

23 and Me

Starting 2023 with 23 days of Prayer and Fasting
January 9 - 31

A Personal Guide to Prayer and Fasting

Prayer is the First Priority of The Connection Church. God is calling us to prayer. Prayer is to the Christian what oxygen is to the lungs. God has given us the privilege of prayer so that we can know Him and know His will for our lives. He knows we can't follow His path if we're disconnected from His power. God speaks to us through prayer and draws us close to Him so that we can live out His purpose for our lives.

Why Pray?

Extraordinary times require extraordinary people to pray extraordinary prayers. Just like we can't expect to keep a close relationship with a spouse or a friend if we never spoke with that person. How much more important it is to spend time with the One who made us and who we live for?

We pray because Jesus told us to pray. We pray because Jesus prayed. We pray as a church because it is impossible for the Body of Christ to know His will and have the power to accomplish it apart from prayer. This is why our pastor is calling us to specific times of prayer so we can grow in our level of commitment in our personal prayer times.

We are not only being called to pray; we are being called to fast.



Why Fast?

In the Bible, prayer and fasting go together. Today, fasting seems to be neglected. In our culture dotted with Golden Arches and Pizza palaces, fasting seems out of place. In fact, little is said about fasting these days in our churches, even though it is assumed to be a part of the Christian's life in the Bible. Throughout history, God's people have made fasting part of their worship and prayer. Fasting is God's way of helping us take our focus off of the physical and get it on to the spiritual. Through fasting, we can experience spiritual breakthroughs.

What is Fasting?

"To fast" means "not to eat" - biblical fasting centers on spiritual purposes. There are many ways to fast. (Specific ways to fast are mentioned later.) A more complete definition might be: "Fasting is an act of the will through which an Christian exercises spiritual control over the body (through not eating) to experience a more personal and powerful time with God in prayer." It involves giving up but is much more about receiving!

Is Fasting Biblical?

When you look at a list of those who fasted in the Bible, it looks like a "Who's Who" of biblical heroes of faith: Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, Anna, Paul, and, of course, Jesus. Fasting in the Bible usually refers to abstaining from all food but not from water. There are references to partial fasts such as in *Daniel 10:3* when he refused certain foods for a period of time. The very first mention Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive.



“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.” But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16-18).

In most cases, fasting is a private matter, but on special occasions, people are called to a corporate or public fast (*Lev.23:27, Joel 2:15, 2 Chron. 20:1-4, Ezra 8:21-23*). A group fast is a great way for God’s people to prepare themselves for a special task so they can be of one mind and one heart to accomplish God’s will.

Fasting is biblical. The question we need to ask isn’t, “Is this a part of my background?” or “Has this been the normal practice in my Christian experience?” Instead, we should ask, “What does the Bible teach about this topic?”

Is Fasting for Today?

In *Matthew 6:16*, Jesus said, “When you fast...” He is implying that fasting is a normal part of a Christian’s life. He doesn’t say, “You must fast” or “If you fast,” but simply “When you fast.” In *Matthew 9:15*, Jesus says, “The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then they will fast.”

This might be the most important word about fasting for our day. When Jesus was here on earth, the Kingdom of God had come. It was a time for feasting, not fasting. There would come a time for His disciples to fast, but not in the legalistic way of that time. The most natural interpretation of the days when Jesus’ disciples will fast is in today’s environment. In fact, this is how the disciples understood Him, because it was only after He rose to the Father that they fasted (*Acts 13:2*). This is the time that Jesus was talking about when he said, “Then they will fast.” The time is NOW!



