



GUIDE TO  
**FASTING**

*January 7th-28th, 2018*

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**#21DAYSCLOSER**

# A CALL TO FASTING AND PRAYER

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Each year in January we set time aside to seek the Lord through fasting and prayer. If you are a part of Harvest Christian Fellowship, and especially if you are serving on the Dream Team, I want to encourage you to mark these days on your calendar and prayerfully consider how you will participate in these days as we enter into the New Year in the grace and power of God.

We are starting this year as we start every year, in a concerted pursuit of God with fasting and prayer from January 7th -28th. Our theme this year is “Closer”. We want to get closer to Jesus in our walk, in the word and in our worship.

As you read the following pages I pray the Holy Spirit speak to you about this season of our life as a church and your individual life as you consider your involvement in this time of seeking God. The following pages of this booklet are to provide some basic guidelines, scriptural instruction, and seeds of faith to motivate and equip you to pursue God through fasting and prayer.

*G. Roy Stephenson*

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# THE FIRST AND THE BEST

By “sanctifying” the first few weeks of this year, we are setting aside “the first” of our year. By pushing back the plate, giving our minds, bodies and spirits to an all-out pursuit of the Lord and His purpose, we are giving “our best”. This principle is found throughout the Word of God and can be found from the very beginning of man’s interaction with God: God’s blessing is released when we give the first and the best. We see this as Adam and Eve were given all they could ever want or need. The only thing that God required was that they honor Him by not taking what was reserved for God and God alone. When Adam and Eve’s sons grew old enough to worship God, they brought their offerings. Abel’s offering brought blessing while Cain’s offering brought displeasure and ultimately death. The difference between the two offerings is revealed in Genesis 4:2-5:

*Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering He did not look with favor.*

*Genesis 4:2-5*

The major difference was that Cain brought “some of his possessions”, while Abel brought the precious gift of the FIRSTBORN. This principle carries on throughout the Word of God as we see the first and best of our passions, time, talents, finances, and families belong to the Lord. When we give God the first and best there is an inescapable blessing that occurs. When we keep the first and best for ourselves, or hold back out of fear, doubt, selfishness or compromise, there is a removal of the favor of God.

Let's look at some examples of our FIRST and our BEST that belong to God:

### **FIRST COMMANDMENT! FIRST LOVE:**

*“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might”*

*Deuteronomy 6:5*

### **THE FIRSTBORN:**

*“as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’*

*Luke 2:23*

### **THE FIRST OF THE INCREASE:**

*“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing,”*

*Proverbs 39-10*

### **FIRST-DAY GIVING:**

*“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income,”*

*1 Corinthians 16:2*

In a very practical way we are going to give God the first and best of this year.

## **THE PURSUIT OF GOD**

The Bible is filled with invitations, commandments and examples of how we are to pursue God. Here are some of those examples:

“But from there you will seek the LORD your God, you will find Him if you look for Him with all your heart and with

all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey Him.” (Deuteronomy 4:29-30)

*“You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart, I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity.”*

*Jeremiah 29:13-14*

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

*Matthew 7:7-8*

*“And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly however, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”*

*Luke 18:7-8*

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

*Hebrews 11:6*

*“Seek The LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near; Let The wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his Thoughts; let him return to the LORD.”*

*Isaiah 55:6-7*

The overwhelming evidence of scripture proves that God responds to those who whole-heartedly, passionately, diligently and consistently pursue Him. One of the obvious ways of intense pursuit found in scripture is the practice of fasting and prayer. Perhaps you have never embarked upon

a spiritual fast. Maybe you've tried it once or twice in the past with little to no effect. Or maybe you used to practice a lifestyle of fasting and prayer and have now drifted from it. These 21 DAYS are our time to seek the Lord with all our hearts.

## **THE CONDITION OF WORLD**

Casual, self-serving, apathetic, complacent - these are a few of the words that describe the current state of the Canadian culture. The reality is we live in a culture that is inundated with the values of comfort, self-gratification, and entertainment. The thought of creating physical discomfort for the purpose of spiritual gain is foreign to most Christians living in 2011. This has not always been the case in the history of the church. The "early church" was birthed in fasting and prayer, and church history proves that times of revival and renewal have always been preceded by seasons of prayer and fasting.

*"In The church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, while they were worshipping The Lord and fasting, The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for The work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off,"*

*Acts 13:1-3*

### **The Words of the Apostle Paul**

*"have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and Thirst and have been in fasting often..."*

*2 Corinthians 11:27*

## The Words of Jesus

*“...the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; Then they will fast.”*

*Matthew 9:15*

Going without food definitely doesn't seem like it fits into the category of “common sense”! Taking extended times to wait on God, pray, worship, and listen for His voice goes against what our flesh would dictate and our culture would prioritize. It is because of these factors that an intense pursuit calls for a radical commitment and an exceptional desire to meet with God, know His voice, experience His presences and live in a place of intimacy.

There is a story told of an old man of God who was mentoring a young prospective pastor. The young man wanted to know how he could be as passionate and effective as his mentor and so he asked the old man if he would teach him how to “find God.” The old man agreed and told the young man to meet him down by the river that afternoon.

