks God to root and ground them in the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, meaning they will be FILLED with Christ's love to the point their lives are centered around the love of Christ. Christ's love is the source of nourishment and security to our soul.

Prayer

"Father, please FILL me with Your love in such a way my heart clings to no other foundation. May my life be rooted and grounded in Your love so that my life may look like Yours. Please Father, FILL me with Your love so I may delight to love like You. FILL me!"

NOTES



FILL ME

Tuesday, October 3

Philippians 1:8-11 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to thank the Church for their partnership in ministry and the love they have shown him. He prays that their love may abound with discernment, so they may approve what is excellent, and so be blameless for the day of Christ, meaning their love may grow in godly discernment so they may embrace and strive for spiritual excellence. Walking with Christ is not simply knowing right from wrong, but fully loving and embracing what is most excellent...mainly Christ Himself!

Prayer

“Father, please FILL me with a love that discerns what is most excellent in Your eyes. FILL me with a godly love that mightily strives to embrace and cherish what You deem to be most excellent. Father, please destroy all the love my heart harbors for darkness, and FILL me with a love that abounds more and more for You and others! Please, Father, FILL me!”

NOTES



FILL ME

Wednesday, October 4

Colossians 1:9-12 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to speak against false teaching that Christ is not enough. He asks God to FILL them with the knowledge of His will in all Spiritual wisdom and understanding so that they may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. This means they will be FILLED with wisdom that comes from God and not man, so their walk may reflect Christ and not themselves.

Prayer

“Father, please FILL me with Your wisdom so my actions may reflect Your worth. May my life strive to walk worthy of the Gospel of Christ. FILL me with a gospel understanding that You find me worthy solely because of what Christ has done on the cross, and may that FILLING free me to live for Christ alone. Please FILL me!”

NOTES



FILL ME

Thursday, October 5

Colossians 1:9-12 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to combat false teaching and help the church realize that Christ's work on the cross was perfect. He asks God to FILL them with His Spirit so that they may bear fruit in every good work, increase in knowledge of God, be strengthened for all endurance and patience with joy. Because spiritual fruit, knowledge of God, strength from God, endurance, patience, and joy are a result of God's work and not man's, Paul asks God to FILL them.

Prayer

"Father, please FILL me with the understanding that everything You work in me is a gift of grace. May I abandon all works of my flesh to be strong, wise, and spiritually vibrant; and, with all the might You work in me, cling to Your grace and power to produce patience, joy, strength, and Spiritual fruit. FILL me so that my life displays Your power and grace. FILL me!"

NOTES

FILL ME

Friday, October 6

1 Thessalonians 3:3-13 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage new believers and assure them through suffering and afflictions. He asks God to make them increase and abound in love for all, so that God may establish their hearts blameless in holiness. God's work in making His people more like Christ involves increasing in Christ-like love for all people. Therefore, Paul pleads with God to FILL them and make this happen because absent the work of God, their hearts would never love like Christ.

Prayer

"Father, please FILL me and make my wretched heart increase and abound in a Christ-like love for others. My heart craves sin, but Your Spirit reigns in me and my flesh is crucified in You. So please, Father, FILL me with a Christ-like love so that my heart may grow in holiness and I may live more like You each day. Please, Father, FILL me!"

NOTES



FILL ME

Saturday, October 7

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to combat false teaching, correct sin, and encourage believers suffering for the Gospel. He asks God to make them worthy of His calling. God not only places the calling on His people, but it is God Himself that makes them worthy for the calling. Because God's call on our lives is to follow Christ, we plead with God to FILL us, for absent the work of God in us we can produce nothing.

Prayer

"Father, please FILL me for I can do nothing without You. To even follow Christ I am hopelessly dependent upon Your work in me. So FILL me and make all of me more like Christ. I plead with You, Father; my flesh craves what is against You, and I need Your mighty work so I may live a life that abides in You. Please, Father, FILL me!"

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WEEK 2 LEAD ME

Sunday, October 8

Romans 10:1-4 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage unity within the church and explain the power of the Gospel. Paul explains in chapter 9 that his heart breaks for his Jewish friends because he desperately wants them to be saved, but salvation must be a work of God. So here he prays that God would save them. Making disciples involves following God's LEADING in praying for the lost.