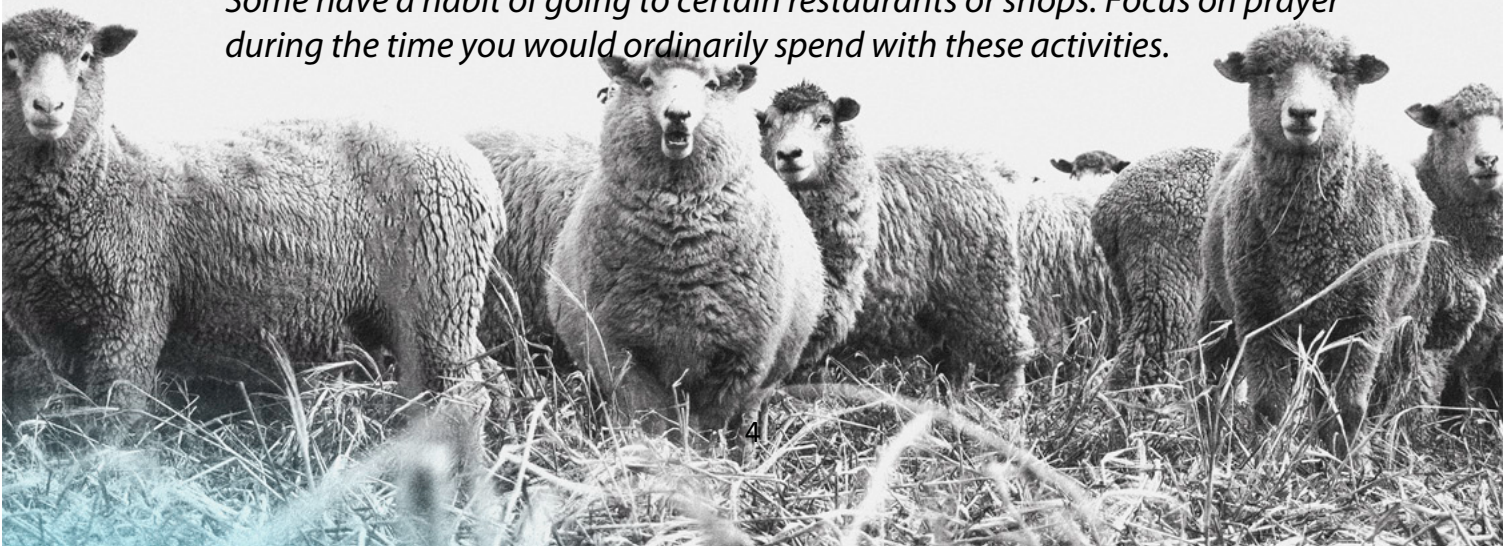
How Do You Fast?

There are many ways to fast. Fasting should always be a response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, not a current fad and certainly not to please others or to meet a goal. Remember, the purpose of fasting is to give up in order to have more focus on God in prayer. Several types of fasting are appropriate:

- **Soul Fast:** *This fast is a great option if you do not have much experience fasting food, have health issues that prevent you from fasting food, or if you wish to refocus certain areas of your life that are out of balance.*

For example, you might choose to stop using social media or watching television for the duration of the fast and then carefully bring that element back into your life in healthy doses at the conclusion of the fast.

- **A Partial Fast:** *Abstain from certain types of food such as soft drinks, coffee, sweets, desserts, and only eat fruits or vegetables. A partial fast can also include a liquid diet during which time the individual drinks only fruit drinks and water. A partial fast could also mean that you have only water. It involves abstaining from eating any type of food in the morning and afternoon. This can either correlate to specific times of the day, such as 6:00 am to 3:00 pm, or from sunup to sundown.*
- **Selective Fast:** *This type of fast involves removing certain elements from your diet. One example of a selective fast is the Daniel Fast, during which you remove meat, sweets, and bread from your diet and consume water and juice for fluids and fruits and vegetables for food.*
- **An Absolute Fast:** *During an absolute fast, the person has no food or water.*
- **Other kinds of Fasts:** *Any activity that takes time and keeps you from having time to focus on God in prayer can be sacrificed for Him. Some people are addicted to exercise and need to give that up to devote that time to God. Some have a habit of going to certain restaurants or shops. Focus on prayer during the time you would ordinarily spend with these activities.*



What is Your Physical Condition?

There are some people who can't fast because of health reasons. A diabetic person should try another form of fasting. A person who takes certain medicines should consult a physician if there are any questions. Young children should do a media fast instead of a fast that involves food - older children should be guided by their parents. Any healthy adult can fast. What we call "hunger" is really appetite. We have been taught to clean our plates, and if we miss three square meals a day with snacks in between, we'll "starve."

