

Prayer & Fasting

Rob Rogers January 08, 2023

Introduction

Changes to Elder Board

Our Elders exist to **GOVERN | GUIDE | GUARD** our flock here at Grace Chapel.

GOVERN - *Oversee the mission and vision of the church.* Within scripture, an elder is referred to the office of an overseer. The purpose is to ensure the accomplishment of the mission that Jesus has given us.

GUIDE - *Shepherding, caring for, and praying for the flock; and also modeling what spiritual maturity looks like.*

GUARD - *Watching over the health of the church, teaching the truth, protecting against false teaching, and working toward unity of the body.*

To accomplish this, we have two primary Elder Roles.

GOVERNING ELDERS – These are Elders who have primary responsibility over the direction, health, and spiritual life of the flock. We hold, as a collective whole, authority for decision making. These are Elders with a vote. As the Senior Pastor, I'm responsible for them, accountable with them for the decisions we make, and I'm personally accountable to them, submitted to their collective wisdom and authority.

ADVISORY ELDERS – These are proven, seasoned, godly leaders that have a long track record of spiritual wisdom and maturity, who offer counsel and guidance to me, and to the rest of our Elders. **They provide an additional spiritual covering for our flock.**

For the last year, **Pastor Dave Buehring** has functioned in the Governing Elder role. He's helped us to establish a development track for future elders, he's provided clarity and guidance as we've reconstituted and reformed how we function as Elders here at Grace Chapel.

As of January 1, Dave has officially moved into an Advisory Elder capacity, and will continue to offer his wisdom and insight to our Elders here at Grace Chapel. Before we move beyond that... church can we thank Pastor Dave and his wonderful wife Cheryl for their unbelievable faithfulness to God's work here?

That leaves a vacancy in our Governing Elder team. I'm thrilled for you to know that **Pastor Chris Whitney**, of OneGenAway has officially stepped in as a Governing Elder. We're thrilled to add Chris's voice, his years of wisdom and experience to the team. Elaine, thank you for agreeing to share your husband with us.

Mission Statement Change

You may have noticed something else this morning...

Throughout 2022, we have talked about God calling Grace Chapel to become a disciple-making Church. We defined a disciple this way... “Someone that is **following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and living on mission with Jesus.**”

In Matthew 4:19... Jesus says... **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”**

And while we absolutely believe it is the calling of the church *to equip the saints for the work of the ministry* as it says in Ephesians 4... and we will continue to do that work, This is the goal for every single one of us... for you, for me, for our Elders, pastors, staff, everyone that calls Grace Chapel home. This is what we’re all about — actually following Jesus and becoming like Him. **It’s all about being disciples, that make disciples, that make disciples...**

This is what we’re here to do together. This is why we gather on Sunday mornings, on Wednesday evenings... this is why we gather in biblical community, in Life Groups, and in discipleship groups... this is why we love our neighbors... and live on mission... this is why we preach the word, why we sing the songs— **because our aim is that every single person who calls Grace Chapel home would be someone that is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and living on mission with Jesus.**

Fasting

One of the ways we grow to accomplish this is through the spiritual practices, spiritual disciplines... and today, we’re going to zero in on one in particular.

So today, you’ll be thrilled to hear that we’re talking about –

FASTING

I’m going to give us an overview and an understanding of this practice, that will prepare us for our church-wide 21-day fast that will begin on Tuesday, January 10th.

Unfortunately, this ancient spiritual practice is largely foreign to the capital Church today... and while there is no specific command for us to fast in the Bible, fasting is seen as a powerful practice throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

Ezra, Esther, Moses, King David, the entire city of Nineveh fasted as an act of repentance toward God. Anna in Luke 2, Cornelius in Acts 10, the Apostles’ fasted to seek God’s will in Acts 13 & 14. Paul stated that he fasted often. Jesus Himself fasted in preparation for His confrontation with the devil in the wilderness, and in preparation for the work God had given Him to do.

Jesus, as he is instructing His followers, starts by saying, **“When you fast...”** He doesn’t say, **“IF you fast...”** He says **“WHEN.”**

- Jesus assumes that fasting is going to be a regular, prioritized, spiritual practice of every single one of His disciples, His apprentices.

So today, we’re going to cover...

WHAT FASTING IS
7 BENEFITS OF FASTING
TYPES OF FASTS

What Fasting Is

Sometimes in order to better understand what something *IS* we first need to understand what it is *NOT*.

Biblical Fasting is **not** about weight loss, a cleanse, not about penance, and it's not a way to try to manipulate God...

*“A fast is not a hunger strike. Fasting submits to God's commands.
A hunger strike makes God submit to our demands.”¹
~ Ed Cole*

What is Fasting?

Leviticus 16:29

“This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls...”

- This verse is God's instruction regarding the Day of Atonement ritual in the Old Testament... but the phrase “*afflict your souls*” **is also translated as self-denial**. It's speaking of fasting as not just denying the body but as denying my desires... my appetites... my wants.

Fasting *IS* an act of self-denial... but it's not *JUST* an act of self-denial.

