



Day of Fasting, Prayer & Reflection

Good Friday, April 2, 2010

WHY ARE WE FASTING?

Integrated with reflecting on the Word, fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal our true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.¹

We recognize that God is at work in the individual lives and the ministries of this congregation. At the same time, there are personal burdens many of us carry. There are burdens we face as a faith community. We look anew to Christ for guidance. We are driven to our knees to pray:

*Lord, we are limited in our understanding and seek Your wisdom and help. We love You and trust You, knowing You've been faithful to your people throughout history in the midst of their obedience in fasting and prayer. Help us to grow in faith. Today, we invoke Your name, Your presence, Your power, Your hand into our lives and ministries. As we gaze upon the Cross and seek to know the cost, our desire is to be obedient and faithful. We submit to Your will.
Amen*

UNDERSTANDING FASTING

Fasting may be new to you but it is deeply rooted in our faith. It comes to us from Judaism and was recommended by Jesus both His personal example and his teaching (Luke 4:2, Matt.6:16-18, Mark 2:20). It is a practice that is designed to strengthen the spiritual life by weakening one's attractions to pleasures of the senses. Thus fasting is always coupled with prayer and spiritual reflection.

Since ancient times the entire season of Lent has been marked by fasting and abstinence. A day of fasting and prayer has been practiced by Christians for many centuries on both Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Fasting involves both giving up something, usually food or perhaps a favored activity, and adding to time spent with God in prayer and reflection. We do this to draw ourselves closer to God, to humble ourselves before Him, and to ask for His will to be done in our lives. By joining together as a faith community on this day of prayer and fasting, we humbly drop our burdens at the foot of the Cross. We arrive here unified in humility, prayer and the hope that can only be found in His name.

YOUR DAY OF FASTING

We are suggesting a one day fast, taking in only water and juice, which will begin the morning of Good Friday and continue through the worship services to be held at St John that evening. Some of you may have health or other reasons to adjust the type and length of the fast to suit your needs. We ask that you stretch yourself spiritually and try to do whatever you are able. If you are concerned about any health risk from fasting, please check with your doctor.

Some suggestions

- Let the emphasis of your day, particularly at meal time, be on seeking the wisdom and will of God.
- Plan for several times of quiet during your fast. As necessary, advise others that you wish not to be disturbed. Have your Bible and these materials ready.
- The sanctuary will be open for the day if you would like to use it during your quiet time.
- Plan ahead to have water, and juice if desired, on hand as you begin your fast. Avoid high acid juices and caffeinated beverages.
- Do not overeat just before your fast. It will simply make you more uncomfortable to be without food.
- Encourage yourself by remembering that others are sharing this fast with you. Imagine our unity as we come before God.

For more on fasting, access this online resource.

¹ A Personal Guide to Fasting, Bill Bright.

ccci.org/training-and-growth/devotional-life/7-steps-to-fasting/01-personal-guide.htm

FEEDING ON WORD AND PRAYER

In place of your meal times during your fast, settle into a quiet place for prayer with your Bible, materials, juice or water gathered around you. You may also choose to journal your thoughts or take a walk to reflect. Begin with a prayer, such as this:

Let the incense of my repentant prayer ascend before You, O Lord, and let Your loving-kindness descend upon me, that with purified mind and heart I may be open to Your Word and presence. Let not my heart incline to any evil thing, but my eyes be turned only to You and Your Cross, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

The last page of this handout focuses our time on four scripture reflection for the day:

Isaiah 58 – God’s perspective on a true fast

Isaiah 53 – The Old Testament prophesy of the suffering servant

Luke 23 – The crucifixion of Jesus

Approach each scriptural reflection by reading the Biblical text several times. Read slowly to digest it. Take your time and look for new insights. Note what words and phrases you are drawn to and want to carry with you throughout your day. Shape these words into your prayers. Meditate on them as you go about your daily tasks.

Use the reflection questions as a guide to lead your quiet time. If one question is particularly useful, then stick with it. This is not a homework assignment! Other questions may come to mind. Follow that leading.

ENDING THE FAST

When you have ended your allotted time to fast, conclude with a prayer.

Lord God, You have called Your servant to ventures of which I cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give me faith sufficient to go out with good courage, not knowing where I go, but only that Your hand is leading me and Your love supporting me; through Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior, Amen.

Scriptural reflections for this day

Morning — Isaiah 58:1-7

What is the true fast that the Lord is looking for from his people?
Why do you think this an important part of our relationship with him?
What is the cost?

What is the Lord asking of you personally from this passage?

Select a word or phrase from text to guide your reflection. Write it down and quietly consider it through out the morning.

Mid Day — Isaiah 53:1-9

Isaiah prophesies about Jesus, the suffering servant, the one who fulfills all which God longs for from humankind, so that we are redeemed back to right relationship with God. What can you learn from this picture of sacrifice?

In what ways have you held back from the Lord? What do you sense him asking of you now?

Afternoon — Isaiah 58:8-14

Describe God's picture of how faithful Christians will impact our world. In what specific ways will you live out that potential?

Consider the *Sabbath* as regular, planned time of rest for seeking God, to grow in relationship with him. Why do you need this? How will you make it yours?

Early Evening — Luke 23:42-46; Isaiah 53:10-12

Why did Jesus need to die?

Bow your head before him in repentance and gratitude. Share with him those things that are on your heart and mind from this day. Allow his Spirit to work within you to bring about new life.