A healthy body can go long periods of time without solid food. However, liquids, such as water and fruit juices, should be available.

Fasting can actually be beneficial to your health. Prepare for the fast by eating smaller meals than usual. During the fast you will feel hunger pangs after half a day or so, but this is not real hunger. Your stomach has been trained through years of conditioning to give signals of hunger at certain times.

Your stomach is like a spoiled child and does not need indulgence but discipline. You are to be master of your stomach, not its slave. If you drink coffee, tea, or soft drinks, you may experience headaches and need to slowly move toward a complete fast that could require days of preparation as you move away from caffeine.

During the fast you may experience weakness. Simply rest and pray, and you will be fine. End your fast with a light meal of fruits and vegetables, and then you can eat more as you go.



What is your Spiritual Condition?

This is the most critical question of the fast. Preparation for a meaningful fast begins with repentance and confession. Do not expect God to violate His own will about the prayers He will hear.

- *Confess any and all unconfessed sin in your heart that the Holy Spirit brings to your attention. (Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 59:2).*
- *Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended and forgive all who have hurt you. (Mark 11:25, Luke 11:4, 17:3-4)*
- *Ask God to fill you with His Spirit so that He will sustain you. (Ephesians 5:18, 1 John 5:14-15, John 4:32-34)*
- *Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. (Hebrews 11:6)*
- *Hunger and thirst for righteousness. (Matthew 5:6)*
- *Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. (Galatians 5:16-17)*
- *Remember that fasting is feasting as you “feed” on God’s presence and will.*

What Kind of Fast Should I Do?

As mentioned earlier, there are many different types of fasts. Prayerfully choose a fasting method that you can maintain for 23 days, from January 9th – 31st.

Only those who have fasted for shorter periods and know how their bodies react to the process of fasting should enter into these fasts.



Schedule Suggestion

Morning: Begin the day with prayer and fasting. Read and meditate on God's Word, preferably on your knees. Invite God's Spirit to fill you with His presence. Let Him know that all you desire in life is His good pleasure. Pray for vision for your life, your church, country, and beyond.

Noon: Return to prayer and God's Word. Take a short prayer walk. Spend time in intercessory prayer for our church, our county, and our world. Pray for our church staff. Pray for the lost people you know.

Evening: Find a quiet place alone to be with the Lord. If others are fasting, join them in prayer. If you are married, pray with your spouse for God's will to be done in your marriage and in your family. Pray that God would be your one desire.

Conclusion

Remember to focus completely on God and use this time to enjoy His presence. Outwardly you may be doing the same things you would normally do, but inwardly you are rejoicing and praising God that He is your sustenance. You will be surprised at how fasting will draw your attention to God. As you step out in faith and try it, you'll learn how to grow in prayer and fasting. If you call attention to your fasting, people will be impressed and, as Jesus said, that will be your reward. You are fasting for greater and deeper rewards. Surrender your will to Him. We will fast and pray!



Psalm 23 Prayer Guide

Monday, January 9: *The Lord is my shepherd,*

How amazing it is to find the words 'Lord' and 'shepherd' so close together! David is asserting that the Sovereign Ruler of the universe has taken up the lowly task of shepherding him! We could not dare believe this if the Lord himself had not revealed himself in this way (Gen. 49:24).

Christians can't read David's words without having their thoughts immediately rise to these words from the Lord Jesus Christ: *'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep'* (John 10:11).

Through his redeeming death on the cross, Jesus bought his sheep.

Having purchased His sheep on the cross, Jesus now lovingly cares for them along the lines described in this psalm.

When believers read the opening words of Psalm 23, they cannot help but insert the name 'Jesus' between 'Lord' and 'is', saying, 'The Lord Jesus is my shepherd.' This is as natural for them as breathing.

