



## FORWARD IN *Faithfulness*

### I. **What is the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting?**

- A. Fasting is primarily abstaining from food for an amount of time for the purpose of seeking God. It is a practice found in the Old Testament at times of desperation for God (Esther 4:1-17, 2 Samuel 15:12-23), devotion to God (Daniel 1:8, Isaiah 58, Jeremiah 36:1-9, Jonah 3), or for discerning the ways of God (Exodus 34:28).
- B. Now while fasting is not specifically commanded in the New Testament, it seems to be expected. Jesus taught on fasting (Matthew 6:16-18). It may be that we are not instructed on when or how long to fast so that we would not be tempted to make fasting a legalistic requirement for everyone to practice the same way. The Pharisees fasted religiously and wore their fasting as a badge of honor (Matthew 6:16). We learn that the church fasted to discern God's direction for the spread of the Gospel (Acts 13:1-3, 14:23). Our Lord fasted (Matthew 4:1-2). The Apostle Paul expected some in the church to be fasting at specific times (1 Corinthians 7:5).
- C. There will be a day when we will not fast; that day is when we are in the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, come Lord Jesus. But until that day, Jesus said His disciples would fast, "Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 And

Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” (Matthew 9:14-15).

- D. It is significant to note that the Lord Jesus spent forty days fasting before His public ministry began and before He chose the twelve disciples. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into that fast and ministered to by the Holy Spirit during that time (Matthew 4, Luke 2). No one should enter a fast that is not Spirit led. Fasting is not for the purpose of forcing God’s hand, an offering of penance, or any other personal motive. Fasting is for the purpose of leading the follower of Christ to a greater depth of submission, discernment, and devotion. Fasting is a beneficial Spiritual Discipline.

## II. **What are the benefits of fasting and other Spiritual Disciplines in personal worship?**

- A. Fasting is a Spiritual Discipline that assists us in seeking God and in submitting to Him. Fasting sharpens, focuses, and arrests the mind. We are constantly remembering our God during our fast. Fasting brings the flesh under control. We are saying no to food and yes to God.
- B. Fasting occurs from a hunger for God or because of a lack of hunger. Fasting for the right reason(s) deepens our desire for God. People who eat still get hungry. Fellowshiping with God only strengthens a healthy appetite for God. Fasting for the person walking with God is a way to grow further in Christ. “Fasting is not for the very moral or the very strong — fasting is for the weak and the needy.”<sup>i</sup>
- C. If you do not have any physical appetite, you are in need of a doctor. Lack of hunger is an indication of sickness or infection. Fasting for the dry and parched believer can bring to surface the issues causing the bareness.
- D. Spiritual Disciplines are necessary for Spiritual growth. When we talk about Spiritual Disciplines, we mean practices such as Bible reading and study, prayer, meditation, Scripture memory, witnessing, and fasting.

## III. **Don’t Miss the Point**

- A. It is vitally important to understand, however, that Spiritual Disciplines are not a means to an end. Discipline does not necessitate spirituality. We can practice Spiritual Disciplines and not be Godly. Jesus said, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).” The Scribes and Pharisees were pious and disciplined people. They were students of Scripture (John 5:29), tithers (Matthew 23:15), prayers, and evangelists (Matthew 23:23). It would be very difficult to do more righteous works than them. On one hand, we understand that our righteousness is in Christ and we identify with His righteousness in salvation; we have been justified by faith in Christ alone. That is the only reason our righteousness could exceed the Pharisees’. We therefore are safe. We will enter

the kingdom of Heaven through a greater righteousness than the most religious on earth, the righteousness of Christ.