When the young man arrived at the designated spot the old man grabbed him by the back of the neck and plunged his head under water where he held him for quite some time. Then he let him come up for a quick breath of air, only to plunge him back under for even longer! After the young man recovered from the near fatal experience, he was outraged and asked what in the world his teacher was trying to do to him. The old preacher replied to his protégé, “When you are as desperate for God as you were for that next breath of air, you will never fail in finding Him!”

# FASTING IN DESPERATE TIMES

For many in our church, our city and our nation, these are indeed desperate times. Many are being personally affected by financial crisis and need clarity, breakthrough, direction, and supernatural intervention. As a nation we find ourselves in a continual downward spiral of political confusion, economic storms, and moral decline, and there is no change of direction in sight! We need an accurate analysis of the situation to embrace the appropriate urgency required to humble ourselves and pray! Biblical fasting is synonymous with humility. When desperate times come, whether they are self inflicted or a direct assault from demonic forces, there is a sure promise in the Word of God that God will respond to the humble cry of His people. Let me remind you of a familiar passage:

*‘When Solomon had finished The temple of The LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in The temple of The LORD and in his own palace, The LORD appeared to him at night and said: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen This place for Myself as a temple for sacrifices. When I shut up The heavens so That There is no rain, or command locusts to devour The land or send a plague among My people, if My people, who are called by My name, will humble Themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from Their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive Their sin and will heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.”*

*2 Chronicles 7:11-15*

When God said that He would “shut the heavens,” it was always a justified action in response to a rebellious

people, so the bleak condition that the nation of Israel found themselves in, time after time, was self-inflicted. God is completely just in shutting the heavens, yet invites us to “reverse the curse” through the acts of humility and intercession. If you are in a desperate season in your life due to sowing a bad crop and ignoring the principles of God’s Word, then it’s time to enter into an intense pursuit of the mercy and healing grace of GOD!

Effective fasting requires intense prayer

*“Then you will call upon me and go and pray to me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart,”*

*Jeremiah 29:12-13*

Searching or looking for God? What... is God lost? Seeking for God... is He hiding? The context of these verses in Jeremiah is God’s response to a people who, by their own sin and neglect of His ways, went into a time of captivity. God begins to tell them He has a great hope and future planned for them even though they disobeyed in the past and wasted their potential. Isn’t that awesome about our God? He has the sovereign ability to grant us a new beginning and reinstate our inheritance even when we’ve wasted precious time and ended up in a place of confusion and captivity. Remember when Peter denied Jesus and failed God about as miserably as anyone in the Bible? The next time Jesus sees Peter, He does not rebuke him or put him on spiritual probation; He feeds him breakfast and restores him to a place of ministry that was founded in a passionate love for God. (John 21)

God declares His heart for His people as the Word of the Lord was spoken through Jeremiah. However, there were conditions given in order for His people to see the fulfillment of the Word. As we look at these three responses to

the prophetic word, let's place ourselves in the picture and apply it personally.

### **“YOU WILL CALL AND PRAY”**

This is talking about us simply lifting up our voices and spending our time in intercession. It is a focused, intentional prayer that requires passion and the lifting of the voice to God.

### **“YOU WILL SEEK ME”**

To make every effort and attempt to go after; to be desperate and passionate in the pursuit of; to search for through the act of worship and prayer. God has always responded to a people who are making every effort to go after Him in prayer and worship. He responds to conditions like hunger, passion, desperation and brokenness.

### **“YOU WILL SEARCH FOR ME”**

This is talking about creating a well worn path through the process of following. A perpetual journey toward God! Not weekend visitation rights, but a lifestyle of pursuit that captures our affections and consumes our desires.

## **FASTING IN A TIME OF FAVOUR**

Fasting is not just about 'desperate times requiring desperate measures' Fasting is actually a key in releasing the favour of the Lord in seasons where God has intended to release HIS blessing and fulfill His promises in our lives.

*“This is what the LORD says: ‘In the time of My favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation will help you; I will keep*

*you and will make you to be a covenant for The people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"*

*Isaiah 49:8-9*

There are seasons in every life and the life of every church. God works through seasons and times.

*"Repent, Then, and turn to God, so That your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."*

*Acts 3:19*

The "times of refreshing" refer to the season or window of God's visitation. The Greek word *kairos* is the word used in this verse which refers to "a proper or set time, a window or divine moment in time." So as men and women of the Spirit, we need to live with the awareness that as we are spending our allotment of *chronos* time (hours, days, weeks...), God brings us into "kairos moments" ---Moments of Divine visitation and refreshing. At Harvest, we are once again in a season of favor and invitation from the Lord!

*"...in The first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to The word of The LORD given to Jeremiah The prophet, that The desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years."*

*Daniel 9:2*

God spoke to Daniel regarding the deliverance of the people of Israel who had been in captivity for seventy years. There was a prophetic word from the prophet Jeremiah that God would now deliver them and they would experience the favour of God. Even with a clear prophetic word, (and we have many!) and the time of captivity coming to an end, Daniel still set himself to fast and pray!

*“So I turned to The Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in FASTING”*

*Daniel 9:3*

So the question must be asked: Since God had already planned on releasing Israel, their release had already been prophesied, and the time of captivity had come to its end, why was the fast necessary? I believe the answer to that question is the very reason we must fast and pray right now!