Having affirmed that the Lord is his shepherd, David proceeds to describe the care he had received from the Lord. It was the best possible care from the best possible shepherd. There is only one Lord—the Lord God. And this is the one whom David had as his shepherd. True religion resides in being able to say with David: 'The Lord is my shepherd.' It is a matter of that personal pronoun 'my'—saying to God 'my Lord' and having the assurance that he says in return 'my child'.



Tuesday, January 10: *I lack nothing.*

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With the Lord as his shepherd, David knew no want or lack. His needs were met by his shepherd. Although he most certainly did not have everything he could desire, he had everything he needed. And God’s people of every generation do not lack.

Wednesday, January 11: *He makes me lie down in green pastures,*

This has to do with finding rest in the Word of God. The ‘green pastures’ represent food to the sheep. The lying down represents leisure or time. By the grace of the Lord, then, his people spend time meditating on the food which he has prepared for them, which is the Word of God.

We can go further and say that the Lord provides a green pasture for his sheep every time the Word of God is truly preached. This challenges all who know the Lord to prize biblical preaching heartily. And it soundly rebukes all those ‘preachers’ who lead their people away from the green grass the Lord has provided in his Word to the brown, withered grass of human wisdom.

All God’s people have been given rest from the guilt of sin and the fear of condemnation through the redeeming work of Christ. They are God’s people by virtue of that. But they still need rest from hunger, from annoying parasites and from conflict. We find these as we look to the green pastures in the Word of God. We are either grazing in those pastures or we are straying from our shepherd.



Thursday, January 12: *He leads me beside quiet waters,*

Believers do not lack refreshment because they are led beside still waters.

God's people often find themselves in need of spiritual refreshment. This is so because they walk in a wearying and exhausting world. Even their 'fellow-sheep' can be trying at times!

Where is the needed refreshment to be found? Are we not refreshed when we contemplate the greatness of our God? Do we not find it when we consider his glorious plan of salvation in which he placed his love on us before time, appointed his Son to be our Redeemer, sent him in the fullness of time and accepted on our behalf his sinless life and atoning death? We are refreshed by pondering Christ's ongoing intercession for us. We are renewed by remembering his promise to come again and receive us to himself into eternal glory?

All of these refreshing things—and many, many more—are found in the Word of God. So we are back to the Bible again! It is green pasture in which we may feed and refreshing water from which we may drink.

Friday, January 13: *He refreshes my soul.*

Believers do not lack forgiveness and renewal because their souls are restored.

Sheep stray, and so do followers of the Lord Jesus. But his kind shepherdly care covers even that. A straying sheep is still a sheep, and the Lord ever cares for his own. David himself would stray far, but he did not—could not!—stray beyond the long reach of the arm of grace (2 Sam. 11:1–12:15; Ps. 32:1–11).



In the New Testament, we need look no further than Simon Peter to find an example of a straying saint who was pursued, forgiven and restored by his divine shepherd (John 18:15–18, 25–27; 21:15–19).

Every child of God is in the grip of grace—mighty, unrelenting, stubborn, pursuing grace!

Saturday, January 14: *He guides me*

Believers do not lack direction and guidance because they are led in paths of righteousness.

Christians often confuse themselves with the question of whether they are ‘finding the Lord’s will’ for their lives. What comfort we have in this part of the Lord’s shepherdly care! The Lord has promised to lead his people. We should not concern ourselves so much, then, with finding the Lord’s will as with walking close to the Lord. ‘Our problem is not really one of guidance, it is one of closeness to God.’

Sunday, January 15: *along the right paths*

It is important to notice that the Lord always leads His people “along the right paths’, that is, in alignment with what God has revealed in his Word. This verse will not allow us to claim the Lord’s leadership for any action that is opposed to the Word of God.

Pray today and ask God to help you make decisions that will lead you down the right paths for your future and the future of our church.



Monday, January 16: *for His name's sake.*

The fact that the Lord leads his people 'For his name's sake' means that he guides us according to all that His name represents. His guidance is, then, in keeping with His holiness, His love, His faithfulness, His wisdom and all that He has revealed Himself to be.

Tuesday, January 17: *Even though I walk through*

David describes what he is doing in the valley as walking, which is thought of as pleasant and restful.