- B. It is not enough to simply profess we have the righteousness of Christ (Matthew 7:21). True righteousness produces fruit in our lives. If we have a profession of faith that is genuine, inevitably we will present genuine fruit. Some of the fruit of our righteousness will be the grace-given desire to discipline our lives to walk in righteousness. Think about what Paul said in (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”
  - i. Paul was not training himself to gain righteousness, but instead to grow in righteousness and to protect himself from unrighteousness. A believer made righteous in Christ will have a desire for greater applied righteousness. Spiritual Disciplines like fasting then will be employed out of want for growth, practical righteousness, and protection from unrighteousness so that he might win the prize. What was the prize? Simple; the prize is Christ (Philippians 3). Paul could say something like this, “because I have Jesus, I want Jesus and want to keep everything away that would keep me away from Jesus” (My summary of Philippians 3, cp. Hebrews 12:1-2).
- C. Disciplines like fasting strengthen the believer’s pursuit of Christ. The believer’s goal is true worship of Jesus in the power of His Spirit to the Glory of God. You were made for worship and disciplines can assist your worship by: (1) informing and sharpening your mind with truth and (2) transforming your mind and heart supernaturally.
- D. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

#### **IV. What are the benefits of Spiritual Disciplines in public worship?**

- A. This pamphlet has been put together to help all of us enter into a time of fasting that is truly beneficial to our soul. Hibernia Baptist Church will be blessed by our desire to know our God and follow His leadership moment by moment.
- B. The benefits of Spiritual Disciplines in personal worship will spill over into our public worship services. The Lord’s Day is special for us. Our public worship is strengthened by our private worship and vice versa. Both are Biblical and both are necessary for spiritual growth.
- C. Ask how God would lead you to join in the thirty days of prayer and fasting. You may wonder if corporate fasts are Biblical if you are familiar with Jesus’ admonition

to keep our fasts private (Matthew 16:17-18). Fasting is a matter between you and God. How you fast and how long you fast are a private matter. Jesus' admonitions about fasting do not exclude us from joining in times of corporate fasts (cp. Acts 13). What matters is the reason behind our fasting. Fasting is not to better our standing before men, but to humble us before God (Isaiah 58:5).

- D. Fasting promotes the confession of sin and commitment to holiness. We have technology, talent, and resources galore in the church at large. What is missing sometimes amid all of the planning and programming is holiness. A hindrance to true worship is sin. As our church comes together in a fast, sin is revealed to us. Sin will be confessed, abandoned, and forgiven (1 John 1:9). God will bless us with powerful public worship, when in private prayer closets, we confess what has been controlling us.
- E. A greater sense of purpose and unity will exist in a church that is seeking God in a concert of prayer and fasting. There will be a greater sense of God and desensitizing of those petty distracting matters that hinder public worship. I pray as we seek God, His presence will be so known in our presence, we leave worship only talking about Him. As others join us in worship they will know that God is with us.
- F. *“Let God send the fire of His Spirit here, and the minister will be more and more lost in his Master. You will come to think less of the speaker and more of the truth spoken...  
Let God but send down the fire, and the biggest sinner in the neighborhood will be converted; those who live in the dens of infamy will be changed; the drunkard will forsake his cups, the swearer will repent of his blasphemy, the debauched will leave their lust –  
Dry bones be raised and clothed with afresh,  
And hearts of stone be turned to flesh”<sup>iii</sup>*

## V. What are we being asked to do?

- A. Each covenant member of Hibernia Baptist Church is being asked to participate in **40 days of fasting** for the purpose of discerning the leadership of the Holy Spirit for our church in some specific ways, some of which are listed later in this pamphlet. Fast and pray for a greater devotion to the Lord Jesus and a humble desperation for God's power to be demonstrated through us.

## VI. How do you begin a fast?

- A. If this is the first time you have fasted, you will want to begin with shorter fasts. You may consider missing one meal or fasting for a day. Entering into an extended fast must be done prayerfully and with preparation. You may even want to have shorter fasts before moving into your extended fast. Begin weaning yourself off of processed foods, simple carbohydrates, and things like caffeine.
- B. Remember this fast should be Spirit led. I have fasted with groups in the past when I was not sure I was being led by the Spirit to do so. I have fasted privately

when I had not prepared myself spiritually and failed miserably. Even on occasion when I made it through the fast, I did not benefit spiritually because my mind and heart were not in the right place. On the other hand, I have seen God move in very specific ways in my life when I was fasting in the power and leadership of the Holy Spirit.

