

SEEKING GOD THROUGH

Prayer & Fasting

7 DAY READING PLAN



CITYWIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

DAY 1

The Start of a Journey

Fasting has, throughout the Bible, been linked with an extra dimension of power. Whether it was Daniel in the Old Testament or the disciples in the New Testament, they were all aware of the power of fasting

The temptation can be that the focus is just what fasting does through or around us and to lose track of what it does in and to us. A key verse in the Bible is Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

God always works from the inside out and He is never just after our deeds and what we can DO for Him. He is after our hearts and what we can BE. What we do comes out who we are.

Therefore, when He teaches us about prayer and fasting, Jesus reminds people not to do it for the approval of man, but in secret for the acceptance of God. **Fasting is not so we can get more of God; we fast so God can get more of us.**

Jesus, as I start this fast, help me to do it from a heart that wishes to know you better, rather than just for what you can do for me. I want to finish this journey more in love with you than when I started. Amen.

Mark 9:29 Proverbs 4:23 Mark 3:14 Matthew 6:5-18

Making the Space

Fasting is not just about stopping something (eating, watching TV, having a social media break etc.) but also **replacing it with some time of prayer and devotion, where we give space for God's grace to challenge and change us from the inside out.**

*Jesus, I want to pray like the Psalmist prayed:
"Search me, God, and know my heart
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting."*

May you continue to point out the things in my heart that don't reflect your best for me. Amen.

Isaiah 58:3-12 Philippians 2:12-13 Proverbs 4:23 Psalm 139:23-24

About the Food and Not About the Food

When Jesus stood on the hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, He made a number of statements that included the words, "You have heard it said... but I say". That was not Jesus adding to the Old Testament law but rather, correctly interpreting it, for even in the Law, God required clean hands and pure heart. That was the whole point of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

It wasn't just about not doing something, Jesus was pointing out that the issue goes deeper than just avoiding a certain action. It starts with the condition of your heart. So he went deeper. For example, don't just try and avoid murdering someone. No, deal with the hate you have in your heart towards that person .

It all comes down to the condition of your heart. Which brings us back to Proverbs 4:23,

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

When we fast, we say to Jesus, "Jesus I love you this much. More than I love ..." (Insert whatever you are fasting from). This is also why fasting something that you hardly eat or you don't even enjoy is not really a fast. **A fast is about sacrifice.** (So no, fasting brussel sprouts doesn't count.)

Jesus, you have my heart. Even though I sometimes find it hard saying no to what I am fasting from, I choose to say 'no' to those things to show you that you mean more to me. Amen.

Matthew 5:21-22 Proverbs 4:23



DAY 2

I am not an Animal

Animals are governed by their instincts; humans are governed by our choices. A spiritually mature person will live from the paradigm of **“My feelings and desires are subject to me; I am not subject to my feelings and desires.”**

In the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he is talking about his desire to see as many people saved as possible. But as Jesus said in Matthew 16:26,

“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

Paul also realizes that he cannot be telling everyone about Jesus but not pursue Jesus himself, so he goes on to say:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NIV)

In “striking a blow to his body,” Paul is saying that he will take control of his body and not the other way around. We live in a world that says, “If it feels good, do it!” Paul, however, draws a comparison with the athletes, who because of their goal of becoming number one in a race, choose to live disciplined even when it doesn’t feel good.

Let’s not kid ourselves; fasting doesn’t feel good. But the pleasure of knowing that I’m in control of my feelings is so much better than any passing craving.

Jesus, I pray that my YES to you will always govern my daily choices. As I fast, I want to grow in my ability to not just live according to my feelings and desires, but by my convictions. Thank you for strengthening me! Amen.

1 Corinthians 9:22 Matthew 16:26 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Grow your NO and Bless your YES

If muscles are not worked out, they will not grow stronger. In fact, they will become weaker. All of us have a “NO muscle”. It’s the power of choice we exercise whenever we choose what to do or not do.

Humans are not animals that are the end product of an evolutionary chain of events. We are created beings, created on purpose for a purpose. That also means, that unlike animals, we don't operate by instincts. Animals don't make choices in general but are governed by their instincts. Hungry? Eat! Scared? Run! Threatened? Fight! Mating season? Well... you get the point!

