

A Call to Prayer and Fasting



As we prepare to move into our new campus in South Phoenix, The Church at South Mountain is fasting and praying on Fridays through the month of December.

Why this call?

Today we find ourselves, as God's people, on the verge of great Gospel witness in our community and in the world, yet we seem to be restrained or hindered by a lack of faith, power, humility, and love. How do we break through? There is no need to invent or come up with anything new. God's means of grace are sufficient. The inspired and infallible Word of God is His primary means of sanctification, coupled with spiritual disciplines, which include prayer and fasting (*John 17:17; 2 Tim.3:15-17*).

After much prayer, study, and consultation, I am calling you to join with us as elders to corporately pray and fast in order to experience the fullness of Christ's power and blessing in our church.

Is fasting biblical? What does the Word of God teach about it?

- The Bible teaches much about fasting and prayer. Fasting is not a command, but it is a voluntary spiritual discipline that our Lord and His people practiced for the following reasons:
 1. As a means of revealing to ourselves and confessing to God what is in our hearts
 2. As a means of humbling our souls and seeking God's protection (*Ps.69:10; Ezek.8:21*)
 3. As a means of preparing for ministry (*Matt.4:1-4*)
 4. As a means of preparing for spiritual combat (*Matt.4:1-4*)
 5. As a means of freeing His people from bondage and strongholds (*Is.58:1-12*)

Read what some have said about the benefits and blessings of prayer and fasting:

C.H. Spurgeon-"*Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has Heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory.*"

John Piper-"*Fasting is an expression of our conviction that it is sin to be satisfied with ourselves as we are. When you need to hear the voice of God more clearly, fast and worship. And who doesn't? A thousand voices compete for our attention. Many voices are directed to our appetites. Fasting says: Lord, I have stopped my ears to the cry of the body. Speak! I long for you to speak. Open the ears of my soul to the degree that I have stopped the ears of my stomach.*"

- Each week, we will provide a half-sheet with Bible references, quotes, and other resources that can be read online, downloaded, or purchased.

What are we praying and fasting for?

There are many elements that fasting and prayer relate to, such as: the salvation of a loved one or friend, financial provision, missions, spiritual renewal, a broken relationship that needs to be reconciled, or special direction or discernment about marriage, ministry, or work. However, whether it is individually or corporately, the purpose of this call to fast and pray gets down to these two things: 1) A greater measure of **personal holiness** (*the pursuit of Jesus Christ and Christlikeness*), and 2) A greater power of **Gospel witness**.

When?

Fridays — Beginning November 21, through the month of December

How?

Corporately, one day a week — Fast by skipping breakfast and lunch on Fridays for the rest of November and December, devoting some of the time that would have been given to those meals to meditation on God's Word and prayer. It should begin after dinner Thursday night; we will not eat breakfast or lunch on Friday, which will provide 24 hours of fasting (depending on what time you eat dinner).

What if I cannot fast for dietary reasons? Or, are there other ways to join in this call to pray and fast?

Martin Lloyd-Jones reminds us that "Fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not...be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special purpose." Some have physical conditions that would make fasting unsafe. Others can fast, not from food, but from watching television for a day to spend that time talking with and listening to the Lord. In whatever case, the purpose, motive, spirit, and expectation of fasting must be clear. Isaiah 30:15 says, "*In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.*" In other words, the strength to do the fast God calls you to do does not come from us. It comes from God. And it comes through trusting Him.

How can we encourage each other in this corporate time of fasting and prayer?

The elders will form a prayer chain where, for example, on Fridays, I will call one elder before or after that day's fast, share with him what the Lord is dealing with me about, and pray with him. Then he will call another elder and repeat the process until the elders have all prayed and shared with each other. I encourage you to find at least one person with whom you can partner to share and pray during this time.

Resources:

Many of these thoughts are gleaned from the rich exposition of John Piper and his series on fasting. I would strongly encourage you to read at least four articles from the Resource Library: Prayer, Fasting and the Course of History; When the Bridegroom is Taken Away; Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone; and A Fast for Waters that Do Not Fail. Fasting for the Father's Reward located at www.Desiringgod.org

Scriptures to Read: *Isaiah 58:1-12; 2 Chronicles 20:1-15; Acts 13:1-4; Matthew 9:14-17*

Book: Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

Articles: Dr. Bill Bright, *Why You Should Fast* located at www.ccci.org

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