## VII. How to fast?

A. Decide what type of fast you will participate in and for how long. There are differing ways of fasting:

### i. Extended Fasts

- a. You may be led to go without food for an extended period of time. That time may be predetermined or you can allow God to lead you out of it.
- b. When you enter into an extended total fast from food your body will gain energy from stored resources. Because much of what we eat today is processed and contains various chemicals and preservatives you may feel really poor over the first few days of your fast. You will notice your tongue turning white as toxins are being cleansed from your body. These days will be difficult especially if you are used to consuming caffeine and processed sugars.
- c. Included in this pamphlet is another resource to give you help during an extended fast. Please be sure to consult your physician (especially if you are taking any types of medication).

### ii. Shorter Fasts

- a. You may be led to do a shorter fast. It may be that you choose to miss one meal a day, one meal a week, or one day a week, for example. The spiritual benefit is not found in the length of the fast, in how you fast, but simply in the 'why' of your fast.
- b. Keep in mind that your fast will affect your physical stamina. You know what type of schedule you are required to keep in September.

### iii. Partial Fast

- a. You may not be able to give up a meal or go on an extended fast from food. You can still fast to seek God. You can choose to give up television, sweets, or anything that would cause you to be more spiritually in tune with your Lord. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose."

## VIII. What should you expect when you fast?

- A. Expect Spiritual warfare. I put this first because it is the fiercest opposition you will face when seeking God in prayer and fasting. The enemy is only too happy to leave us to our mediocre Christian life. He will not, however, tolerate the serious Christian, and prayer is serious business. Expect to be tempted in the strangest ways but take heart that we have help in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:1-14).
- B. Expect to feel hungry. You know this, but did you know your body is conditioned to feel hungry even when it isn't. I sometimes say when I am hungry that, "man, I am starving." The reality is that our body is not starving until it begins to consume itself after a long period without any food. The starvation processes take place somewhere between thirty and forty days for the average healthy adult. The first days will be the most difficult.
- C. Expect your energy to be lower. Now again you know this, but be sure to adjust your schedule. You may not be someone that takes naps, but a short nap may be just the help you need to stay sharp during a fast. Be sure to schedule time in for rest. Limit your physical activity as much as possible during your fast.
- D. Expect to be tempted to be irritable. Because you are "hangry" you will be tempted to act in the flesh during your fast. Ironic, you are fasting to submit to the Holy Spirit, but will be tempted to act in the flesh. Do not use your fasting to excuse fleshly reactions (Matthew 6:17). Instead allow fasting to flesh out the works against the Spirit (Galatians 5:16ff).
- E. Expect your fasting to affect other people. No doubt during your fast you will be around people celebrating with food at birthday parties and the like. Plan your answers in advance. There is no sin in letting people know you are fasting if you are doing it to keep them from being offended or to be grandiose.
- F. Expect people to misunderstand your reasons for fasting. We live in a day when most people live for themselves. I am not being cynical here, just truthful. Be ready to humbly explain your fasting is not for approval before God, but because you are accepted in Him (Ephesians 1:3-6), you desire a greater intimacy. Expect to share the Gospel during your time of fasting. Many people equate religious activity with penance or the like. They assume we participate in spiritual disciplines to win God to our side. What an opportunity to explain the good news of Jesus to them.
- G. Expect a clearer discernment of God's leadership. On one occasion while fasting (this time under the Spirit's direction) a friend came to my mind during prayer. I was so moved in prayer that I decided to drive to their work place. They were there to my surprise to have a Bible Study, but the person to give the lesson forgot and did not show up. My friend could not believe that I "just happened" to walk in while they were waiting for someone to deliver the Word of God. That day two people in attendance indicated they wanted to follow Christ. I will never forget that day. I wonder if I would have been so attuned to God had I not been fasting and praying.