How thankful we should be for the word, "Through!" The valley of death is not the stopping place for God's children. It is a traveling place. God's people will not get lost in it but will come out safely.

Wednesday, January 18: *through the darkest valley*

It is only natural for us to shrink from physical death, which is the separation of body and soul. Death is an intruder into God's creation. It came into this world as a result of mankind's sinful rebellion against God.

A dark shadow may appear to be quite frightening but it has no real power to harm us. And death, unpleasant and forbidding as it may be, cannot finally do any real harm to the child of God. Christ has removed the substance of death and only a shadow remains. A shadow is there but cannot hurt or destroy.

The Lord himself was the basis of David's peace about death. As David contemplates his death, he sees himself entering a dark valley.



Thursday, January 19: *I will fear no evil*

The sight of the Shepherd and his tools causes David to realize that he has absolutely nothing to fear. His shepherd is there to kill the enemies of fear, doubt and guilt and to guide him safely through. The same Lord who was shepherding him through life would shepherd him through death.

If we would have the same peace as David, we must have the same shepherd. We must always keep in mind as we deal with this psalm that it all depends on the opening line: *'The Lord is my shepherd'*.

Friday, January 20: *for You are with me;*

Suddenly he is aware that someone else is there in the shadows. It is the Lord himself. It is important to notice the change in personal pronoun as David reflects on his shepherd. In verses 2 and 3, David speaks about his shepherd. But when he comes to the valley of death, David drops the 'he' in favor of 'you' and 'your'. He was able to look upon the prospect of death with peace and calmness because he knew that it would mean meeting his glorious shepherd face to face.

How comforting it is to know that we are never alone in life's valleys! The Lord has promised His unfailing presence in our lives. When we are walking through the valleys, He will move to our side and escort us safely through them, even carrying us when necessary. We can come victoriously through every trial with the Lord at our side.



Saturday, January 21: *Your rod and Your staff,*

As he looks at the Shepherd, David sees him carrying a rod and staff. The rod was a heavy club the shepherd used to kill predators, and the staff, a long pole with a crook in one end, used to round up the sheep and guide them along.

The Lord would protect him and keep him close to His side. David was *comforted*—turned from fear and terror—because his Shepherd was skillfully armed with His *rod* and His *staff*. The rod was a club the shepherd fashioned and carried to fight off wild animals and thieves. It was a deadly weapon. The staff was the instrument the shepherd used to deal with his sheep. It was not a weapon but a tool. The shepherd leaned on it for support as he journeyed across rough ground and rocky crags. Most staffs had a hooked end that the shepherd used to catch a sheep's leg or neck to pull it out of a hole or back into the fold. The shepherd would nudge a sheep with his staff when it began to stray or when it was hesitant to move along with the flock.

David was fearless in the valley because he knew his Shepherd would protect him from all deadly threats, including his own waywardness. His Shepherd would keep him close to His side in the darkness and would be with him through every step until he passed safely through to the light on the other side.

Sunday, January 22: *they comfort me.*

We cannot have what the shepherd produces without having the shepherd. If we want to enjoy the full measure of David's peace, we must have the full measure of his faith. We must recognize that we desperately need a shepherd. We must recognize that only God can rightly shepherd us. And we must wholeheartedly turn to God, renouncing our dependence on ourselves and on any other shepherds.



Monday, January 23: *You prepare a table before me*

John R. W. Stott writes: 'The scene changes. I am no longer out of doors, but indoors; no longer a sheep in a flock, but a guest at a banquet.'

We can go even further. God's children are his guests because they are his friends. They were not always so. They were by nature God's enemies. But he has reconciled them to himself through the cross of Christ (Eph. 2:14–18; Col. 1:19–22). Think of it! Friends of God! What a privilege!

As the shepherd cares for the needs of his sheep, so the host provides for the needs of his friends.

David affirms that God's provisions for his guests are both constant and abundant.

Tuesday, January 24: *in the presence of my enemies.*

The consistency of God's provisions means that God's people have them in every situation and circumstance. We have already noted that the saints of God have enemies in the hour of death. They have them all through life as well. These enemies are the world, the flesh and the devil.