Prayer

"Father, LEAD me to my knees for the lost. I do long for them to know You as their savior, but that must be a work done by You. Father, please LEAD me to talk with them, love them, serve them, and above all to pray for their souls. LEAD me."

NOTES



LEAD ME

Monday, October 9

Colossians 4:2-4 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage a right understanding of the gospel that sees Christ as enough. Paul asks the church to pray that God may open a door for the Word, to declare the mystery of Christ, and to make it clear. Paul is asking for God's LEADING in his desire to proclaim the gospel. He asks God to LEAD him through open doors and into all clarity, so that he may share the gospel well.

Prayer

“Father, please grant me a strong desire to follow Your LEADING. Please LEAD me through numerous open doors to share the gospel. Please LEAD me in how I speak so it may be clear and saturated in humility. Father, please LEAD me, for I need You to walk through open doors and to make it clear. Please, Father, LEAD me!”

NOTES

LEAD ME

Tuesday, October 10

Colossians 4:12 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage the church to cling to the truth that Christ is enough. Christ as enough for everything. Epaphras was always struggling on their behalf in his prayers, that they may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. Epaphras saw prayer as laboring with God on behalf of others. This intentional wrestling with God requires His gentle LEADING or else my prayers are self-focused.

Prayer

“Father, please LEAD me to lovingly engage with You in prayer for the sake of others. Give me a burden and delight to come to You on behalf of my brothers and sisters in Christ. LEAD me to labor and struggle in prayer for their spiritual maturity. Please LEAD me.”

NOTES

LEAD ME

Wednesday, October 11

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage new believers and assure them through suffering and afflictions. Paul prays to see them face to face and supply what is lacking in their faith. Paul is asking God to direct His path toward them so God might use him to supply their faith with any encouragement, support, and joy they might need. Paul asks God to LEAD him for the sake of others' progress and joy in the faith.

Prayer

"Father, please LEAD me in a lifestyle that delights in others' progress and joy in the faith. LEAD me toward those who need gospel encouragement and support. May I see the morning, day, and night as opportunities to be used by You. LEAD me!"

NOTES

LEAD ME

Thursday, October 12

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage new believers and assure them through suffering and afflictions. Paul asks God to fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power. God Himself is the one who powerfully fulfills our desires and attempts of good and faithfulness. Without His LEADING and power, no attempt of faithfulness would ever be accomplished.

Prayer

"Father, please LEAD me and fulfill every resolve and work of faith you give me. May I be dependent upon Your LEADING and joyfully expect you to fulfill Your work according to Your might. LEAD me in such a way that it's evident I'm not accomplishing works of faith by my power, but You are accomplishing works of faith by Your power. LEAD me!"

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LEAD ME

Friday, October 13

1 Tim 2:1-4 (ESV)

Paul wrote this letter to his mentee Timothy as he began to pastor the church in Ephesus that needed protection, correction, and leadership. Paul urges Timothy to pray for all people that they would lead peaceful and quiet lives, godly and dignified in every way. As God LEADS His people to live gospel-saturated lives of peace and godliness, it pleases God and is used to bring people to the knowledge of salvation. God LEADS His people to live gospel lives so that the gospel may be seen and believed.

Prayer

“Father, please LEAD me to live a life of all godliness. Not for my own reputation and gain, but so that others may know that You saved a sinner like me. May others know that no matter what happens in this world, my home is with You. LEAD me today so that others might come to a saving knowledge in You. LEAD me!”

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LEAD ME

Saturday, October 14

Philemon 1:4-7 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote to this letter for the sake of reconciliation between believers. Paul prays that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. God must make your sharing of the gospel effective. The gospel that we share is that everything good in us is the result of Christ alone and for the sake of Christ alone. Thus Paul asks God to LEAD Philemon into effective sharing of Christ’s work in salvation.

Prayer

“Father, please LEAD me in my sharing of Your gospel. LEAD me to see that every good thing in me is the result of Your doing and is for the purpose of Your glory. LEAD me to share this amazing news with people I talk with. Father, please allow my efforts to share this with people to be effective through your power. LEAD me!”

