

A Guide to
**Prayer &
Fasting**
by Rev. John Harris




INTRODUCTION

As we begin this journey of faith, Beyond All Limits, we invite you to join us in a time of prayer and fasting. It is a privilege to pray to our heavenly Father with expectancy. In John 14:13, Jesus said, "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it."

Although fasting is an almost forgotten practice, this biblical foundation is an important part of worship and prayer. Fasting helps us to focus on matters of the Spirit. The late Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade of Christ, said, "I believe the power of fasting as it relates to prayer is the spiritual atomic bomb that our Lord has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil and usher in a great revival and spiritual harvest around the world."

We are in a season of exponential opportunity to trust in God, to believe in Him and to hope in Him for more than we could ever imagine. Recall that when Nehemiah saw the walls in disrepair, he was compelled by God to pray and to fast for the restoration of the city to the glory of God. We pray that God would call each of us to a deepening of our faith in Him through prayer and fasting.

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We pray that this book will encourage you to pray and to seek God as never before. We pray that He would enable us to each do our God-given part— just as Nehemiah and his colleagues used their God-given gifts to restore and revive a city and nation.

Our prayer is that as we continue in this spiritual journey, we will continue to know that the “effective, fervent prayers of the righteous avail much.” May we be faithful, as in the days of Nehemiah, to pray and fast. May God do through us only that which He can do. May all the glory go to Him, and may all who see the work give praise to our great God.

Thank you for joining us in this journey, and may God richly bless you.

WHAT IS YOUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION?

Preparation for a meaningful fast begins with repentance and confession. Do not expect God to violate His own stated will concerning the prayers He can hear. If you have unconfessed sin in your heart, He will not hear you (Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:2). Iniquity is unconfessed sin. Don't waste your time fasting and praying if you have decided not to confess all known sin to Him. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.

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.

Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14-15.

Surrender your life to Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Develop utter dependence on Him with total submission and humility. (John 5:15)

Study the attributes of God.

Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. (Hebrews 11:6)

Hunger and thirst after righteousness. (Matthew 5:6)

Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit. (Galatians 5:16-17)

FROM START TO FINISH

A challenging part of prayer and fasting is taking your focus off the world and toward God. Many things distract us from time alone with God: work, leisure, worries, social and civic commitments, even church activities. In Hebrews, these items are labeled as “every weight that slows us down.”

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.

—Hebrews 12:1–2

The author uses the analogy of a race to depict the believer’s life of faithful living. In the grandstands are all the faithful disciples who have run before us, encouraging us to run strong. Before us is the track, one prepared beforehand by God. At the end is the finish line, where Jesus is standing, waiting to congratulate all who cross it. What prevents us from reaching the finish line? The author tells us that it is weight and sin. Sin is obvious to us all. A life of faith must be lived in obedience to God’s Word. But what about the “weight that slows us down”? Because this weight is not as obvious, it is what interferes most with reaching the finish line.

The author coaches us to lay off “every weight that slows us down.” The image is of a runner taking off his warm-up clothes so he is left with only his running attire. By doing so, he has nothing to encumber him during the race. The weight in your life is not sin. Rather, it is anything that keeps you from running the race set before you, anything that keeps you from achieving all that God wants to do in and through your life, and ultimately in and through our church. This weight normally comes in the form of good things but becomes a distraction to our spiritual growth. These are the things that we must lay down so that we may run unencumbered in our race of faith.

Part of prayer and fasting is creating an environment in which we can encounter God. You also may be called during this time of prayer and fasting to set aside some good things to allow yourself more time with God.

What distracts you from time with God? Look over the list below and commit to set aside some normal activities to give yourself more time for prayer, Bible study, silence and solitude:

Television	Movies
Computer/video games	Leisure reading
Watching sports	Working out
Reading the newspaper	Yard work
Shopping	Hobbies
Surfing the Internet	Decorating
Golf	Talking on the phone
Cooking/entertaining	Going to the mall
Information, e-mail, pager	Music

Ask God to reveal some areas that you can periodically set aside in order to spend more time in prayer. As we throw off what slows us down and the sin that hinders our progress, we will find ourselves able to spend more time at the foot of the throne of God, seeking His face, listening to His Word and being equipped to persevere and to run our race.

Only as we focus our lives on Him can we hear His plan for our lives individually and corporately as the body of Christ.

The Ministry of Prayer

WHY PRAY?

As stated earlier, prayer is about spending time with God, uniting our hearts with His. It is our love for God and a desire to know Him more that leads us to pray. J.I. Packer comments in his book *Knowing God*, "Men (and women) who know their God are before anything else people who pray, and the first point where their zeal and energy for God's glory come to expression is in their prayers."