*“The voluntary abstention from an otherwise normal function—most often eating—
for the sake of intense spiritual activity.”²
~ Dallas Willard*

Willard is saying you're not just depriving yourself of something to say you did it... fasting is not going without, just to go without. Willard's definition tells us that ***the purpose of fasting is to go without something temporal, in order to hunger for and connect with the eternal.***

Fasting is physical abstinence for the purpose of spiritual investment.

Luke 9:23

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

- Jesus describes the essence of discipleship as self-denial, for the purpose of spiritual engagement. You deny yourself, in order to follow Jesus. to become like Christ, to do the things that Jesus did.

¹ Randi Fredricks. *Fasting: an Exceptional Human Experience* (AuthorHouse, Dec 20, 2012) p. 320

² Dallas Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. (Harper Collins, Oct 6, 2009)

Every time you see the discipline of fasting in the Bible... you never see it as an isolated practice. *Fasting is always intimately linked with the practice of prayer.*

*You can have prayer without fasting,
but you can't have fasting (in the biblical sense) without prayer.*

You're going without something, in order to engage in a greater thing. **You're fasting in order to develop greater levels of intimacy, dependence, communion, and communication with God.**

7 Benefits of Fasting

1. Victory Over Temptation

Matthew 4:1-4

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. ³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." ⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*'"

- Jesus fasted in preparation for spiritual battle and had victory over temptation.
- Matthew 4 says that fasting prepares you and strengthens you for spiritual battle, and can give you **victory over temptation**.

2. Increases Our Faith

In Matthew 17, the disciples had previously worked miracles and brought healing to people, but they couldn't cure this one boy of epilepsy... but Jesus could. They approached Jesus in private and asked him... "*Why couldn't we cast this demon out?*"

Jesus rebukes them and the whole crowd for their lack of faith.

Matthew 17:20-21

"Because of your **unbelief**; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have **faith** as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. ²¹ However, this kind does not go out except by **prayer and fasting**."

- **Jesus links fasting with faith** — with our ability to trust God to do the impossible! You want to increase your faith this year? You want to see God work miracles in and through your life, you want to believe and see God do the impossible? **Fast and pray.**

3. Brings Personal Guidance

In Acts 10, Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, was fasting and praying... and an angel appeared to him instructing him to send for Peter — to have Peter come and declare to Him the ways of God.

Do you need God's guidance? Do you need Him to reveal to you your next step in your career, your relationships, your finances, your marriage, your ministry, your mission? Do you need personal guidance from God for this next season of life? **Fast and Pray with expectancy that God will speak to you.**

4. Wisdom and Decision Making

Acts 13:2-3

As they ministered to the Lord and **fasted**, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having **fasted and prayed**, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.

- As the early church leaders fasted and prayed the Holy Spirit spoke to them, and specifically called out Barnabas and Saul from that community to be sent out to Apostolic, pioneering, church planting, missional work in the first century world.

Fasting and praying doesn't just bring God's guidance for you — but also brings God's wisdom and guidance to the mission — for a community, a body of believers, the collective whole.

- When the early church appointed elders and leaders, they would fast and pray, seek God's guidance for that particular body of believers, and appoint those leaders according to the Spirit's guidance and wisdom.

Has God given you influence within a community of people? In other people's lives? Has he given you *positional authority* over others that He's called you to serve. Fast and pray, not only for God's guidance in your own life, but for the Will of the Holy Spirit for those you lead as well.

5. Deliverance and Protection

In Ezra 8, Ezra declared a corporate fast and prayed for a safe journey for the Israelites as they made the dangerous nine-hundred-mile trek to Jerusalem from Babylon. They had no military protection (Ezra 8:21-23), God protected them and answered their request.

Are you entering a season of risk? Is your future uncertain? Is God asking you to step out into something that terrifies you? Fast and pray. Ask for his protection as you obey Him.

6. Spiritual Insight and Influence

Under the rule and authority of Nebuchadnezzar, pagan King of Babylon — Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, fasted and prayed.

Daniel 1:17

...God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

- Directly after this, Daniel and his friends were chosen to have higher levels of responsibility and influence in the royal courts of Babylon.
- Daniel fasted and prayed and was gifted with spiritual insight, and was granted positional influence.

Again in Daniel 10 — Daniel fasted and prayed for three weeks, and an angel appeared to him.

Daniel 10:12

“...from the first day that you **set your heart to understand**, and to **humble yourself** before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.”

*The angel equates fasting and prayer with **humility and understanding**.*

Regular times of fasting increase your ability to perceive and understand eternal and spiritual matters. You'll gain spiritual insights and be able share them, when the opportunity presents itself.

7. Favor and Provision

In Nehemiah 1, Nehemiah gets news of how the Hebrew people in Jerusalem were suffering and in great distress, after they had escaped from Babylonian captivity. The gates and walls that protected the Jerusalem were destroyed, and there was no protection from Israel's enemies.