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SHOW ME

Sunday, October 15

Ephesians 1:15-21 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to explain how gospel living is the product of gospel understanding. He asks God to give them wisdom and knowledge, having the eyes their hearts enlightened...so that they may know what is the hope he has called them to. Paul prays the truth of their continual growth in Christ and future residence with Christ would enlighten their hearts and change them at their core. God **SHOWING** us the hope we have in Christ is a gift that makes us live more like Christ.

Prayer

“Father, **SHOW** me the hope I have in Christ in a way that changes me. May my heart rest in this hope because You called me to it, and Your calling is irrevocable. Please, Father, **SHOW** Christ’s hope and may it be sweet to my soul. **SHOW** me!”

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SHOW ME

Monday, October 16

Ephesians 1:15-21 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to show the church that growing in our love for the gospel produces a life that reflects the gospel. He asks God to give them wisdom and knowledge, having the eyes their hearts enlightened...so that they may know what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints. The truth that we are blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing and are given the right to be called a child of God should enlighten our hearts and change us at our core. God **SHOWING** us the riches of glorious inheritance He gave us by His grace makes us live more like Christ.

Prayer

“Father, **SHOW** me the riches of your glorious inheritance I’ve been granted in Christ. May my heart never forget that Christ paid for all my sin so that I may receive all His inheritance. May my soul forever be in awe that You would slay Christ so You may call me Your child. **SHOW** me the immense riches, joy, and pleasures of being Your child. Please, Father, **SHOW** me!”

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SHOW ME

Tuesday, October 17

Ephesians 1:15-21 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to explain that gospel living is the product of gospel understanding. He asks God to give them wisdom and knowledge, having the eyes their hearts enlightened...so that they may know the immeasurable greatness of His power toward those who believe. Paul wants their hearts to grasp the truth that the power in which God is working toward them to sanctify them, grow them, love them, give them grace, and work all thing out for good is immeasurably great. God **SHOWING** us His power is great grows our awe and trust in Him.

Prayer

“Father, please **SHOW** me how great Your power is that You lovingly work toward me. **SHOW** me that you are more powerful than pain, than my doubt, than my worry, and my sin. **SHOW** me that the power that you lovingly work toward me is beyond measure. **SHOW** me this, Father, so that my love and trust in you will grow. Please **SHOW** me!”

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SHOW ME

Wednesday, October 18

Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to explain that gospel living comes through growing in gospel understanding. Paul concludes his prayer by saying to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think...to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Paul reminds them they are praying to the One who can do far more abundantly than anyone can ask or can even think and has forever used His church to bring glory to His name in all generations. When we are **SHOWN** whom we pray to and why we exist as a church, our prayers become gospel-centered and glory driven!

Prayer

“Father, please **SHOW** me who I am praying to. **SHOW** me that You long for Your church to glorify Christ more than we do. **SHOW** me that there is no request or thought I can bring to You that is beyond Your doing. **SHOW** me Your love for Your church and its purpose to glorify Your name. **SHOW** me.”

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SHOW ME

Thursday, October 19

Philippians 1:8-11 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to thank the Church for their partnership in ministry and the love they have shown him. Paul concludes his prayer for them reminding them they are filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus, to the glory and praise of God. He wants the church to remember they are filled with the righteousness of Christ for the sake of praising and glorifying God. God **SHOWING** us our righteousness comes from Christ alone for the purpose of worshipping God alone refines our prayer life.

Prayer

“Father, **SHOW** me ways I look to myself for righteousness instead of relying on Christ. **SHOW** me ways I am worshipping ways of this world or my own ways instead of You. Do this, Father, so I may be freed from the idols of my heart and be fully consumed by You. Please, Father, **SHOW** me.”

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SHOW ME

Friday, October 20

Colossians 1:9-12 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage a right understanding of the gospel that sees Christ as enough for everything. Paul ends his prayer by giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. This reminds the church that only Christ qualifies them to worship God and be used by God. Being **SHOWN** our qualifications are completely in Christ humbles our pride and gives boldness to our insecurities.

Prayer

“Father, please **SHOW** me that I am fully qualified to love You, worship You, serve You, and tell people about You...solely through the blood of Christ. **SHOW** me ways I wrongly believe I qualify myself or am not qualified enough. **SHOW** me the beauty of Christ’s complete payment on the cross so that I might live in complete thankfulness, humility and boldness. **SHOW** me!”

