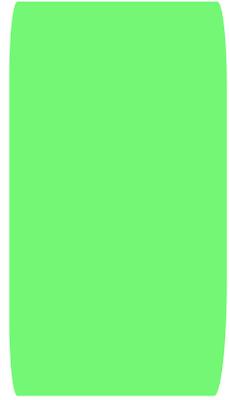




A Guide to

Prayer + Fasting





Intro

This is a simple guide for you to use during the next 21 days. To start off the new year right, we are encouraging you to grow in your relationship with Jesus as you participate in three practices that are focal to the Christian faith: Scripture, prayer, and fasting. We desire for this to be helpful to you as you seek to follow Jesus daily.



Scripture

During these 21 Days, our church will be journeying in Scripture together through the Gospel of John. John's Gospel is separated into 21 chapters, one for each day of this journey. Below are some ways in which you can make the rhythm of reading Scripture a part of your everyday routine.

WHEN

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

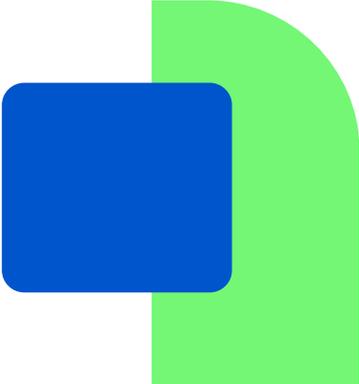
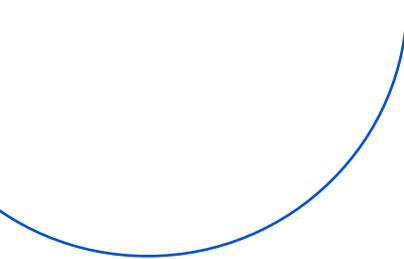
Lunch Break: If you have time during your workday to read during your lunch or another break, this might be a perfect way to spend your time.

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

WHAT

Bible App: We recommend you utilize the Bible App on your phone to not only help you follow along, but also to resource you on this journey. In this app, you will find thousands of translations of Scripture, the ability to take notes, and even a feature that reads Scripture to you!

Journal: We recommend using a simple journal that's easy to use. You can find these at just about any store, especially book stores or online. Pen: Take notes within your Bible or a journal.



HOW

S.O.A.P (Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer):

Scripture

Open your Bible to your reading for the day. Take time reading and allow God to speak to you. When you are done, look for a verse that particularly speaks to you, and write it in your journal.

Observation

What do you see in the passage? What is going on? Who is involved?

Application

Personalize what you have read, by asking yourself how it applies to your life right now. Perhaps it is instruction, encouragement, a new promise, or corrections for a particular area of your life. Write how this scripture can apply to you today.

Prayer

This can be as simple as asking God to help you use this scripture or even a prayer for greater insight into what He may be revealing to you. Remember, prayer is a two-way conversation, so be sure to listen to what God has to say! Now, write it out.



Prayer

During these 21 days, we would ask you to seek God both for yourself and for your church.

WEEK ONE: SEARCH ME

We begin this season with a week of introspection. Our prayer this week is that of the Psalmist who says, “search me, O God, and know my heart”. As we begin this new year, we take time to ask God to reveal to us the reality of who we are and how God wants to move in our lives. We want the Lord to reveal to us hidden sin and unhealthy patterns we have ignored. We want to ask the Holy Spirit to test us and reveal where we can surrender more fully to Jesus.

WEEK TWO: SHAPE ME

We refuse to be a people who fall into a spiritual slumber. In this new year, seek God to spiritually awaken you in areas of your life that might be asleep. Following Jesus means allowing Him to continually transform you; to never stop conforming you to His image. Together let’s pray that God would cause us to see the beauty of who He is so that anything in our lives that does not have value would fall away. Putting sin to death only happens when we truly delight in Christ. Shape us God so that we may daily enjoy you and be alert for the mission you have prepared for us in our city.

WEEK THREE: SEND ME

The Psalmist says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, the people labor in vain”. We do not want our labor as a church to be in vain. We do not want the labor of this fast to be in vain. We want Jesus to build His house by sending us to live on mission for Him in our community. For this to be a reality, we must be a people of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of men, women, and children so they might find a new life in Christ through the ministry of STF. We believe this for our neighbors, co-workers, families, and friends. Pray for opportunities to invite people to STF and to pour out your life through discipleship relationships this new year. We believe that a move of God only happens through the power of prayer from his children who have hearts postured in humility and repentance. Lord, send us!



Fasting

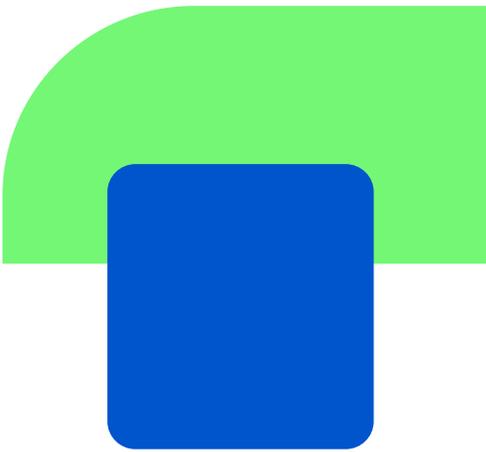
Why do we fast?