As humans, we make choices based on our values. The problem occurs when we don't grow our "NO muscle". When we don't learn to say no we are actually saying yes to everything or just to too many things, which weakens our "yes". In the long run, it makes us unable to fulfil all the commitments we have said yes to and in the worst case, it can destroy us, as we are unable to say no, even to habits and choices that are destructive to our soul, spirit and body.

Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, "Let your 'yes' be a 'yes' and your 'no' a 'no'". And as you grow your NO, you bless your YES. When we fast, we exercise our 'no muscle' and remind ourselves that our feelings and desires are subject to us; we are not subject to our feelings and desires.

Jesus, help me become stronger in saying yes and no to the right things. Give me wisdom to discern between them and the courage to follow through on them. Amen.

Matthew 5:37

Proverbs 4:23

Say NO to Say YES

We cannot always, through our own power and ability, do what is right. Sometimes we find it hard or even impossible to forgive, to leave a dark experience behind or to not let negative thoughts rule our mind. We try, fight and stretch ourselves to the maximum but fail over and over again. So frustrating, isn't it? What's the answer? Yes, you got it: fasting!

Religious fasting is refraining from food for a spiritual reason. **When we fast from something we need, we turn our attention towards God in a special way.** The result is that God releases His power in our lives in a fresh and powerful way, and we receive strength to say yes! Yes to His word, His will, His plans and His ways for our lives as individuals, and as a church. As part of this fast, let's decide to say no to food and seek Him with all our hearts, so we can be able to say YES to Jesus!

Father, today I say no to food because I hunger for you. I open up my heart and receive your power to say yes to what pleases you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Zechariah 4:6

Romans 7:15-25

DAY 3

Self-help is a Contradiction

The self-help industry is a multi-billion dollar industry! The idea of it is that you can help yourself. A lot of this comes down to a humanistic belief that deep down, humans are good. If that is the case, then surely anything bad in us is someone else's fault or we can help ourselves out of whatever issue we face.

The problem though is that "*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*". Yes, we were created in the image of God, but every time we make a choice based on what "self" wants, we move further and further away from the original design. Sin dehumanises us.

The only self-help we need is help to deal with our 'self'. Our 'self' is what gets us into trouble and limits us. Anything with 'self' attached to it is ultimately limited, whether it's our confidence, speech, or anything else.

Fasting says that our trust is in Jesus. **It's only Jesus who can redeem our 'self' and only Jesus who can change our hearts with all its desires and wants.**

As we give up our 'needs' through fasting, we slowly realise that they weren't needs but merely 'wants'. And in that place, where Jesus is all you have, we realise that **Jesus is all we need!**

Jesus, I recognise that my self is what gets me into trouble again and again. I choose to put my 'self' aside in order to focus on you. You are what I need and as I give up on what I want, I pray that you will continue to change my heart until what I need is all I want. Amen.

Romans 3:23

Galatians 2:20

Jeremiah 17:9-10

Renewal and Transformation

"How are you doing?" A question so many of us get asked on a daily basis. What's amazing is that we serve a God who sees every single detail of our lives, even the bits we are not showing others, and still He loves us with an unconditional love.

We have an opportunity to **allow Him into the deepest parts of our heart and mind**, for Him to do a transformational work within us. Where perhaps in our own efforts we are unable to see a way out of a bad habit or bad thinking, we can allow His Holy Spirit to renew our mind.

The word renew means: Give fresh life or strength to; revive, regenerate, revitalise, reinvigorate, restore, breathe new life into, resurrect, resuscitate, awaken!

Renewing your mind by choosing to wash your mind in God's word and truth takes intentional effort; it's rewards are life and peace!

Jesus, I thank you for your unconditional love towards me. I allow you to renew my mind and give fresh strength to my life. Amen.

Romans 12:2

Proverbs 3:5-6

For the Love of Life

What would your friends say that you talk about a lot? Jesus made it clear in Luke 6:45 that the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. Let's make sure that God has our undivided attention. **My desire is to love Him with all my heart, soul and mind.**

What is your heart full of? What is taking up a bit too much space in your mind. This prayer and fasting season gives us a great opportunity to make room in our lives for what God wants to do in us. Let whatever you have chosen to say NO to during this fasting period serve as a reminder to **seek God fully, serve Him wholly and to love Him completely.**

Jesus, I want to make room in my life for what you want to do in me and through me. I pray that you will help me to see more of who you are and that you will make me aware of the opportunities you have given me today. Have your way in me. Amen.