The will of God is very clear that the captives can go free. The price has been paid on the cross of Calvary and “today is the day of salvation.” With all those things in place, God has still given responsibility to His church to preach the message, pray for the lost, fast for the breaking of spiritual strongholds, and disciple those who are brought out of darkness.

If we understand that prophetic words are almost always contingent upon the interaction and response of God’s people, then we can position ourselves to see the fulfillment of the Word. To simply give mental assent to the will of God does not necessarily bring it to pass. Many times prophetic words must be birthed by prayer and fasting.

We were reminded in December that our church is once again standing before a “wide and effective door” of ministry (1 Corinthians 16:9). This is the time to set our hearts to seek the Lord and enter into a fast as Daniel did, so that we can see true spiritual breakthrough!

So what does fasting have to do with it? Why fast? Isn’t God going to do what He has purposed to do? Why should I punish my body and starve myself? These are all questions that are frequently asked by believers who either do not un-

derstand the power of Biblical fasting, or have learned how to survive at a low level of spiritual power and breakthrough by not using all the weapons of their warfare. This kind of Christian life is usually boring, predictable, frustrating and familiar with defeat.

Fasting is not a real popular practice in the church these days, especially in the westernized church, and definitely not in our Canadian culture and mindset. Many believers do not even realize that fasting is biblical and very much a part of New Testament Christianity. Others have bought the lie that fasting is no longer valid, or it is just “dead works” or some ancient form of self-denial. Like any Biblical truth, the enemy continually attempts to obscure or pervert the message and application of fasting and prayer so as to eliminate a powerful spiritual weapon from our arsenal.

God has given the church everything we need to overcome all the powers of darkness and live in spiritual victory, but that does not mean we are guaranteed to live there. Just possessing the weapon, and the instruction book on how to fight, does not win the war! Let me challenge your thinking regarding fasting and prayer, while giving you some Biblical foundations to produce faith for pursuing God.

The Bible makes it clear that there are certain means by which Christ’s people partner with God’s power through the application of spiritual principles. We enter into, and exercise spiritual dominion through simple obedience to disciplines found in the Word.

Here are some (in no particular order):

- (1) Receiving of The Lord’s Table/Communion
- (2) Anointing with oil & the laying on of hands
- (3) Tithing and giving of offerings
- (4) Praise and worship

- (5) The study and teaching of God's Word
- (6) Prayer and intercession
- (7) Caring for the poor
- (8) Evangelism and preaching the gospel
- (9) Audibly confessing the Word of God
- (10) It is also true that fasting, joined with prayer, is a proven means of advancing the kingdom of God and taking ground in the spirit realm.

## **FASTING IS SCRIPTURAL**

The Word of God makes it clear that fasting is an instrument of spiritual power - a key in breaking spiritual bondage and receiving the mercy of God. As you study the Word you will find fasting is in both the Old and New Testament. It is a practice that is to be observed throughout the church age (until Jesus returns). A great Bible study is to search the scriptures for all the ways fasting was used in the lives of God's people.

## **JESUS TAUGHT FASTING**

By His own word and example, Jesus taught fasting. He said that in the era following His earthly ministry (after His ascension), fasting would be a part of the lifestyle of His people.

*“And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. And they came and said to Him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast? So Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they*

*cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.”*

*Mark 2:18-20*

“Those days” are right now! We are living in the time when the “bridegroom” Jesus has been taken away from the disciples until he returns for His bride. Jesus told his followers that while He walked the earth with them it was not the time to fast BUT “they will fast in those days.” So now is that time! And WE are the THEY!

Jesus went on to say in that same teaching:

*“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins,”*

*Mark 2:21-22*

In these verses, Jesus is clearly delineating between the Old Testament fasting that was done under the law, and New Testament fasting that would be done under the power of the Holy Spirit. The new wine is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the New Testament Church, and the new wineskins are those believers who are living a lifestyle of fasting and prayer while experiencing the new wine of the Spirit of God.

**“WHEN YOU PRAY...”**

**“WHEN YOU GIVE...”**

**“WHEN YOU FAST...”**

When Jesus was teaching His disciples during the

Sermon on the Mount He was giving them the principles for New Testament Christianity that are all still very relevant and applicable today. He mentions three different spiritual disciplines in Matthew 6, and it's interesting that one of the three has really taken a back seat in the 21st century church.

### **“WHEN YOU PRAY. . .”**

If you go to any church you will undoubtedly hear the topic of prayer taught and encouraged. Prayer will also be a part of the worship experience in every church on any given Sunday

### **“WHEN YOU GIVE...”**

the same applies. We have not let that one fall to the ground.

How about,

### **“WHEN YOU FAST...”?**

Now consider the fact that Jesus taught all three of these with the same importance, and He never said “if you give,” or “if you should consider praying,” or if you would be so spiritual as to give up a meal.” No Jesus was affirming the practices of His followers and giving them the Kingdom application of how to live out those practices.

*“When you fast...and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

*Matthew 6:16*

Let me address this scripture because many people misapply what Jesus was saying when He told His disciples to pray, give, and fast “in secret.” Many people have asked me, “Why do we have a corporate fast and talk about it and get people to sign up, when Jesus told us to do it in secret?”

Am I losing my reward and the spiritual power behind it if I tell people I'm fasting?"

So here are a couple things to consider...

