

Week of Prayer & Fasting

"Our seasons of fasting and prayer have been high days indeed; never has heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory."

- **Charles Spurgeon**

Dear Bridge Family,

As humans, we were created for God. Our ultimate purpose is to live in Him and find our being through Him (Acts 17:27-28). Yet, our hearts often wander, seeking fulfillment in things that cannot truly satisfy. Fasting and prayer provide an opportunity to reorient our lives toward God, away from the distractions that capture our desires and affections.

At The Bridge Church, we believe in the power of fasting as a spiritual discipline that refocuses our hunger—both physical and spiritual—on the Father. Together, let us embark on this 5-Day journey to seek God, deepen our relationship with Him, and petition His guidance for the future.

What Are Prayer and Fasting?

Prayer is our direct line of communication with God. It is an expression of worship, dependence, and trust. Through prayer, we bring our needs, thankfulness, and intercession before the Lord, entering into a relationship where He speaks to us through His Word and Spirit.

Fasting is the voluntary abstention from food for a spiritual purpose. It is a physical demonstration of a deeper spiritual hunger for God. Richard Foster writes, "More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us." Abstaining from food has the capacity to redirect our focus from temporary satisfactions to the eternal satisfaction only found in Christ.

Key examples of fasting in the Bible include Jesus fasting in the wilderness (Matthew 4, Luke 4) and the early church fasting before sending out Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13). Fasting allows us to: a) develop greater dependence on God, b) seek guidance for decisions or direction, and c) grow in spiritual maturity and intimacy with God.

For a deeper dive into the topic of fasting, see the addendum at the end of this resource titled: "A Deeper Dive into Fasting."

Encouragement

During this week, we remember Charles Spurgeon's reflection on fasting: "Our seasons of fasting and prayer have been high days indeed; never has heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory."

Whether you abstain from food or other distractions, let your fast be an offering to God. Trust that what you sow in this week of seeking Him will yield fruit for the year ahead.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
— David (Psalm 34:8)

For Christ,
Pastor Ethan

5-Day Devotional

Jim Keen

Monday: Living In The Shadow

Scripture: Psalm 91:1-4

Focus: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."

Reflect: God is a refuge in all circumstances. This should be a picture of our trust in him. We live and rest in him. This shelter is called the "secret place" in the King James Version. Today may we enter the secret place of God's presence and find him there. Today, how can you make time for just you and God?

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, help me to put my full trust in you. You are my shelter and my covering. You alone are my place of safety in this world. Help me encounter and experience you today.

Tuesday: Do Not Fear

Scripture: Psalm 91:5-4

Focus: "You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday."

Reflect: We have no reason to fear what is going on around us—whether in our immediate lives or in society around us—because our security is found in God. No matter what we see and hear, he is always in control as we put our trust in him.

Prayer Prompt:

Father, help me to depend on you in all areas of my life. No matter what is going on around me, I can put my trust in you.

Wednesday: No Evil Will Conquer

Scripture: Psalm 91:9-13

Focus: "Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—The Most High, who is my refuge."

Reflect: When we make God our dwelling place and our refuge, no matter what is going on in our lives, he is with us and provides divine covering. As found in Psalm 23, it says: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff comfort me."

Prayer Prompt:

Father, even though I don't understand all that is going on in my life, I know you are with me and you are watching over me. Help me increase my trust in you no matter the circumstances. You are working for the good in my life and I will see your promises fulfilled in my life and the life of my loved ones. Thank you that I can dwell in your presence and you fight my battles for me when I fully trust in you.

Thursday: He Rescues

Scripture: Psalm 91:14-16

Focus: "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name."

Reflect: As we continue our week, think back on the times God has intervened in your life, all of the answered prayer, and his provision in your life. He is a God who redeems and rescues those who call out to him. In Psalm 116:1, it says: "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy." Thank the Lord for his mercy and salvation.

Prayer Prompt:

Merciful Father, I thank you for your mercy and salvation. I thank you that I can call on your name and you hear me. You truly are my shield and redeemer. I come to you today and repent of everything (name whatever it may be) that separates me from you. I look to you as the source of my life.

Friday: Stand Firm

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-18

Focus: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

Reflect: As we end the fast, remember where our strength comes from. We have a way of standing strong in the Lord as we put on his armor each day. We have an enemy of our soul who wants to kill, steal, and destroy us, but we have the victory in Christ. As long as we continue to put our trust in him, and put on our armor, we can live an abundant life in Christ.

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, thank you for your unfailing love and faithfulness. Strengthen my heart to trust in you always. Help me to remember daily to put your armor on. Remind me daily that we wage not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of darkness, and I can stand firm in you because of the victory through the cross and Jesus' sacrifice for all those who call upon him.

Addendum: A Deeper Dive into Fasting

Ethan Welch

Fasting is a powerful yet often underutilized spiritual discipline. It goes beyond merely abstaining from food; it is a profound expression of our need for God, an acknowledgment of our dependence on him, and a tool for spiritual breakthrough. This addendum explores the biblical and theological depth of fasting, offering insights to deepen your understanding and practice.