Matthew 22:36-37

Luke 6:45



DAY 4

Tuning into His Voice

Can you remember a time when you recognized someone's voice within the din of other noise around you – perhaps your mother, a child, a loved one? Suddenly, in the midst of loud chaos and noise, you heard a familiar voice of someone you love.

Jesus, throughout the gospels describes Himself as the shepherd and His followers as His sheep. He states that their relationship is so close that the sheep recognise His voice and listen to it. The spiritual practice of fasting is so vital to our spiritual growth, yet is often the most neglected in our busy western society. **Fasting enables us to tune out the world's noise so that we can tune in to God's voice.**

Heavenly Father, I want to deepen my relationship with you and recognise your voice. As I fast, please speak to me and help me to be in tune with what you say to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

John 10:14-15

John 10:27

The Still Small Voice

In the Old Testament book of 1 Kings, we read how the prophet Elijah, having fled from King Ahab and Jezebel, travels 40 days to Mount Sinai. It is here that Elijah has a powerful encounter with the Lord in the midst of his depression, fear and despair.

God desired to speak to Elijah. Do you believe that God wants to speak to you, too? What is interesting is that God wasn't to be found in the 'expected' and 'impressive' ways (the strong wind, earthquake or fire). Instead, it was a 'still small voice' that ministered to Elijah.

We often stereotype God and search for Him in the 'big, powerful, loud' ways like church events, conferences, books, and podcasts. All of these are beneficial in our growth as disciples, but our spiritual diet cannot only consist of these things. We need to learn how to hear from God for ourselves—in solitude, when we are not surrounded by the voices of others.

God will rarely compete with the busyness and distractions in your life. **Our relationship with our Lord is deepened and strengthened in the pursuit of Him.** May this time of prayer and fasting be a holy search for and discovery of His still small voice in our own lives.

Heavenly Father, please give me inspiration, clarity and a heightened awareness of your voice in my life. I believe that you are a personal God who wants to speak personally to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 Kings 19:11-12

Solitude and Meditation

During this time of fasting, we create more time to spend in prayer and reflection. Prayer connects us to God and requires times of solitude and the meditation of scripture.

Solitude is intentionally setting aside time to be by ourselves: to step away from our daily routines and circumstances in order to speak and listen to our heavenly, eternal Father. Jesus, throughout the gospels, often withdrew to pray. Solitude is not isolation! Wayne Cordeiro, a pastor and author, wrote, "Solitude is a chosen separation for the refining of your soul. Isolation is what you crave when you neglect the first."

Meditation is fixing our undivided attention and thoughts on something specific: everything else is zoned out. Our prayer life takes on a whole new dimension when we meditate on scripture. We learn our prayer vocabulary when we immerse ourselves in scripture and speak it out. **The Word of God reveals who God is and that informs how we are to pray to Him.**

During this time of fasting, create opportunities to pray in solitude and meditate on God's Word.

Heavenly Father, as I fast, please speak to me powerfully through the Bible. Please cause specific verses to stand out to me, which bring direction to different areas of my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Mark 6:30-32

Joshua 1:8

Psalm 119:27



DAY 5

Peace

Have you ever found yourself trapped in a chaotic or noisy environment where you just need some peace and quiet?

Sometimes, our understanding of having peace is to run away from situations or circumstances, however, peace that comes from the Holy Spirit is a peace that subdues. It is a peace that can exist in us, despite what's going on around us.

Definition of subdue: To overcome, quiet, or bring under control (conquer, defeat, overpower, overcome).

What an amazing promise! Peace within us to conquer, defeat and overcome challenging circumstances in our lives. **His peace working in and through us in every season of our lives.**

Jesus, help me today to be aware of your peace within me. Whatever circumstances I may find myself in today, I know that your peace which surpasses all understanding guards my heart and my mind. Amen.