Jesus was comparing "new wine skin fasting" with what the Pharisees were doing. The religious people of Jesus' day were fasting two days a week and everyone knew about it. The motivation for their fast was to be seen by men and to come across as spiritual heavyweights so they could ultimately control and manipulate others. The problem with their fast is they were still sinful and far from God on the inside (see Matthew 23:25-30). When Jesus was talking about "what is done in secret" in Matthew 6, He was referring to the things that are first a matter of the heart, and the work that is going on is, first and foremost, being done in the secret place of our heart. If we are engaging in public acts of spirituality without a pure heart and motivation, we are fasting like the Pharisees.

We also need to look at the fasts that were undertaken in the Bible. None of them were a secret! Even Jesus made it known that He fasted for forty days and nights. That is why it's recorded in the Bible. We see the leaders of the New Testament church in Acts 13 "all together in the same place, at the same time" in a corporate fast. We see that all the fasts that were called in the Old Testament were given as a public call for all the people to enter into (2 Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Joel 1:14). We also see men of the New Testament openly talking about their fasting (Acts 10:30; 14:23).

So the conclusion is this: fasting, prayer and giving are to be done without hypocrisy! It is as simple as that. We cannot participate in outward spiritual activity if we have not made the secret place of our hearts the primary target for the Holy Spirit's work. So, if we were supposed to keep

these things a secret the scripture would not contradict itself by showing us otherwise.

So if you pray, give, or fast in a public way, you don't lose your reward or jeopardize the power that is available—it's only if your motivation is to be seen as a giver or a spiritual person and you enjoy letting people know how much you pray or how much you give. If that is the reward you are looking for, then that's all you will get.

## **JESUS MODELED FASTING**

*“Then Jesus was led by The Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’”.*

*Matthew 4:1-4*

We first observe the fact that “Jesus was led by the Spirit” into a season of fasting. This statement tells us that fasting is a spiritual practice. There are many cults that practice a form of fasting but are not led by the Holy Spirit. There are also many health food enthusiasts that use fasting as a means of purifying the body while connecting to the spiritual world. In Matthew 4, Jesus makes a statement that clarifies one of the purposes of fasting: “Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” In this statement He is saying that there is a time for laying down the earthly bread in order to receive the heavenly.

In my personal experience with fasting I have found that a greater revelation of the Word of God, and clarity in my

spirit to hear what God is saying, comes either during a prolonged time of fasting or immediately following. This should not be our primary motive for fasting, but it is a wonderful byproduct!

Here is the result of Jesus' fast: He "returned in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). This is the first time that this was said of Jesus and it happened at the conclusion of a time of fasting. He also performed no miracles until He spent time in fasting and prayer. This is a clear model of the way that spiritual power is released in and through God's people.

One time, Jesus' disciples were attempting to cast a demon out of a boy who was having epileptic seizures, and they were not having any success. Finally in frustration and defeat, they called for Jesus. He arrives and rebukes them for their lack of faith, then deals with the demon.

*"And Jesus rebuked the demon, and he came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast him out?" So Jesus said to them, "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. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting"*

*Matthew 17:18-21*

We see in that last verse, a real key in spiritual warfare. There are strongholds, demonic powers, and obstacles in our personal lives and the life of our church that will not be removed "except by prayer and fasting. "There is a blindness, or spiritual darkness, that blinds the eyes of those who are unwilling or unable to come to Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). When the church fasts and prays there is a real spiri-

tual power released that breaks bondages that may not be broken any other way!

As Jesus concluded His time on earth, He gave His disciples authority to do the works of God and to carry His message to the ends of the earth. I believe that everyone who is a disciple of Jesus – that’s you and me - is under the same mandate to preach the gospel and do the works of Christ.

Then Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” (John 20:27) This verse not only means that we share in the delegated authority of the Father but we share in the lifestyle and teachings of Jesus. This means we do not have the luxury to be selective in regards to the spiritual disciplines and instructions that Jesus gave us. If Jesus said that His disciples would fast during the period of time between His ascension and second coming (and He did), our only response should be to ask WHEN AND HOW LONG?

## **THE EARLY CHURCH FASTED**

The Church in the book of Acts practiced fasting. As we study the early church we will see that fasting is not only a part of their lifestyle, but Holy Spirit activity and kingdom advancement are connected with times of fasting.

*“And Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.’”*

*Acts 10:30-37*

It is significant that this scripture mentions that Cornelius had just completed a four-day fast when he had a visitation from God --- accompanied with a message and a mandate. This is no coincidence here in these verses. The Lord is showing us a direct connection and correlation to times of fasting and prayer with visitation and revelation. Let's just think about it: if I spend four days on the couch watching Hockey or Reality TV and eating chips (I like chips by the way), am I positioning myself for a Divine visitation? Of course it's a dumb, rhetorical question. Yet so many believers desperately need to hear from God to know what He has planned for their lives, yet they live day in and day out feeding the flesh and not their Spirit.

*“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for The work to which I have called them” So after They had fasted and prayed, They placed Their hands on Them and sent Them off”*

*Acts 13:2-3*

Again, it is no accident that the Word prefaces the revelation of God's will with the conditions or environment that God was speaking into. “They were worshiping the Lord and fasting.” The majority of the times that I have received significant revelation from God have been during times that I have set aside for worship and prayer and fasting.