- H. Expect sin to be uncovered. When we grow in grace, we also grow more sensitive to sin. Don't be surprised to have a heightened sensitivity to personal sin during your time of fasting. Be obedient to God in repentance and confession (1 John 1:9). Be ready to restore fellowship with others if possible and/or to make restitution for wrongs done brought to your attention by the Holy Spirit.

**IX. What should we expect corporately when we fast?**

- A. We discussed a few benefits of fasting and spiritual growth for both private and public worship earlier. Many of the experiences we have individually will be the experiences of the community of faith as we fast together. The enemy will not be idle, people on the outside will misunderstand, and some inside will have false expectation of results that are man-centered and not God-centered. Be careful.
- B. Expect a deeper sense of the need to seek God in the community of Faith. Each Sunday we have an opportunity to respond to God's Word to us after it is preached. Expect to see more responses by God's people to His call for obedience. It can and should be very natural to seek the Lord in prayer, repentance, thanksgiving, praise, and petition during the response (invitation) time before we conclude every worship service.
- C. Expect a greater hunger for God and His Word in your Bible Study Group. Private worship extends to our public gatherings (Acts 2:42ff). Secret agendas are abandoned and the fellowship and unity of the body supersede personal preferences.
- D. Expect greater generosity. The closer we are to God and His will, the more we desire to be part of His plan. This includes our generosity. Isaiah proclaimed the reasons to fast and the reasons not to fast (Isaiah 58). One reason to fast is to assist those in need, those who are hungry, or those in need of our help (Isaiah 58:7-8). The more our hearts are knit with Christ's, the more we will be broken over a lost multitude in our communities and the world and the more we will sacrifice to finance the work of the Kingdom.

**X. What to do during the fast?**

- A. Someone said our greatest victories are won on sore knees and empty stomachs. Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Pray diligently and pray specifically. Included in this pamphlet are requests the entire church will be praying for. List your personal requests and praise and thank God for His answers whatever the answer may be (Ezra 8:23; Joel 2:13; Acts 13:3, Luke 2:37, 2 Chronicles 20:3-4).
- B. "Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God." <sup>iii</sup>

- C. Devour much of God's Word. God's Word is described as spiritual food (1 Peter 2:2, Hebrews 5:12, Jeremiah 3:15). Remember Jesus told Satan while He was fasting that, "It is written," "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). There will be much more time to read the Bible when you are not preparing and consuming meals.
- D. Share Jesus with the lost. Jesus gave the Gospel to a Samaritan woman in John 4. She was born again and even became an evangelist herself. When the disciples found Jesus, they urged him to eat. Jesus said, "I have food to eat that you do not know about" (Matthew 4:31-33). There are some things we would rather do than eat.
- E. Avoid media entertainment as much as possible. Fill your mind with worship music, Scripture and things that are edifying (Philippians 4:8). Spend time meditating on the Word of God (Psalm 1) and fellowshiping with the Lord Jesus.
- F. Serve one another. You will have a heightened awareness of others when you fast and pray. The Holy Spirit will guide. Now, He always guides the believer. We do not have to fast to be led by the Spirit. You are simply being encouraged to greater service on behalf of Christ during these days of prayer and fasting.
- G. Encourage one another. Since this is a corporate fast, seek out others that are fasting in some way to pray for one another by name, send texts, make calls, and generally find ways of encouragement. We are not in this alone.

**XI. What will the church be asked to pray for during this fast?**

- A. Pray diligently.
  - i. The reluctance of the carnal heart to dwell in God's presence is terrible. We would rather speak of Him than speak to Him. How often He finds the occasion to reprove us, saying "The companions hearken to thy voice; cause Me to Hear it" A dad will prize a badly spelled, scratched and grammatically incorrect letter from his child.<sup>iv</sup> Precious are the imperfect, diligent prayers of the saints in the presence of the Lord Jesus.
  - ii. "Satan strikes either at the root of faith or the root of diligence." – John Livingstone
  - iii. "Bear up the hands that hang down, by faith and prayer; support the tottering knees. Have you any days of fasting and prayer? Storm the throne of grace and persevere therein, and mercy will come down." John Wesley
- B. Pray specifically for holiness to be the quality of covenant members at Hibernia Baptist Church.
- C. Pray we grow deeper in our desire to see the Lord Jesus Christ glorified in all we do and magnified in our public worship.