Philippians 4:6-8 John 14:27

Come Away with Me

Busy, busy, busy. Life can be busy. Whether you are a student, a business person, in ministry, or a stay-at-home parent, I think we can all relate to busy. The kids need to be fed, the house needs to be cleaned, we have homework and work, meetings, volunteer activities, sports, friends, church and family who want our attention. Are some days too full to open your Bible. Are you too busy serving Jesus to spend time with Him?

Let the Holy Spirit remind you of a beautiful verse in Song of Songs 2:10: *"The one I love calls to me... Come away with me!"*

What we can learn in a fast-paced life is that we always have time for what we deem important, like eating. Even on the busiest of days, we remember to eat. So, what is important to you? And better yet, what is important to Jesus? **Thankfully, there is no condemnation, he simply desire our attention.**

Let this be a day and season where we break with busy, and where we establish a habit to daily respond to **His call to come away with Him, to go deeper with Him in the midst of a fast-paced world.**

Jesus, here I am. Thank you for your love and grace. Despite the fact that I often get it wrong, You still forgive me and desire me. Draw me closer to Your heart today. Help

me to build healthy routines in the midst of a fast-paced life; I want You to be at the centre of all that I am and all that I do. Amen.

Song of Solomon 2:10-13

Jeremiah 29:13

Fix your Eyes on Me

Have you ever told yourself not to think about something only to find you can think of nothing else? Often the thing we try the hardest to avoid becomes exactly what we run right in to.

In Matthew 6, Jesus commands us not to worry. We worry about a lot of things, and trying hard not to worry can become very hard work! Jesus addressed the issue precisely because it is something that we struggle with and he wanted to show us that we have an alternative available. Instead of focusing on the things that make us worry, we ought to "*seek first His Kingdom*".

When we **choose to look to our source rather than to our situation**, we realise that He is in control and not us. Fasting helps us turn away from the things that usually have our attention in order to seek God. We are not trying to force ourselves to not worry; we are **choosing to fix our eyes on our heavenly Father**.

Jesus, I thank you that you are my source. You know what I am worried about today. Help me to shift my focus from my situation to you. I want to seek Your Kingdom first in my life and in my world. Amen.

Matthew 6:31-33

Hebrews 12:2

1 Peter 5:7



DAY 6

Crave God

We've all craved something at some time – be it chocolate or some other 'comfort' or delicacy.

In Psalm 27, King David expressed that there was one thing He craved from God. To crave means to have a powerful desire for something. David, who was yet to become king, had a craving to live with God in His house, to live close to Him. This is what he sought above all else. He didn't seek fame or fortune or favour; he just sought God.

What are you craving above all else? As we fast and seek God, let's **ask Him to increase our craving for Him and Him alone**. All the riches of this world will never be enough, and our selfish desires will never satisfy us. Nothing is as sweet as the real thing; Jesus.

Heavenly Father, I crave more of you in my life. As I seek you today, may your presence be so tangible and sweet, and may you speak to me through Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Psalm 27:4 Psalm 27:8

Clear Sight

What we see, and how we see it, determines the way we live life. In this season of fasting, we have a great opportunity to get our sight fixed. When Mary is standing outside the grave talking to Jesus, she thinks He is the gardener. She is looking at Jesus but she doesn't recognize Him. But when Jesus speaks to her, her eyes open and she cries out, 'My Lord, my Master!' The whole situation changed when she saw Jesus.

This is what we pray for, too, during this fast. A fresh revelation of God, where we see Him as He really is in detail!. **When we see Him, our faith grows. When we see Him, we're being transformed into His likeness. When we see Him, our faith and approach to life and the world around us becomes courageous, influential and attractive.**

If your sight, for one reason or the other, is blurred or not seeing clearly, the Holy Spirit can touch your spiritual eyes today. He can bring back sight again so you are able to see all who God is and all the good things He has in store for you.

Father, today I ask you to touch my eyes so I'm able to clearly see who you are. Help me also to see myself, the things and people in my life through your eyes. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ephesians 1:15-19

Psalm 119:18

My Hungry Place

We get to know a different side to someone when they are hungry. As the blood sugar levels lower we wont be seeing the best version of that individual. When hungry we withdraw to our hungry place and become unable to listen, speak or focus on anything properly – our behaviour changes. In the same way as our bodies need food in order to function (some of you are feeling that right now), our soul and spirit also need feeding.