God can speak through a donkey to a rebellious leader, write on a wall in the middle of a party, send a blinding light from heaven to change the heart of his enemy, or send an earthquake to convince you He is the Son of God. However, these are not the usual ways He chooses to speak to His people. These visitations occurred when God was speaking to the unsaved, the rebellious, and those who were ignoring His ways. The way God usually speaks to His children is

when they are running after Him and listening for His voice.

*“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed Them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”*

*Acts 14:23*

This verse shows us that the advancing of the church, through the raising up and appointing of leadership was not accomplished outside of the practice of prayer and fasting. How many churches have gone down a road of painful experiences, if not destruction, because they appointed leaders without prayer and fasting? When we appoint people to lead based on popularity seniority, or charisma --- or we make decisions without the direction of God, we are setting the church up for failure.

## **FASTING GETS ME OUT OF THE WAY**

King David said in Psalm 35:13,  
*“But as for me, ...I humbled my soul with fasting.”*

Nothing humbles or quiets the soul like fasting! The soul is our mind, our will and our emotions. When we feed our mind with secular food we feed our emotions what they think they need; and when we allow our will to be led by non-spiritual desires, we end up in a very shallow place in the spirit. The way to quiet the voice of the flesh, take authority over ungodly desires, and find the mind of Christ, is to humble our souls (that word means to bring low, to put under). When we humble our souls, we silence the voice of the flesh and bring our passions and desires under the authority of our spirit-man.

Most of the hindrances I face in accomplishing Gods will for my life are self-imposed. That's right my soulish thoughts and unsanctified desires are screaming so loud I can't hear the voice of the Lord or perceive what the Spirit is saying to me.

Fasting quiets the voices and clears the communication channels. My personal experience is that during a prolonged fast (5 days or more) it becomes quite easy to discern the source of thoughts and impressions.

Even non-Christians who want to be "more sensitive" to the spirit world will fast in order to sharpen their perception. Many cults practice fasting as a discipline to heighten their awareness and produce a stronger connection with the spirit world; however, they are actually using a biblical principal but they are lacking the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:15-18,

*"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. I know that nothing good lives in me, That is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out"*

*Romans 7:15-18*

*"I die every day — I mean that, brothers — just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*1 Corinthians 15:31*

That last verse never sounded too attractive to me. Paul is saying that he had put to death his own will and desires on a daily basis in order to fulfill his role as an apostle. What would he want to do that for? Sounds like a painful life --

does it to you?

I have found however, that dying to self is actually a wonderful thing, for that is when I have discovered and been able to live out the life and purpose of God.

Remember what Jesus said about finding your life?

*“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.’”*

*Matthew 16:24-25*

The “taking up the cross” is not a one-time event. It is a continual, daily decision. Fasting is a powerful way to lose the life that I am making for myself in order to find real life that has been prepared for me in Christ.

*“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For The flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against The flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so That you do not do the things that you wish.”*

*Galatians 5:16-17*

Carnal Christians are those who have accepted Christ as Savior yet choose to live according to the desires of their flesh. This is a place of temporary fulfillment and certainly proves to be a life of frustration. The continual warfare that we are all engaged in is the warfare between the flesh, or earthly desires, and the spirit or heavenly desires. When I abstain from feeding even the legitimate desires of my flesh it allows my spirit-man to rise up in power.

The strength of God is perfected in weakness. Fasting is a way I that I can initiate weakening my flesh and strengthening my spirit.

*“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

*Romans 8:6-8*

## **SEVEN OBJECTIVES OF FASTING**

*“Is This not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let The oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?... Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of The LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and The LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say ‘Here I am.’”*

*Isaiah 58:6-9*

We have been discussing the question, “why fast’?” This next section will cover seven biblical objectives, or targets, for fasting. Not only are they objectives for our time of fasting but they are the biblical results of fasting and prayer. So in all actuality this is a continuation of ‘Why fast’?” I don’t want to spend time and passion investing in anything that does not produce results, especially if those investments include self- discipline and physical suffering. How about you?

We need to have a target for our prayers and a clear focus in our spirit as we begin a time of fasting. Write down your personal prayer goals and objectives during your fast. As a church body we are initiating a time of intense pur-

suit of God, We are responding to the promise in Jeremiah. “And you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart,” (Jeremiah 29:13). We are “preparing the way” and responding to a window of a “time of favor”. Anything that would hinder our church from the high call and purpose of God, we want to see destroyed and removed from our path!

We understand that it is “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty “(Zechariah 4:6). This is a time for us to humble ourselves and cry out for Divine intervention in our families, our church, our city, and our nation. Here are some specific prayer points and objectives to consider:

## **1. RELEASE OF POWER**

*“However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”*

*Matthew 7:21*

The release of more of the power of God in our lives works through this principle found in His Word. Maybe you’ve stuck spiritually or you’ve hit a spiritual barrier or wall that you cannot seem to break through. Instead of just accepting the way it is and learning to live with the situation, let me challenge you to engage the weapons of fasting and prayer and see what God will do. After the disciples prayed their best prayer and used the training they had, they still could not produce the desired results. So Jesus steps in and gives them a key to a greater release of power.

It’s been said that “time changes everything,” but that kind of change is not always for the best --- and many times we merely exist instead of living a victorious life. Is there anything in your spiritual life that makes you want to take

action and do something radical? Are you getting tired of the same scenery? Perhaps it's time to take some serious action!