While most Christians understand the basic truths about prayer, most of us find great difficulty devoting time to it every day. It is true that a close, personal walk with the Lord is impossible without daily quiet time—a time of listening and speaking to our heavenly Father. None of us would expect to maintain a good relationship with a wife or husband or close friend if we never spoke to that person. How much more important is it to seek to be near the One who made us and whose will and work we desire to do?

Likewise, it is impossible for the body of Christ—the church—to stay on course if we do not faithfully and regularly unite our hearts and voices in prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our decisions and our actions. We pray because Jesus told us to pray. We pray because Jesus Himself prayed. We pray because it changes us, and we pray because it brings about the will of God in our family, church and in our society. That is why, during these exciting days, our Pastor is leading us to a new level of commitment to prayer. Every member is being asked to join in all the collective times of prayer with the entire body of Christ, as well as in personal times of prayer.

You are being asked to pray, but you are also being asked to fast.

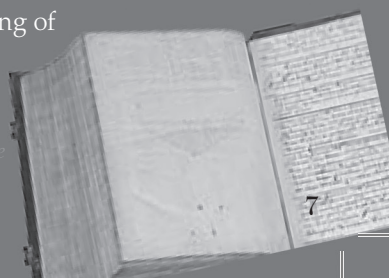
The Ministry of Prayer

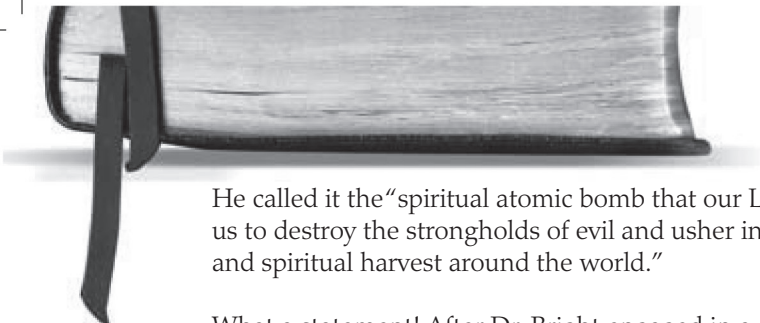
WHY FAST?

Biblically, prayer and fasting go together. And as with prayer, fasting is about God. However, in our day, the biblical principle of fasting has been almost forgotten. Throughout history, God's people have made fasting an important part of their worship and prayer. Fasting is God's way of helping us focus on matters of the Spirit; it enables us to gain control of our appetites so that we can direct our mental and spiritual energies toward Him.

Those who have experienced the power and blessing of fasting testify that it is far more than a religious exercise or discipline. Recall what Dr. Bright said about the power of fasting as it relates to prayer.

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He called it the “spiritual atomic bomb that our Lord has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil and usher in a great revival and spiritual harvest around the world.”

What a statement! After Dr. Bright engaged in a 40-day personal fast, during which God gave him the vision to call churches and individuals to times of fasting and prayer on an unprecedented scale, he stated:

This proves to be the most important 40 days of my life. As I waited upon the Lord, the Holy Spirit gave me the assurance that America and much of the work will . . . experience a great spiritual awakening . . . But before God comes in revival power, the Holy Spirit will call millions of God’s people to repent, fast, and pray in the spirit of 2 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 I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

The scope of this revival depends on how believers in America and the rest of the world respond to this call.

Our Pastor is calling us to pray and fast for spiritual revival in our families, our church, our community and beyond. We are called to seek the Lord as never before as a church body, to ask God’s spirit to renew and revive us again for His purpose and plan in our personal lives and in the corporate life of First Baptist Orlando. As we consider further growth, we are asking God to truly take us beyond all limits as we reach out to our community. The task is huge; it is bigger than any of us; it is God-sized. Therefore, we are being called to fast and pray for God’s purpose and plan to be accomplished.

How we respond, individually and collectively, will determine whether First Baptist Orlando will be in the center of revival, spiritual awakening and the greater works God has planned for us.

WHAT IS *fasting*?

To fast means primarily “not to eat.” Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes. Fasting normally involves abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not water, for a determined amount of time with specific spiritual goals. A thorough definition might be: “The fast is an act of the will through which the individual Christian exerts spiritual control over the flesh (through not eating, or through the laying down of other distractions and hindrances) with a view to a more personal and powerful experience with God in prayer.” It involves giving up the physical to attain the greater spiritual insights.

Is *fasting* FOR TODAY?