Before Jesus started His public ministry, He fasted. When the Devil tempted him to eat, Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*". **When we choose sacrificially to say no to our natural hunger (literal or figurative) in order to feed our soul and spirit, we can believe that God will work in us, transforming us into the best version of ourselves.**

Jesus, help me to make a daily decision to feed my spirit with what you have for me. I pray that you will speak to me and change me from the inside out as I read your Word. Amen.

Hebrews 4:12 Matthew 4:4 Romans 15:4



DAY 7

Those Sly Little Foxes

When Adam and Eve lived in the garden of Eden, their relationship with God was perfect. The Bible says that they were naked, but they felt no shame (Genesis 2:25). Can you even imagine what a perfect relationship with God would be like? Unlimited access to the fullness and greatness of God!

Even though we know Jesus and love Him, the reality is that there is so much we don't yet know and understand about who He is and how He works, and there is so much that we have not yet discovered or experienced. Why? Because we live in a fallen world, sin entered our relationship, and we have free will to choose good and evil.

In the Song of Songs, King Solomon refers to sin as sly little foxes that hinder our relationship with God. He paints a picture of foxes that raid the budding vineyard, and ruin what God has planted. This is a good reminder to self-examine. **What sly little foxes currently hinder your relationship with God and your growth as a person?**

As we fast and seek to go deeper with Him, let us go deeper within yourself? **Fasting is not so we can get more of God, it's so that God can get more of us.** Maybe you are struggling with insecurity, unforgiveness, bitterness, pride... Whatever your sly little foxes look like, will you trust Him with them and surrender? Here is the beautiful truth; we are not doing this on our own. King Solomon wrote: *"We will do it together."* Jesus paid the price for our sin, and we no longer have to carry the burden of it.

Lord, I give you permission to search my heart today. Though it's uncomfortable, if there is anything in me that is not from you and in line with your Word, help me to let it go. Thank you for doing it with me. I don't want anything to hinder our relationship; I want to be fully yours. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Song of Solomon 2:15 Psalm 139:23-24

Ephesians 2:13

A Face to Face Meeting

In Exodus 33, we read about how Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp. He called it the tent of meeting, and this is where the Israelites came to inquire of the Lord. It says that *"the Lord would speak to Moses' face to face, as one speaks to a friend."*

While there is something so exciting and supernatural at play here, there is also a sense of normalcy; two friends meeting and speaking together face to face in a tent.

There is no doubt that God's presence was in that place. Even after Moses returned to the camp, it says that his young intern, Joshua, would not leave the tent.

Isn't it wonderful to think that **God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, wants to interact with us** in such a normal, yet supernatural way? Let's seek His face today and expect that He will show up and speak to us as he spoke to Moses – face to face.

Heavenly Father, I am so expectant to meet with you today. As I seek you, speak to me and reveal to me more of who you are. May your presence be so tangible that I don't want to leave our meeting place and return to my daily activities. I long for more of you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Exodus 33:11

Jeremiah 33:2-3

Breakthrough is on its Way!

As we conclude this week of prayer and fasting, remember that **fasting breaks the power of our flesh and as a result, causes supernatural breakthrough.** What breakthroughs do you need in your own life? What miracles do you desire to take place in your life? Take time today to journal and write down what God has taught you during this time of fasting and what you have learned about yourself.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this period of fasting. I want to experience your miraculous power at work in my life. Bring breakthrough, miracles, healing, and restoration to the broken areas of my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21

OUR CHURCH EXISTS FOR GOD

Everything we do comes from our love for God the Father, our obedience to Jesus, and our desire for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

OUR CHURCH EXISTS FOR YOU

We are committed to doing whatever we can to equip, encourage and empower you to *Follow* Jesus and *Share* your life as you fulfil your God given and unique calling as a *Blessing* in our city.

OUR CHURCH EXISTS FOR HOBART

We are committed to following Jesus' leadership, and partnering with God's people in our city, in order to reach a point where every person, every street, and every sphere of society, is being influenced by people with a vision of the Kingdom of God.

As this happens Hobart will increasingly be a beacon of hope for the rest of Tasmania, Australia and for the world.

FOLLOW *Jesus*

SHARE *Life*

BLESS *Tasmania*



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