*“But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

*2 Corinthians 12:9*

The opposite of this verse is also true; when I am strong in my own power, then I am weak in His! Fasting is the best way that I know of to expose those areas where I am self-sufficient instead of God-dependent. As we put our fleshly desires aside through the practice of fasting and prayer, we really begin to see clearly how weak and helpless we truly are without the grace and strength of God.

This is a good place to live! When we have humbled ourselves we can count on our mighty God to come close to us and show His power in our lives. Remember James 4:6,

*“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

## **2. RELEASE OF DIRECTION**

*“Then I proclaimed a fast there... before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us and for our little ones...”*

*Ezra 8:21*

*See also Isaiah 58:11; Daniel 9:2-21*

Our church is continually in a season of growth and change. In all of our plans, we are continually aware of our need for clear direction. This is true for our personal lives as well. Sometimes we settle for what seems good when it is not God's best for us. As an army in a true spiritual war we desire to position ourselves to hear our captain's marching orders. I do not want to spend my energy and passion and money going in directions that God has not initiated! How

about you? Through the process of fasting and prayer we are able to discern the plans of the Lord and avoid costly detours. As we “humble our souls with fasting” all the voices that compete for our affection begin to quiet down and the voice of our shepherd becomes predominate. So pray for “a right way for us” as well as the direction you need in your life at this time.

### **3. RELEASE OF REPENTANCE**

*“We have sinned and have committed iniquity and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from the precepts and from thy judgments.”*

*Daniel 9:5*

Repentance is a gift before anything else. God grants repentance. When we fast we are willingly humbling ourselves and asking God to show us who we really are. The proud and arrogant see no need for repentance, but those who draw

near to God will see that their hearts are in need of His forgiveness and mercy. It's the Isaiah 6 principle: When Isaiah was translated into the throne room of God; he immediately realized his sinful condition and began to cry out for mercy! Before God took the coal from the altar to cleanse his lips, Isaiah had to face the “woe is me, for I am a wicked man.” Our nation, our city and our church need a fresh release of true repentance and a conviction of sin. If we would turn from those things that are offensive to God, the result will be an immediate release of forgiveness, healing and restoration (2 Chronicles 7:14).

### **4. RELEASE FROM BONDAGE**

*“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wick-*

*edness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?*

*Isaiah 58:6*

There are an overwhelming number of people in our region, in our city and in our church who need to be free! Even those of us who have walked with the Lord for a while may have areas of bondage that need the delivering power of God.

Through fasting and prayer the chains that hold people in their bondage begin to loosen, and those strongholds that seem to hide in the closets of our hearts are brought to light and dealt with. This process always brings agitation and discomfort until repentance and freedom come. Just a reminder, that the real fruit and effectiveness of the church is measured by the breakthrough in the spirit occurring in peoples' lives. We can have all the programs and buildings we want but if the Captives are not being set free in the spirit then all we do turns into a big religious exercise in futility.

## **5. RELEASE OF HEALING**

*“Then your light shall break forth like the morning; your healing shall spring forth speedily”*

*Isaiah 58:8*

This is not something that we are directly fasting for, but more of a by-product of fasting for others! If you study Isaiah 58 you will find several promises connected with unselfish fasting. One of those promises is health and healing. We also see that healing and deliverance often manifest in the same way. When Jesus was asked to heal people, He often took authority over a spit of infirmity. This means that with a greater release of power in the church, more healing will take place! Not all physical infirmity or disease is demonic.

Just understand that the release of God's presence, and the dispelling of the powers of darkness, produce physical healing. This level of breakthrough is oftentimes the result of prolonged seasons of fasting and prayer.

## **6. RELEASE OF MINISTRY**

*“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.”*

*Acts 73:2*

There are teachers among us that are not teaching! There are missionaries in the house! There are worship leaders and evangelists in the building that have yet to lead or preach! There are small group leaders who haven't started their group yet! When are they going to take their place in the battle and begin to do what they've been called to do?

A church that gives itself to an intense pursuit of God as a lifestyle will see ministry popping up and released everywhere. It's not that fasting produces the evangelist and prophets, but rather we become aware of the eternal value system and God's desire for our lives as we invest in the eternal and die to the temporal. When we are going after the call and destiny the Lord has for us, we will hear His voice and opinion in the matter. Words of knowledge, prophetic words, clear direction, and time frames will begin to be revealed as we follow the Acts 13 pattern. Is not our responsibility to choose and send people into areas of ministry—that is the Holy Spirit's work. Our part is to prepare and seek the Lord of the Harvest and ask Him to send laborers! So let's do our part!

## **7. RELEASE OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

*“And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”*

*Joel 2:28*

The “afterward” in Joel 2:28 is referring to God’s response to a people who are serious enough about true revival to declare a fast and return to the Lord. The book of Joel describes the people of God in a desperate place of famine and despair, both spiritually and physically. God is amazing in the way He continues to offer a way out of the biggest mess. This principle applies to a nation as well as to an individual. That’s you and me! Look at these verses where God gives His people the roadmap to recovery....