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SHOW ME

Saturday, October 21

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 (ESV)

Context: Paul wrote this letter to encourage new believers and assure them through suffering and afflictions. Paul ends his prayer by saying so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. God's work of salvation, His filling us with His Spirit, and His leading us to make disciples is God's way of bringing glory to the name of Jesus Christ. Paul is **SHOWING** them God's grace toward sinners is allowing them to partake in the loving efforts to make all of creation about Jesus Christ. There is no greater calling and joy than being used by God to glorify Christ!

Prayer

"Father, please **SHOW** me the immeasurable joy of simply being used by You. **SHOW** me the gift of being a broken vessel used to display the perfection of Jesus. **SHOW** me all the ways I take more joy in my own kingdom over Yours. **SHOW** me that Your love and grace toward me is the greatest gift because it qualifies me to share in the greatest treasure of Christ! Please, Father, **SHOW** me!"

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Why Fast?

We may be compelled to fast for various reasons. Some are good. Others are not. The eroded conditions in Jerusalem (physical and spiritual) drive Nehemiah to fast and pray. (Nehemiah 1:1-11) He does so to repent and confess his and Israel's sins. He also fasts and prays to see what role God wants him to play in Israel's turnaround.

Those are good reasons, but there are wrong reasons too. You don't fast and pray to lose weight. Though Jerry Falwell Sr. lost 80 pounds in two consecutive 40 day fasts, it wasn't to lose weight. It was to seek God on Liberty University's behalf.

Furthermore, you do not pray and fast to be seen as "super spiritual." People did that in Jesus' day and He calls them out on it. (Matthew 6:16-18) "If all you want," Jesus tells them, "is to be seen as spiritual. That's all you get." Doing so they missed the true benefit of praying and fasting...drawing near to God.

Drawing near to God is the purest reason to pray and fast. That's Moses' reason for his 40 day fast on Mount Sinai. (Deuteronomy 9:9, 18). It was likely Anna's reason for making prayer and fasting a regular part of her life. (Luke 2:37). Even Jesus did so before beginning His intensive three-year ministry. (Luke 4:1-13)

Please understand, the reason for us praying and fasting together for 21-days is not to compel more members to go and plant churches. It's not even to move us to give more to repair this building and start new works. The sole reason is for each of us as followers, and together as a single body, to draw near to God. None of the above are even possible without us drawing near to God together. That's the core biblical reason for prayer and fasting.



How to Fast

Most followers know how to pray. However, some may have never combined it with fasting. That's why many questions about prayer and fasting are practical. We want to know the "How to's" of fasting. The insights below are from the late Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ (Partners in Prayer, John Maxwell), Ronnie Floyd, pastor of Cross Church, Springdale, Arkansas (The Power of Prayer and Fasting) and my own.

Understand the aim of fasting

Fasting's aim is to draw near to God. By removing something we depend on, something that delights and fulfills us, reminds us that our dependence and delight is to be in Jesus alone. Therefore, when we long to have whatever we are giving up, it reminds us of two things. First, we delight and depend on Jesus alone. Second, it reminds us to pray. Soon, we'll talk about what to pray when fasting. But now we need to understand how to choose the type and time of your fast.

Choose your type of fast

There are various types of fasts in the Bible. Daniel uses a partial fast in Daniel 10:3. For three weeks, he abstains from delicacies such as meat and wine. Many see this as eating only fruits and vegetables. Paul drinks only liquids in Acts 9:9. Moses abstained from both food and liquids in his 40-day fast. (Because of the potential physical problems, a physician needs to be consulted before conducting such a fast.)

You can fast items other than food. According to 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, sexual intimacy between a husband and a wife is one. I've heard of others fasting television or time on social media. In fact, it may be good for any prone to an eating disorder to fast something other than food.

Parents whose children want to understand fasting will need to talk with them. Help them determine what they delight in or depend on. Guide them in what would be a wise and healthy fast for them. Talk with them about your experience fasting and praying. Listen to theirs as well.

Make a workable prayer list

Write down your prayer aims and keep a journal. In the process of the fast, God may answer it specifically or change it dramatically. But one thing is sure; it will help you know what God has said during your fast. That is why Grove has produced this prayer journal for our members.