Knowing about these enemies, David here subjects God's care to what we might call the ultimate test. He asserts that God's care cannot be negated or destroyed by these fierce enemies. David sees himself sitting at a banquet table while they gather all around. While they threaten and snarl, he feasts. Such is the care of God!



Wednesday, January 25: *You anoint my head with oil;*

David emphasizes the abundance of God's care. Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Lord had empowered David with His Spirit in every battle.

Samuel had anointed David with oil when he identified him as Israel's future king (1 S. 12–13). The Lord had preserved David in his many battles in order to fulfill His anointed purpose for him.

Shepherds applied oil to their sheep. When a sheep was injured, the shepherd would use oil to soothe and heal its wounds. They poured oil on their sheep's heads and backs to repel insects. As they grazed, the fragrance of the oil would also repel snakes that hid in thick grass.

Thursday, January 26: *my cup overflows.*

It was customary in those days to receive a guest by anointing him with fragrant perfume and with a cup filled with a choice wine. In this way, the host indicated that nothing was to be considered too good for his guest.

David declares that God's care is abundant to excess. His head had been anointed, and his cup was filled to overflowing. A full "*cup*" is another sign of God's fullness and blessing. This party is a genuine celebration.

Friday, January 27: *Surely Your goodness*

God's goodness is that character that causes him actively to seek the good of his creature. His mercy is that quality that inclines him to relieve their hurting.

Because he had seen so very much of God's faithful care in every conceivable situation, David knew he could count on God's goodness and mercy every step of the way.



Saturday, January 28: *and love*

This is His covenant-love, redemptive power, and faithfulness. The goodness of God and the love of God will “follow” or “pursue” David throughout his lifetime. Sometimes, as in David’s relationship with Bathsheba, it is a severe mercy (2 Sam. 11–12), but mercy at its best.

As David looked back on all the events of his life, he could see the faithfulness of his Shepherd. The Lord’s constant care filled him with great assurance and hope for the future. The word *surely* does not express a probability here but a certainty. In other words, David could face the rest of his life boldly, with great confidence about his future.

Sunday, January 29: *will follow me*

Think about it: the Son of God, the Creator and Great Shepherd, became the Lamb of God so He could suffer the judgment we were due (Isaiah 53:6–7). The Lamb of God was slain at Calvary to take away our sin, the sin of the world (John 1:29). He became the door or gate by which we can enter into the sheepfold (Jn. 10:1, 7, 9), a way into the Father’s house (John 14:1–6). The Chief Shepherd is coming back for us, His sheep (1 Peter 5:4), and He will transport us into the Lord’s house, where we will be with Him forever (1 Thes. 4:16–17). The Lamb will shepherd us—feed and lead us (Rev. 7:17)—throughout eternity, and we will dwell with Him forever in the Lord’s presence.

How wonderful to be one of His sheep! Why would anyone not want to be in His flock? Why would anyone choose to wander aimlessly through life unprotected, unguided, and uncared for? Why would anyone refuse to choose Him and the wonderful privilege of living with Him forever?



Monday, January 30: *all the days of my life,*

David had experienced enough of life to know that God is good all of the time. In every circumstance God's goodness had flowed out to him: in battles, false accusations, his life as a fugitive, the death of his child, and heart-rending problems within his family. Even in David's time of horrific sin—adultery and murder—God displayed His goodness to him. In times of distress, David had repeatedly called out for God's *mercy* to preserve him and God had shown him steadfast, covenant love. The Lord had proven true to His character and His Word. David expected God's goodness to continue throughout the rest of his life, and he knew that God would be unfailingly true to His great name.

Tuesday, January 31: *and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

The provisions of God in this life are a small foretaste of what waits ahead for us as believers. The table David is talking about is set in the middle of enemies in the wilderness. A glorious day is coming when all God's people will be gathered around God's table in his eternal house, and there will be no enemies present to set a single trap.

So, the greatest expression of the goodness and mercy of God waits for us in heaven. The people of God will then be with the Lord who cared for them every step of the way. And they will never be separated from Him.