Fasting is removing what you think you need to be reminded of what you actually need. 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.”



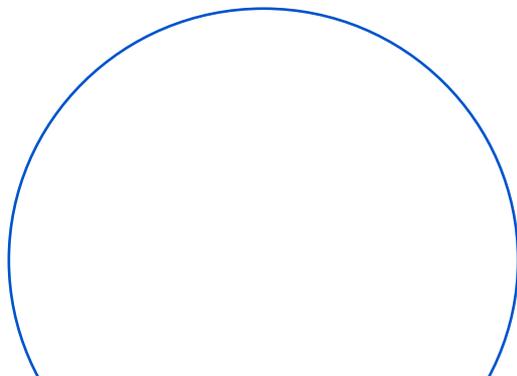


Fasting teaches us we can go without getting what we want and survive.

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.



Types of Fasts:

“As with all the disciplines, a progression should be observed; it is wise to learn to walk well before we try to run.”

In fasting we remove what we think we need to be reminded of what we actually need. In Scripture, fasting always concerns food - we remove food (what we think we need) to be reminded of what we actually need (the presence of God). For the purposes of our church fast, we want to challenge you to remove what you believe will best remind you of your need for God. You might ask, “What should I fast from?” We believe this is a question the Holy Spirit should answer for all of us. To answer 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.

Fast #1: Removing things other than 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.

Fast #2: Removing certain types of food (meat, sweets, coffee, 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.

Fast #3: Removing all foods (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. ***Please consult your physician before engaging in this type of fast.***

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 eat 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.



CONCLUSION

Choosing your fasting plan is a very personal decision. We are all at different places in our walk with Jesus 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.

Plan and Prepare for Your Fast

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 Type of Fast You Will Participate In

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:

The type of fast God wants you to undertake - discussed in the Types of Fasts section below.

What physical or social activities will you restrict?

How much time each day will you 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. Unconfessed 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.

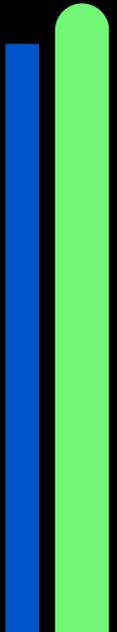
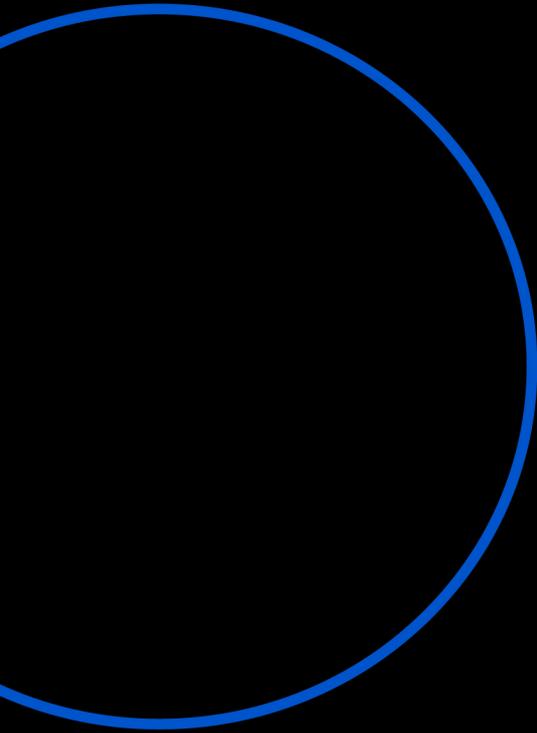
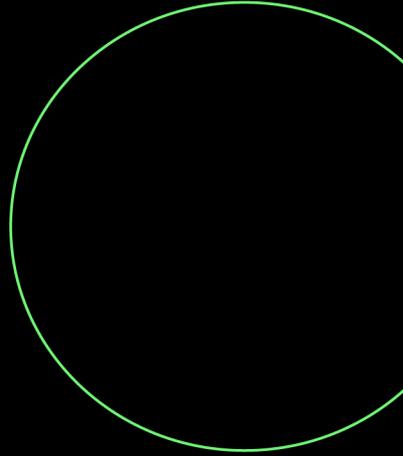
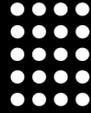
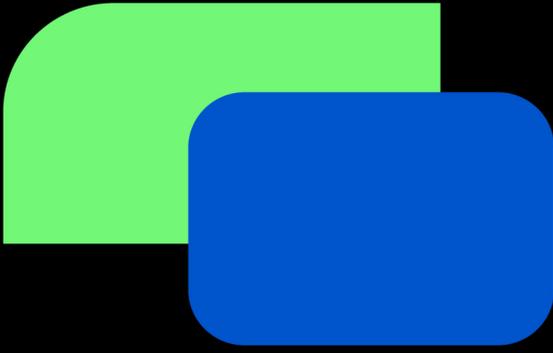
Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1 :9). Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you.(Mark 11 :25; Luke 11 :4; 17:3,4) Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.

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, 1 O; 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.



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