*“Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.”*

*Joel 1:14*

*“Even now” declares The LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping. Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, and call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing..”*

*Joel 2:12, 16*

This is how we position ourselves for the mercy and grace of God to come upon a people that have turned from Him. We need to realize that we are not just praying for our families and ourselves, but we are interceding for our city, province and nation! Whether your intercession is direct or indirect the overflow of God’s response to our prayers will affect those who are not even looking for God! Consider the

impact that even ten righteous people would have had on the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (check out Genesis 18).

In Joel 2, the response of the Lord when His people humble themselves with fasting and crying out to Him for help...

*“Then the Lord will reply, ‘I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.’”*

*Joel 2:19*

We can also expect an increase in Holy Spirit activity as we go after God during these days. The gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 & 14 will increase! Those who have never prophesied or given a word of knowledge will begin to hear the word of the Lord for themselves and others. Visions and dreams will increase because Holy Spirit communication is part of revival. Remember that a 2-day or a 2-week fast is not a “cure-all” or some formula that releases revival. In order to continually walk in the benefits of fasting we must live the lifestyle of fasting and prayer.

## **WHAT DO I FAST?**

The word “fast” or “fasting” in the Bible means: to not eat to close the mouth, to abstain from food” The reason I point this out is that many people have told me they are “fasting television” or “fasting sports”. Now unless you are eating TVs and sports equipment, this is not an accurate statement. Don’t get me wrong; I believe it is a legitimate spiritual practice to set aside entertainment and things we enjoy for the purpose of seeking God, but “fasting” is not an accurate description of those types of disciplines. If I

abstain and sanctify my time away from the television for the purpose of prayer and worship, that is a healthy spiritual discipline and a sacrifice for my flesh, but it is not fasting.

When we fast we are simply refusing to give our body one of its greatest needs for the purpose of feeding the spirit man instead. The observance of a fast varies with each person. We want to avoid any legalistic view of how much or how long or comparing ourselves with others (2 Corinthians 10:1 2), but we do want to be clear on the fact that fasting is the act of abstaining from food and sometimes water.

## **WHEN DO I FAST?**

Because the Word of God is clear on the subject and practice of fasting as a church we will always observe two basic forms of fasting:

### **1. THE GENERAL DISCIPLINE**

This can take place at any time by all who desire more of God and are willing to crucify the flesh. This type of fasting can be a meal, a day, or more. You don't have to be "led" or "impressed" or have an angelic visitation to be motivated to fast! It should be a part of the Christian lifestyle. The "fasted" lifestyle is to be a normal part of New Testament Christianity.

### **2. THE SPECIAL CALL TO A CORPORATE FAST**

This is a seasonal call where the leadership of the church senses a direction from God to lead the Body into a time of spiritual intensity. This is not a mandatory call that

requires that everyone participate, but rather a trumpet call in the Spirit; those who are hearing what the Spirit is saying to the church will respond during these times. Just as there are seasons in the year, there are seasons in the Spirit for every church. We must know the times and seasons – you don't plant seed in the winter for example or harvest an immature crop --- best results are had in our life when we operate correctly in the season of life we are in both individually and corporately.

So what season are you in? Is it time to fast or feast? Is it time to laugh or weep? Is it time to sow seeds or reap a harvest?

## **SPECIAL NOTES**

### **1. WE ARE NOT ASKING ANYONE TO FAST FOR THE ENTIRETY OF THE TIME SET ASIDE.**

You should spend some time in prayer and ask the Lord for a clear impression of what kind of fast you should attempt as well as the length of time and who will be affected by the changes in your daily schedule. Some people will fast one meal a day and spend that time in prayer and the Word. Others will fast two days a week taking only water and juices and a few will sense the need to go on extended times of fasting (several days or longer — maybe even up to 40 days).

### **2. THERE IS NO PRESSURE FROM MYSELF OR ANYONE AT HARVEST FOR YOU TO FAST.**

If you are not ready or really don't want to do it, don't. Remember that this is to be done in faith and with expectation. Never fast to impress someone else or to simply be 'spiritual' like everyone else.

### **3. WE ARE IN NEED OF GOD'S GRACE AND FAVOUR!**

The reason for this time of fasting is simple: desperation for God and recognition that we cannot know or accomplish His will in our own strength. There is a real sense of coming revival. There have been many prophetic words regarding the outpouring of God's Spirit on and through our church. We want to position ourselves in humility and expectation for all that God wants to do.

*'Go Through, go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations!'*

*Isaiah 62:10*

## **WARNINGS**

### **1. FASTING IS NOT A WAY TO TWIST GOD'S ARM OR EARN SOME SPIRITUAL BLESSING.**

This is not passive resistance and we are not talking God into or out of something that is not His will. Please don't set yourself up with unrealistic expectations or fast for God to do something for you. He doesn't work like that. I have seen people become disillusioned and bitter because they went on an extended time of fasting so God would give them a husband or save a family member or release them into a specific ministry. Remember this fact: "Fasting is about the positioning of my heart and spirit to know God's will and hear His voice, not about convincing God to answer my prayer."

There is also a danger that we fall prey to the erroneous

notions of historic asceticism: i.e., the belief that a higher spiritual state is attainable through rigorous self-discipline. Productive fasting is all by grace and based on obedience to the Word. Going hungry does not make you more spiritual, it just makes you hungry! New Testament fasting will bring you to a place of humility and brokenness so the will of God can flow through you without resistance.

