

Weekly breakdown:

**CONGREGATIONAL
FOCUS DURING THE
FAST**



**WEEK ONE:
HEART FOR THE
HOUSE**



**WEEK TWO:
HEART FOR MAKING
DISCIPLES**



**WEEK THREE:
WAKE UP**



21 DAYS

— OF PRAYER —
AND FASTING

Introduction:

As a congregation we have made a tradition of starting the year off by focusing and centering our hearts on God and this year will be no different. Starting January 9, 2023 we will have a congregational focus on growing in our walks with Christ in three areas: reading, praying, and fasting.

The Mercer Church
started this
congregational
tradition back in
2020

Reading:

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 Reading Plan: Choose a plan and work the plan. If you miss some days, do not try to catch up. Simply pick up where you left off.

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.

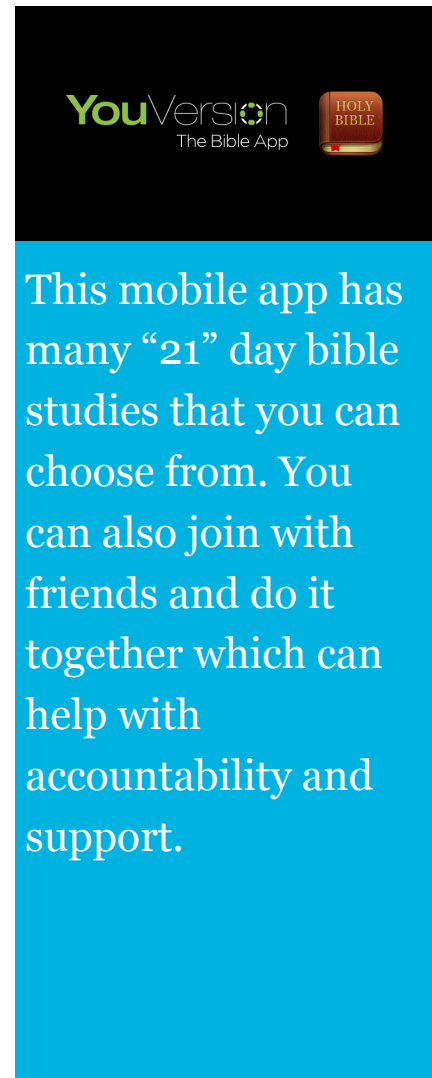
Pen: Take notes within your Bible or a journal.

HOW

Pray: Ask God to speak to you through his Word. And then expect God to speak. Your approach to God's Word will greatly impact your times of personal worship. Ask God to search your heart and to transform your life.

Read: Take notes as you read. If you have a question or have difficulty understanding something, use the study Bible notes to explore answers.

Journal: (try to limit it to one page per day to start): Start a new page and record the date and Scripture you read on the top line. Write down a verse or two that stood out to you. Stay focused on what God is saying through his Word that intersects with your everyday life. This is not about speculation, private interpretations or manipulating God's Word to say what you want it to say. This is about bringing Christ to your everyday life based on the truth of God's Word rightly interpreted.



Praying

WEEK ONE: HEART FOR THE HOUSE

We believe The Mercer church has an incredible opportunity to reach and serve our community. Pray that we would be a place of love. Pray that no hypocrisy would slip into our church family. This is also an important time to pray over the church's resources. Pray that this new year would see financial stability, transparency, and growth. We must all learn to be good stewards of the time, money, and resources that God has given us. As we grow as a congregation so do the needs of our congregation. As we become good stewards of the blessings God has given us may we keep our eyes open to the needs surrounding us.

WEEK TWO: HEART FOR MAKING DISCIPLES

God has called us all to be disciple makers. We pray that this year every disciple in our congregation is able to participate in the process of teaching and bringing someone into a maturing relationship with Christ. For this to happen we must be a people of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see the spiritual need of those around us. Pray for opportunities to invite people examine the word of God and pray for the confidence to seize the moment when God makes it clear.

WEEK THREE: WAKE UP

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. Together let's pray that God would wake us up to see the beauty of who He is so that anything in our lives that does not have value would fall away. Getting rid of worthless, sin-filled desires only happens when we truly delight in Christ. So wake up, enjoy God and be alert for the mission that God has called us to in our city and community.

DURING THE FAST, WE
WOULD ASK YOU TO SEEK
GOD ON THE FOLLOWING
TOPICS BOTH FOR
YOURSELF AND FOR OUR
CHURCH.



Fasting

THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

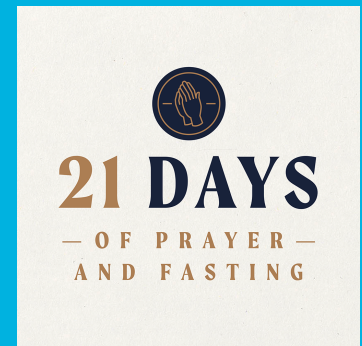
Fasting reveals and heals our dependence on food (and other things) to fill the discomfort caused by low self-esteem, unfulfilling work, unloving relationships, uncontrollable circumstances, etc. It removes the false peace derived from the pleasure of eating. Richard Foster, in His Classic Celebration 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 fast- ing 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.



**FASTING IS
DESIGNED TO
INTENSIFY
OUR
DEPENDENCE
ON GOD BY
WEAKENING
OUR
DEPENDENCE
ON FOOD AND
OTHER
THINGS.**

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 Nature of Your Fast

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:

- How long you will fast - one meal, one day, one week, several weeks, certain days (Beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts)
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake - discussed in the Types of Fasts section below.
- What physical or social activities you will restrict
- How much time each day you will 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. Un-confessed 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.

Types of Fasting

ABSTAINING FROM CERTAIN TYPES OF FOOD (MEAT, SWEETS, 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.

Determine the timing and duration of your fast and begin. You may choose to go without this specific type of food on only certain days like Fridays, or you may go without during the weekdays only or perhaps every day. Finally, choose the duration of your fast. This community wide fast is 21 days but that does not mean you must go without for all of the 21 days. Determine the timing and duration ahead of time and pray through it.

ABSTAINING FROM ALL FOOD (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.

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 eating 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.

ABSTAINING FROM THINGS BESIDES 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.

Conclusion:

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

NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF FAST YOU CHOOSE, AND EVEN IF YOU CHOOSE NOT TO FAST, PLEASE SEEK GOD IN PRAYER AND READING.