Nehemiah 1:4

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

We don't know how long Nehemiah fasted; it could have been up to 4 months... but what we do know is that God gave Nehemiah incredible favor with King Artaxerxes. As a result of his obedience and boldness, he was sent with permission and provision to rebuild Jerusalem.

Nehemiah had a comfortable life in the King's palace... but he didn't let that lull him into a spiritual slumber. In the comfort and abundance of Williamson County, it's so easy to fall into spiritual apathy... to allow the convenience and comforts we enjoy convince us that we don't really need God.

What Nehemiah tells us is that fasting is a way to remind yourself that you are utterly dependent on Someone greater than what this world could ever provide.

While we might not have direct access to the King of Persia... we do have access to the King of Heaven. When we fast... when we pray, we know that God will take our prayers and turn them into provision.

God took Nehemiah's grief, mourning, prayer and fasting, and turned it into favor and provision for the people of Israel.

Types of Fasts

Starting on January 10th (this Tuesday) we're going to participate in a church-wide 21-day fast as we head into 2023. We're also scheduling QUARTERLY FASTS throughout the year that will be for a shorter duration, that will also coincide with our Nights of Prayer as well.

Here are some different types of fasts to help guide us.

1. Full fast – No food. Liquids Only.

- A typical “Full Fast” is actually no food and no drink for 1 – 3 days. Doing that for 21-days is not a good idea.

- Even with liquids, this type of fast is very difficult, and should be done thoughtfully and carefully, especially for an extended period of time like 21 days. Most often in scripture, these types of fasts last anywhere from 3 – 7 days. There are instances where these types of fasts extend longer than that, but in those instances, there is direct guidance from God or supernatural ability given by God to complete this.
- If you're new to fasting, I would encourage you not to start with 21 days with no food.
 - You could try a full fast for a 24-hr period – and then modify your fast for the 21-days. But again, don't do it flippantly.

2. Daniel Fast – Planted Foods & Water

- Daniel 1 refers to vegetables, but in the original language it means things that are sown, which would include fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. Daniel actually practiced this type of fast for 10 days, and then later for 21 days. Misty and I have done this several times, and if you're new to fasting, this might be a good starting point for you.

3. Partial Fast – Restriction of Your Choosing

- This could be that you don't eat food from sunup to sundown. (Regular Fast) Or that you abstain from at least one meal/day for 21 days, or a specific type of food for 21 days. It could be abstaining from caffeine, alcohol, sugar.
 - **IMPORTANT:** If maybe you've had an unhealthy relationship with food in the past, and you're concerned about practicing a food fast – you might consider another type of partial fast. Electronics, social media, your phone... different forms of entertainment. The Bible also refers to a mutually consented sexual fast between a husband and wife, in 1 Corinthians 7.

*Whatever it is that you abstain from, remember that **the point of your fast is to create a physical hunger that drives you to deeper levels of intimacy with God – to find your satisfaction and fulfillment in God.***

Discipline of Abstinence

In Dallas Willard's book, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, he puts forward the idea that if we continue to view disciplines of abstinence (silence, solitude, and fasting in particular) as disciplines of *deprivation*, we'll never actually understand and enjoy the full weight (benefits) of these disciplines.³

The Apostle Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

- Paul is specifically referring to the persecution of the church, but the principle applies to fasting as well.

³ Dallas Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. (Harper Collins, Oct 6, 2009)

*Fasting is simply letting go of that which is seen,
to reach for that which is unseen.*

Many of us view fasting as a time-bound *sacrifice* for God, but it's not that at all. **According to Paul, it's not even a sacrifice. Paul says, anything you give up in this life is building something much greater for you in the life to come!**

When that truth sinks in, ***we view fasting not as a sacrifice but an investment.*** Disciplines of abstinence become joyous because we know ***that our light affliction is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!***

Any sacrifices we make to grow in intimacy with God, ultimately is no sacrifice at all — it's an investment that will help us ***to follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus, and live on mission with Jesus.***

AVAILABLE RESOURCES:

Overview of Fasting

<https://practicthewayarchives.org/practices/fasting>

Fasting Starter Kit

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/fasting-starter-kit.html>

Exploring and Beginning Prayer

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/prayer/prayer-starter-kit.html>

Our Relationship to Food, Body, and Image.

<https://practicthewayarchives.org/teaching/relationship-to-food>

Discussion Questions

1. How do you respond when Jesus says, “*WHEN* you fast...” NOT “*IF* you fast.” Do you think that this commandment might not apply to you?
2. Define the “purpose of fasting.”
3. Discuss: “You can have prayer without fasting, but you can’t have fasting (in the biblical sense) without prayer.”
4. Seven benefits of fasting are: 1) Victory over Temptation, 2) Increases Our Faith, 3) Brings Personal Guidance, 4) Wisdom and Decision Making, 5) Deliverance and Protection, 6) Spiritual Insight and Influence, 7) Favor and Provision. Which of these benefits will you specifically pray for in your fast?
5. Have you fasted before? What kind of fast? What were “the results”? What benefits did you seek/receive?
6. How can you view fasting not as a sacrifice, but as an investment?

NOTES