- i. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)
  - ii. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:16-20)
- D. Pray the elders will submit to the Holy Spirit’s leadership constantly.
- E. Pray specifically we can leverage more money for outreach and missions by paying off our current note. We can retire our debt. This means we would be able to move our budget’s mission’s percentage to 20%. We currently have a plan to pay down our debt rapidly and be close to finished by 2021. What if we could pay off our debt by 2020? We could easily expand our mission’s giving to 20% by 2020 if we paid off our note. Don’t be surprised if I ask you personally how God may be leading your family to greater generosity in the days ahead.
- i. Everything we do is missional; meaning all we do, we do to make disciples. Our daily ministry, the way we serve and use our money, and the pastors and staff are on mission. That being said, we would like to support more local and foreign mission efforts as we grow together.
- F. Pray we are able to finish saving enough money to build Phase 3 of Hibernia’s Master Plan. That would mean replacing modular space with a permanent building with BSG rooms and fellowship space. The building would finally offer our students the Bible Study space they need.
- G. Pray specifically that our impact in Asia will increase. We entered into what we call the Thomas Initiative several years ago. The purpose of the initiative is to reach unreached people with the Gospel. We are the only group (that we are aware of) reaching into a group of more than eight million people with the only hope of Heaven for them. The task is overwhelming and burdensome.
- i. Please pray for our partnerships around the world as they are bringing good news to many who have never heard. Pray for their safety, health and endurance. Pray that the Father will give them the resources they need as well as boldness and love to share and to serve others.
- H. Pray specifically that we are able to impact one of the largest and most Christ-less populations in the United States with the Gospel. That area is South Florida. Our network of churches is working to plant hundreds of churches among millions of people. We need thousands of churches just to make a dent, but we have to start somewhere. Pray we have a large impact.

- I. Pray we learn how to better affect the foster care organization and assist orphans in our state. You may be aware of our partners like the Florida Baptist Children's Homes, Porch Light (a ministry rescuing girls from enslavement), Life Line Adoption Ministries, First Coast Women's Services and the like. We have formed partnerships to aid in helping families adopt, provide for children without homes, and stop abortions. Pray we are even more effective and that soon we can offer every foster child or orphan a Christian home to be reared in.
- J. Pray specifically we expand our reach into our community. Let's be submissive to the Spirit as He sovereignly leads us into our neighborhoods with the Gospel. Pray that our \*Love Loud projects will be effective in bringing people face to face with Jesus. Pray we have at least one major Love Loud project a week and more members champion projects.
  - i. \*A Love Loud project is a mission effort to meet needs in the community, have a presence, or serve in the community in order to intentionally share Jesus. More information can be gathered each Sunday at the Connect Point or by contacting Paul Sweat, our mission's pastor.
- K. Pray for protection of Hibernia Baptist Church against the evil one.
  - i. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matthew 6:13).
  - ii. But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3).
- L. Pray each family in Hibernia will grow in family prayer and worship during the week.
  - i. A family worship resource is available from our Children's Ministry.

**XII. Suggested fasting resources:**

- A. Fasting Guide by Rick Shepherd on our website: <https://www.hiberniabaptist.org>
  - i. Go to the Resources Tab > Forms/Guides > Fasting Guide
- B. A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Prayer and Fasting by John Piper
- C. The Coming Revival: America's Call to Fast, Pray, and "Seek God's Face" by Bill Bright
- D. The Worship Hymnal produced by Lifeway Worship

