1. The Biblical Basis for Fasting

Throughout Scripture, fasting is woven into the lives of God's people during moments of significant spiritual importance:

- **Jesus' Example:** Before beginning his public ministry, Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). His fast was not just an act of preparation but a demonstration of dependence on God amidst spiritual opposition.
- **Old Testament Practices:** The Israelites fasted during times of repentance, national crisis, and seeking God's guidance (Joel 2:12-13, Nehemiah 1:4). Fasting was often paired with prayer and mourning as a communal act of humility before God.
- **The Early Church:** In the book of Acts, fasting was integral to seeking God's will, such as before commissioning leaders (Acts 13:2-3).

Fasting in Scripture often coincides with moments of heightened spiritual sensitivity, clarity, and reliance on God's power.

2. The Purpose of Fasting

Fasting is not a way to earn favor with God but a response to his grace. It reorients our priorities and draws us closer to him. Here are some of its primary purposes:

- **Dependence on God:** Fasting reminds us of our reliance on him for both physical and spiritual sustenance (Deuteronomy 8:3).
- **Clarity and Guidance:** Fasting creates space to hear God's voice more clearly. By quieting the noise of life, we position ourselves to discern his will (Acts 14:23).
- **Repentance and Renewal:** Fasting is a physical expression of an inward repentance, as seen in Joel 2:12-13: "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting."
- **Intercession:** Many biblical fasts were undertaken on behalf of others, such as Daniel's fasting and praying for his people (Daniel 9:3-5).
- **Victory over Temptation:** Jesus modeled fasting as a way to confront and overcome spiritual warfare (Matthew 4:1-11).

3. Types of Fasts

Fasting in the Bible is almost always a withdrawal from eating. However, that may not be feasible for everyone at this time. If that is the case, fasting can also take various forms, allowing flexibility depending on personal limitations and spiritual goals:

- **Absolute Fast:** No food or water is consumed (Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9). This type of fast should be brief and approached with caution.
- **Normal Fast:** Abstaining from all food while continuing to drink water or liquids (Luke 4:2).
- **Daniel Fast:** Abstaining from certain kinds of food or meals, as seen in Daniel's diet of vegetables and water (Daniel 1:12, Daniel 10:3).
- **Intermittent Fast:** A partial fast could include abstaining from certain meals throughout the day or week, but not all meals.
- **Non-Food Fasts:** Abstaining from distractions like social media, entertainment, or other activities that can take the place of spiritual focus.

4. Fasting and Spiritual Hunger

John Piper aptly states, "The weakness of our hunger for God is not because he is unsavory, but because we keep ourselves stuffed with other things." Fasting highlights the ways we often satisfy our souls with temporary pleasures rather than the eternal joy of God.

When we fast, our physical hunger becomes a metaphor for spiritual hunger. Just as our bodies cry out for nourishment, our souls cry out for God (Psalm 42:1-2). Fasting heightens this awareness and trains us to find satisfaction in him alone.

5. Practical Tips for Fasting

- **Prepare Spiritually:** Approach your fast with a heart of expectancy. Pray and ask God to reveal areas of your life where you need renewal or breakthrough.
- **Start Small:** If you're new to fasting, you may want to begin with a partial fast or shorter time period before attempting a longer fast.
- **Set a Focus:** Establish a specific spiritual purpose for your fast, whether it's seeking guidance, repentance, or deepening intimacy with God.
- **Stay Hydrated:** If you're undertaking a normal or partial fast, drink plenty of water to sustain your body.
- **Replace with Prayer:** Use the time you would normally spend eating or engaging in other activities to pray, read Scripture, and listen to God.
- **Be Wise:** Consult a physician if you have medical conditions or concerns about fasting. For some, abstaining from non-food activities may be more appropriate.
- **Stick with It:** There will likely be moments throughout this week that feel difficult. Use this week to develop godly discipline, and stick with it!

6. The New Testament Lens on Fasting

In light of the gospel, Christian fasting takes on a new significance. As Piper explains, the “new fasting” is not rooted in mourning the absence of the Messiah, but in longing for the fullness of his kingdom. Having tasted the goodness of God through Christ, we fast out of a deep desire for more of him (Matthew 9:14-17).

This longing reminds us that fasting is not about what we abstain from but what we are drawn toward—God himself. It reflects a hunger for his presence, his power, and his promises.

7. Encouragement for Your Fast

Charles Spurgeon captured the beauty of fasting, saying, “Our seasons of fasting and prayer have been high days indeed; never has heaven’s gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory.”

As you fast, let your hunger point you to the Bread of Life (John 6:35) and the Living Water (John 7:37-38). Trust that your fast is not an act of deprivation but a feast of spiritual richness, drawing you into the fullness of God’s love.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
-David (Psalm 34:8)