

STARTING THE YEAR STRONG

Prayer & Fasting



INTRODUCTION

We do two significant things as a church to set up our upcoming year. On the first Sunday, we have an anointing service where we speak of the anointing of God and anoint with oil those who desire it. Secondly, we set aside a dedicated time of prayer and fasting.

In the Old Testament, the prophets would anoint people by pouring oil on them to set them apart for God's service. In Christ, the anointing of the Holy Spirit is all we need, yet we use oil as a symbolic expression of God's work, which can have a profound impact.

Just as anointing points to the spiritual reality of God's work in our lives, fasting points to the posture of our hearts before Him. We don't fast to earn God's favour or God's presence because we already have that in Christ. This year we want to take an opportunity to explain what fasting is and why you might consider doing it. Our desire is to see you fulfil the God-potential in your life. That's why we're inviting you, our church community, into the spiritual posture of being sensitive to God through fasting.

We believe that biblical fasting is:

- **Relational**, not ritualistic
- **Transformational**, not transactional
- **God-centred**, not self-centred

Rather than earning anything from God, fasting positions us individually and corporately to **hear, realign,** and **respond** to His invitation and His will.

Topics We Will Explore

- Why we pray and fast
- How fasting brings change
- Why we fast food

WHY PRAY AND FAST?

Throughout Scripture, prayer and fasting appear repeatedly as a response to spiritual hunger, a hunger for God's presence, direction, and power. Fasting is not commanded as law; instead, it is practiced as devotion. In Joel 2:12-14, fasting emerges as a response to God's invitation to us:

"¹²Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning..."

This call is not rooted in shame or obligation, but in mercy and restoration. God invites His people to draw near, to reorient their hearts toward Him and receive His grace, love, and compassion.

We do not see fasting as a legalistic requirement, a religious performance, or even a prerequisite for being sensitive to God. Yet we recognise that in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks about fasting in the same context as giving and prayer, identifying these as practices of righteousness for every believer (Matthew 6:1).

"...when you give..." (Matthew 6:2)

"...when you pray..." (Matthew 6:5)

"When you fast..." (Matthew 6:16)

The Benefits of Prayer and Fasting

Through prayer and fasting, we experience internal spiritual formation that shapes how we live before God:

- We become aware of misplaced dependencies
- We create space to realign our hearts and respond to God
- We express our longing for God's will in our lives

In a world shaped by constant consumption, noise, and distraction, prayer and fasting remain deeply relevant for us today.

Fasting reinforces our dependence on God and our desire for His Word. As Job declares:

*"I have not departed from the commands of his lips;
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my
daily bread." (Job 23:12)*

Fasting also teaches restraint:

*"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that
comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:3-4)*

Throughout Scripture, we see that fasting aligns our desires with God's purposes (Daniel 9:2-3, 17-19) and quiets the noise so we can hear the Spirit more clearly (Acts 13:1-3).

Together, prayer and fasting reshape our spiritual appetite, training us to desire what God desires and to live attentively before Him in our everyday lives.

Reflection Questions

1. What do I tend to rely on for comfort or control?
2. What could God be inviting me to surrender in this season?
3. How can prayer and fasting help realign my heart with God's will?

FASTING CAN BRING CHANGE

Fasting has never been a mechanism to force God's hand; it is a posture that weakens the influence of the flesh and sharpens spiritual discernment.

Throughout Scripture, fasting often preceded breakthroughs, guidance, and deliverance, particularly at pivotal crossroads that required wisdom, courage, repentance, or divine intervention. Whether God's people were seeking deliverance, direction, or preparation for a new season, fasting positioned them to respond faithfully to God.

For example, when the Jewish people faced the threat of annihilation, Esther called the people to fast, and through this, she gained favour with the king, and the Jewish people received deliverance (Esther 4:15-16 & 5:3).

Other Old Testament examples include:

- The Ninevites who proclaimed a fast when they believed Jonah's message, and God withheld the destruction He had threatened (Jonah 3:5).
- Moses fasting for forty days and nights before receiving God's covenant, instruction, and promises for His people (Exodus 34:1-28).
- Through prayer and fasting, Daniel gained clarity about the season he and God's people were living in and received revelation concerning what was still to come (Daniel 9).

The Early Church

When leaders in the church in Antioch worshiped the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit spoke and set apart Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the work ahead:

"... ² 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." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." (Acts 13:2–3)

Paul and Barnabas also prayed and fasted as they appointed elders for the early church:

"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)

Through these examples, we see that fasting led to Spirit-directed leadership, which in turn launched a global mission movement.

Today, fasting can help us:

- Discern God's voice in complex decisions
- Prepare for new seasons
- Respond faithfully in moments of challenge

As a Church, fasting can become a shared practice, uniting us in humility, prayer, and expectation as we seek God together.

Reflection Questions

1. What decisions or challenges am I facing right now?
2. How might fasting help me listen more carefully to God?
3. How can I use fasting as a tool to practice waiting on God and obeying His leading rather than my own desires?

WHY WE FAST FOOD

In Scripture, when the Bible speaks of fasting, it almost always refers to abstaining from food, sometimes also from drink for a set period. It was often accompanied by other physical expressions as people humbled themselves before God.

"Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting..." (Psalm 35:13) "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." (Daniel 9:3)

Food fasting uniquely engages the body in prayer, making dependence felt, not just confessed. Paul highlights this in 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, reminding us that while physical things such as food have a temporary purpose, the body belongs to the Lord and should not be mastered by either needs or desires.

The absence of food is not the goal. To **be present** with God is. As we fast from food and cultivate attentiveness to God, we often find ourselves fasting from everything that competes for our devotion.

For modern believers, fasting:

- Interrupts digital, emotional, and material dependencies
- Helps rebuild spiritual attentiveness
- Creates sacred rhythm in an overstimulated world

Fasting does not earn closeness with God:

*"... ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, **though He is not far from any one of us.**"*
(Acts 17:26–28)

As a church, we fast with expectation for personal renewal, and so that our lives and our community might reflect Jesus more clearly.

Reflection Questions

1. As I fast, what is God revealing about who He is and who I am becoming in Him?
2. How is this fast drawing me into a deeper, more consistent awareness of God's presence throughout my day?
3. Which Scriptures, thoughts, or promptings has the Holy Spirit been highlighting during this time?

CLOSING PRAYER

God, as we pray and fast, would You quiet our hearts, realign our desires, and deepen our hunger to be present with You. Shape us, as individuals and as a church, to live attentive, surrendered, and obedient lives, rooted in Your love and led by Your Spirit.

We choose presence over performance, devotion over distraction, and faith over familiarity.

In Jesus' name, Amen.