Read Isaiah 58 and Luke 4

Isaiah 58 contrasts the differences between sincere and insincere fasting and prayer. God describes His disdain for insincerity as well as the blessings to expect when sincere. Luke 4 prepares you for spiritual challenges. It records Satan tempting Jesus during His forty days of prayer and fasting. Since the aim of prayer and fasting is to draw near to God, Satan wants to keep you from it. Expect challenges from him.

Pray and read scripture vulnerably

The purpose of a fast is to draw near to God. Our reason for drawing near is to know and want what God knows and wants. This happens by spending time in prayer and Scripture. Doing so, God highlights Scripture verses He wants you to see which may alter your prayers. As is true with many heart to heart talks, the way the conversation ends may be different from the way it started. What you thought you needed from your fasting and prayer may be different than what God shows you.

Take it one day at a time

I read of a 5-year-old who was confused when her daddy told the family that he was going to fast and pray. After little Ginny learned that fasting meant not eating, she shouted, "You can't fast, Daddy! You'll die." Trying to calm her, Ginny's mom and dad explained that men and women in the Bible fasted. Ginny thought for a moment, then the panic returned as she shouted, "And they're all dead!"

By the second through fourth day of an extended fast, you might think you are going to die because of what you are giving up. Don't think of the length of your fast. Simply focus on being faithful each day. Take it one day at a time.

Slowly return to your normal diet

If you have fasted food for an extended time, return gradually to your normal diet. Take it slowly so your digestive system can adjust. Again, it may be good to seek your physician's advice.



What to Expect When You Fast

A year after retiring, my dad underwent triple bypass surgery. He and mom asked questions and were given pamphlets to read. They wanted to know what to expect from “open-heart surgery.” Of course, they expected physical affects, but they were not prepared for what Dad experienced emotionally. Since then, others told me how their open-heart surgery was both a physical and emotional experience.

Prayer and fasting resembles open-heart surgery. You place your heart in God’s hands. He examines it. And if you allow Him, He mends any damages making your heart healthier as a follower. But make no mistakes, the process of prayer and fasting affects you both physically and spiritually. We see this in Luke 4:1-13. From Jesus’ experience, here is what to expect.

Physical Side Effects

If you fast food, expect to experience hunger. Jesus did. Luke 4:1-2 describes Him as hungry. The Greek word depicts someone aching for food. When fasting food, you may also experience dizziness or headaches. I’ve found that drinking juice, if you are allowing for juice in your fast, helps subside the side effects.

Temptation

Greek grammar in Luke 4:1-3 implies Jesus was repeatedly tempted during His 40-day fast. Satan is relentless. He doesn’t want you drawing near to God. Even if you succeed in completing your time of prayer and fasting, Satan still tries to destroy your experience with God. These verses also show Satan’s strongest temptations coming at the end of Jesus’ fast. Therefore, keep guarding your heart days after you’ve completed your fast.

Humility

Fasting and praying is a humbling exercise. During the experience, areas in your life vying to overthrow God’s reign in your life surface. Satan tempts Jesus with three areas. They include **PERSONAL APPETITES** (“Tell the stones to become bread”), **PERSONAL AMBITION** (“The kingdoms of the world are Yours if You worship me.”), and **PERSONAL ABILITIES** (“Jump from the temple and let the angels catch you. Show everyone what you can do.”)

We forget that God led Jesus into the wilderness not just to pray and fast, but to be tempted. (Luke 4:1-2) Jesus’ temptation reveals how Satan tempts us. He goes after our appetites. Is there anything you must have more than following Jesus? Some of those “must have’s” include ambitions. Is having a certain income, position, recognition more important than following Jesus? Then there are our abilities. Because you can do something does not always mean Jesus wants you to. Do your abilities dictate what you do instead of following Jesus’ lead in all decisions?

I’ve found extended prayer and fasting to be a humbling experience. God surfaces when good desires and efforts had subtly taken over. Though they are good causes, I had placed them over following Jesus.

During your fast, your personal passions will surface. Like me, you will have to go through the humbling exercise of asking yourself, “Are they more important than my relationship with Jesus?”



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