## **2. PREPARE FOR OPPOSITION.**

Because we are talking about moving into destiny and possessing God ordained territory, it is obvious that this will not take place without a fight. Consider the temptations of Christ in the wilderness. During your time of fasting you may encounter opposition and do battle with three enemies: Self, Sin and Satan (or demonic forces) - you will not be fighting with Satan directly.

Flesh fights desperately to stay alive. Some areas of your flesh may appear as if they are conquered, but will rise up in a fast crying for survival – that area was just “playing dead”. Sometimes people are surprised when they attempt an extended fast for the first time: they are expecting angels and visions and the voice of God only to find some ugly, sinful things surfacing in their heart. Do not be surprised or derailed by this process of purification. Fasting is a way we approach the fire of God: the first thing that starts happening is the dross or unclean elements in the silver and gold come to the surface of our life. Even in a practical way – if you go on an extended fast (five days or more) you will experience bad breath and even new body odors --- this is the evidence of toxins coming to the surface of your physical life --- the same can happen in the spirit.

Temptations will arise. On the day or days of your fast

you can expect donuts at the office, unexpected lunch invitations, and a heightened sense of smell. **PRESS THROUGH!** Many times you may feel more tension build at home or in any area the enemy can apply pressure.

Discouragement may come in like a flood. Recognize the source and stand on the victory of Christ. My personal experience has been that the fruit and rewards of fasting do not come until the fast is completed. Sometimes quite a bit later!

**REMEMBER** any effort to pursue God that is motivated by faith **WILL BE REWARDED** (Hebrews 11:6) so, fast in faith, not in works.

## **TYPES OF FASTS**

### **1. THE NORMAL FAST OR LIQUIDS ONLY FAST.**

This fast would include the drinking of water and juices or herbal teas. Avoid coffee and other caffeine beverages especially if the duration of the fast is several days. This type of fast can be done for 1 day, 3 days, 7 days, and up to 40 days. Please consult a physician and a church elder before a 40-day fast.

### **2. THE WATER ONLY FAST**

This becomes difficult if fasting for extended periods. If you are doing manual labor, or keeping any kind of busy work schedule that requires focus and energy, this can be a challenge. God will give you grace for what He leads you to do but use wisdom in going for more than a few days on this one.

### **3. TOTAL FAST**

No food or water. This fast is Biblical but is only used in times of spiritual emergencies. We do not recommend this type of fast for obvious health reasons. If God leads you into this type of fast please use wisdom and consult your small group leader or an elder.

### **4. THE PARTIAL FAST, OR THE DANIEL FAST**

This fast is a limited diet perhaps of vegetables and water or fruits and vegetables (see Daniel 10:3). This is an effective way to enter into the spirit and discipline of a season of fasting for those who have schedules and responsibilities that would not allow a complete fast (i.e. manual labor workers, high-stress- schedule jobs, housewife or mother).

## **SOME GUIDELINES**

1. Do not fast if there are medical or dietary reasons that prohibit it.

2. Begin the time of fasting with an attitude of humility and a desire for personal holiness and purity.

3. Be sure to set aside several times throughout the day to pray and read the Word, even if it's 10-20 minutes here and there. Without the elements of prayer and the Word you are simply STARVING YOURSELF! A good practice is to designate the time that you would usually be spending at the table or a restaurant and devote it to prayer and the Word.

4. Always drink plenty of water while fasting. This washes out the physical impurities that are released from your system during a fast. This aspect of fasting is quite healthy and will produce good results. Many nutritionists and physicians recommend a three- to seven-day “cleansing” fast of only water or limited juices. You may experience bad breath or body odor because of this process --- breath mints are ok during a fast!

5. Schedule your times of fasting wisely and in agreement with those who will be affected. Take into account your commitments and workload in regards to what type of fast will be most effective and realistic.

6. Schedule times of prayer with other believers (corporate prayer meetings, a prayer partner).

7. Ask the Lord how much you should fast and then obey Him! If you do not feel a clear word regarding the time frame, it’s okay to fast one or two meals a day for a few days.

8. Avoid excessive entertainment. The whole idea of this time is to pursue God and deny the flesh. A great way to push back the entertainment plate’ is to find as many ministry events as possible and jump in: prayer meetings, Bible studies, small groups, worship, more prayer meetings, and Sunday services.

9. If you fail to complete the time of fasting that you committed to the Lord, do not fall under condemnation! Just give it another shot. Remember this is about heart motivation, not performance.

10. Expect to hear Gods voice through His Word,

dreams, visions and revelations but DO NOT be discouraged if during your fast, you do not feel “super spiritual.” My personal experience has been that many times I do not sense the spiritual impact of a fast until after it is over. Your experience may be different. If this is a spiritual endeavor that is new for you please start out slowly. Perhaps attempt a two-meal fast first and then go for a full day. You may want to read some books on this subject to deepen your understanding and motivate you during your time with the Lord. A few great books are: Gods Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis; The Transforming Power of Fasting and Prayer, and The Coming Revival by Bill Bright.

Our desire is to prepare our hearts for the work and glory of God, so let's pursue God together for our lives, our families and the lost. In the days ahead we will see what the Lord will do with a humble, willing people that are running after God!

Pursuing God with you,

*Roy Stephenson*