In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard J. Foster writes:

“The constant propaganda fed us today convinces us that if we do not have three large meals each day, with several snacks in between, we are on the verge of starvation. This, coupled with the popular belief that it is a positive virtue to satisfy every human appetite, has made fasting seem obsolete.”

We need to realize several things about fasting as we try to answer that question.

Is *fasting* BIBLICAL?

The list of biblical characters who fasted includes such greats as Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Anna, Paul and Jesus Christ the incarnate Son. Many well-known Christians throughout church history fasted and gave testimony to its value and power. Among them were Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd.



WHICH SCRIPTURES SUPPORT FASTING?

asting has solid scriptural roots. Here are several examples of fasting:

In the book of Joel, God called His people to fast and pray for a time of repentance, personal commitment and revival among the people.

The people of God faced national extinction in the days of Esther the queen. Esther called for her own people to respond with a fast in Esther 4:16. God called His people to pray and fast during a major crisis, and God delivered His people.

Ezra proclaimed a fast for protection as the people returned to the land following the rebuilding of the walls. God heard, and He answered by giving them supernatural protection (Ezra 8:21).

When Daniel was faced with spiritual battles, he fasted and prayed: "In those days, I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled," (Daniel 10:1-2).

Joel called a national fast at the beginning of a locust plague. "Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord," (Joel 1:14). We may never see a plague of locust, but we are seeing a plague of unrighteousness. Abortion, pornography, violence, terrorism and lawlessness show the rebellion of the people against God's Word.

IS FASTING APPROPRIATE TODAY?

es, it is! Our nation is in need of revival. Our world is in desperate need of salvation from the bondage of

un-righteousness. Our church is in need of protection, direction Spirit and power as we strive to do great things for the Kingdom of God in this world. Our families are in need of direction, support and protection to stand firm and equip future generations of believers.

Yes, fasting is for today, and it is for the now!

HAS THE HOLY SPIRIT CALLED YOU?

Fasting should be a response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and a desire for obedience. It is not to be practiced as a current fad and certainly not to please others or to meet a goal. It will most likely come because the Holy Spirit has shown you a specific need that calls for intense, focused and uninterrupted praying on your part.

Because all fasting must be God-inspired and God-ordained, our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will initiate within us a desire to pray and fast on behalf of all that God is doing and wants to do in our world, our church and our lives. As we are faced with a spiritual crisis in our country, our task to be a light to others becomes even more urgent. Our prayer is that God will call you to join us in prayer and fasting for First Baptist Orlando and our country.

WHAT IS YOUR PHYSICAL CONDITION?

There are some people who should not fast (diabetics and those with other problems, as advised by a physician). But a healthy person of any age should be able to fast. What we call "hunger" is really appetite. The healthy body can withstand long periods without solid food; however, liquids—water and juices—should be available. There are books, such as Dr. Bright's *The Coming Revival*, that contain information on the physical aspects of fasting.

WHAT KIND OF FAST SHOULD YOU DO?

There is no better time than now, both personally and corporately as a church, to fast on a regular basis. If you have never fasted, below are several options that you can consider. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to a decision as to which fast might be best for you to practice.

Option 1—You can choose to fast (abstain from solid food but drink fruit or vegetable juices as well as water) for one day. This could mean you would eat dinner one day, then not eat solid food again until dinner the next day. You would be missing two meals. You could also fast from lunch one day until lunch the next day.

Option 2—You can choose to do a 24-hour fast. This usually does involve some hunger pains or discomfort before the time is up, but the spiritual benefits can be wonderful.

Option 3—Another option is a three-day fast. A three-day fast is an acceptable way for a Christian to demonstrate the seriousness of purpose and depth of commitment that responds to a serious challenge.

Option 4—Longer fasts of a week, two weeks, a month or 40 days have proven to lift the participant to a very high level of spiritual awareness and responsiveness to God. The longer fasts should generally be undertaken only by those who have first engaged in shorter periods of fasting and have learned how their bodies react to the process of fasting.

Option 5—Consider a “hindrance fast” of the distractions of the world. Following Hebrews 12:1–2, which states we should lay aside that which so easily ensnares us, you may want to pick several activities to abstain from, and use that time to seek God. Even good activities can distract us from the best. You can consider a time away from television, leisure reading, sports, shopping, computers or anything else you find taking up time in your schedule, and use that time in prayer.



If this is your first time to fast, or it has been some time since you last fasted, you are encouraged to start with a shorter time period of fasting. This will give your body an opportunity to adjust to the experience of a fast. Also, if you have never fasted and attempt a two- or three-day fast and fail to go the whole time without food, you may feel depressed and discouraged from attempting another fast. What is important is your motive and dedication to the fast, not how long you fast. Begin with a shorter time period of fasting, then, as you become more experienced, you can increase the number of days of your fast.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO ON THE DAY YOU FAST?"

Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a said countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father . . ."
—Matthew 6:16–18

On the day you fast, you should put yourself on a schedule that will allow you to receive the maximum spiritual benefit. Set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be. A suggested schedule for your day of fasting could be as follows:

MORNING

Begin your day in prayer and fasting.

Read and meditate on God's Word, preferably on your knees.

Invite the Holy Spirit to work in you and to do His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

Invite God to use you. Ask Him to show you how to influence your family, your church, your work, your community and beyond.

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on the day

Pray for His vision for your life, for our church and for empowerment to do His will.

Spend the morning outwardly performing the regular duties of your day. Inwardly, you will be in prayer and adoration, song and worship. Cause every task to be done as "unto the Lord," as beautiful service and ministry to Him.

NOON

Return to prayer and God's Word.

Take a short prayer walk.

Spend time in intercessory prayer for our church, our city, our nation and our world. Pray for the leaders of our nation, our Pastor and our staff. Pray for the lost, for the Gospel to go forth in every nation. Pray for your family and any special needs.

EVENING

Seek a quiet place alone with the Lord.

If others in your Bible Fellowship class are fasting, you may want to meet together for a time of prayer.

Avoid television or any other distraction that may dampen your spiritual focus.

ANOTHER GOOD SUGGESTION:

When possible, begin and end each day on your knees with your spouse for a brief time of praise and thanksgiving to God. Longer periods of time with our Lord in prayer and Bible study are better spent alone.

CAN YOU CONFUSE FASTING AND DIETING?

Fasting is not dieting. Though you will experience some physical benefits from fasting, the focus of the fast is on God and not on any benefits that may be derived from the fast. In fact, if our fast is not unto the Lord, then it has failed. The center of the fast must be God. If anything replaces God as the center of the fast, then we have missed the purpose. Our focus and our attention during a fast must be fixed on God. That is the only way we will be saved from seeking and loving the blessing more than the One who blesses.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF FASTING?

Fasting allows us to experience God through a more intense and productive prayer life. This is true of the individual and the church. The fast will have no purpose if it is seen as only an interlude in an otherwise worldly-centered lifestyle. It must be a step toward a deeper commitment to know God and His will for our lives.

Fasting results in our being more attentive to God and the things of God.

Fasting results in our being more aware of our inadequacies and His adequacy.

Fasting results in believers being changed in ways so they are empowered to change the world!

Fasting results in God moving powerfully in our lives and in the church in ways that allow Him to show Himself to this generation.

Fasting brings results. When believers fasted in the Bible, things happened. For example:

results

- The fast released people from the bondage of sin and addiction. (Matthew 17:21)
- The fast answered problems and gave godly wisdom and direction. (Ezra 8:21–23)
- The fast broke negative mental and emotional habits. (1 Kings 19)
- The fast brought about healing and wholeness. (Daniel 1:1–21)
- The fast can expand and increase our witness and testimony for Christ. (Isaiah 58:6,8; Matthew 5:14–16)
- The fast can provide unusual power and protection from the evil one. (Esther 4:16)
- The fast brought revival for the saved and salvation for the unsaved. (1 Samuel 7:2–11)
- Fasting will result in God doing something supernatural in our lives. God will also do something supernatural in the lives of others, in the life of our church and in our world. Fasting will allow the Spirit of God to take us from our present state of spiritual awareness and responsiveness and lift us to a higher level. Only then can He do with us, in us and through us what He desires to do.

CONCLUSION

The disciples of John the Baptist, noted for their practice of fasting, once asked Jesus why His disciples did not fast. In Matthew 9:15 Jesus states, "How can the guest of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?" As long as Jesus was present with His disciples, they did not fast. Jesus then said, "The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."

The Bridegroom is no longer present on the earth, in His physical body. Jesus assumed that after He ascended, we, as His followers, would fast. Now is the time to fast. Our Pastor has called us to pray and fast. The time is now! We have been given a God-sized assignment at a time when our world needs to see the power, grace and love of Jesus Christ. We need God to direct, protect, empower and use us to accomplish His purpose and plan for our lives. Therefore, let us fast and pray. Let us run with endurance this race set before us. May we expect in God and hope in him in this spiritual journey. It is our prayer that you will know the new thing that God is doing to bring his hope and grace to our community, city, nation and world. The choice is yours. Call to Him now, and He will reveal to you great and mighty things you do not know.

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