



Watertown
Evangelical
Free Church

A PASTORAL LETTER
to the
WEFC CHURCH FAMILY
on

PRAYER & FASTING

November 26, 2018

*“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 2:15

A letter from Pastor Dan Osborn

Some days back the WEFC Elders united in a three day fast for the purpose of bringing deliverance to those in bondage, whether spiritual, emotional, sexual, chemical or any other kind of bondage or spiritual oppression. In light of the severity of my wife Heidi's depression and her absence among us, I asked the elders if we could have a time of fasting and prayer for her and others who are struggling. The elders welcomed the opportunity to fast and pray together. Because it was somewhat of a new spiritual exercise, we decided to do this together before we invited the church to fast and pray together.

The elders fasted and prayed from October 21-23. The following testimonies came from that special time:

- *I felt initially a brokenness (my mind, my body, and my spirit) before the Lord but as time passed it changed to more of a peaceful clarity allowing me to hear God speak in a new way to me. Ed Hoseth*
- *It reinforced for me that humbling yourself before God is a good thing even when (especially when) you cannot see how He is answering your prayer. Dave Peterson*
- *Kathy and I did a modified fast and focused on times of praying together and alone. The provided prayer guide helped us to focus and we really could never finish in under an hour. Jim and Kathy Deidrick*
- *Fasting for 3 days tempered my preoccupation with my own needs and agenda; it allowed me to feel and experience reliance on God himself, more than His gifts or blessings. Pastor David*
- *Fasting became a "can do" experience that diminished (in time) the food element, but sharpened other elements, most importantly, spiritual focus. A worthy experience... no doubt about it...something to build upon. Wayne Hubin*
- *I've found that God is always there to talk to, through good times and through struggles. Even though God is always there to talk to, fasting gave me additional quiet time to focus on prayer and scripture. Keith Hokenson*

The WEFC Elders and Staff have continued to prayerfully discuss the spiritual discipline of fasting as both taught and modeled in the Scriptures. Out of these deliberations, we have sensed the Lord's prompting to send this pastoral letter on fasting to the WEFC family to invite you all into the process with an instructional statement on the biblical teaching and purposes of fasting as well as some practical guidelines and suggestions on the practice of fasting.

Together as elders, we are thankful to the Lord for His blessings on our church. With a growing church family, we are passionate about helping each brother and sister in Christ experience the deeper life of spiritual maturity and intimacy with our Lord and Savior. Our goal is that we may become fully devoted followers of Christ who experience the joy of the Lord, healing from the effects of sin through the abundant life as Jesus promised (John 10:10), and the exhilarating thrill of participation in the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

We believe that an important part of the Bible's teaching about the life of the Christian is the spiritual discipline of fasting. Yet we acknowledge that fasting has fallen into severe neglect in the Christian community in the United States and that this neglect has been reflected in our own WEFC ministry and practice. Seeking to reverse this trend of neglect, we issue this pastoral letter on fasting to the WEFC family with the prayer that the Lord will use it to stimulate your thinking, inspire your heart, and inform your mind about the biblical teaching and purposes of fasting. We ourselves are sojourners with you in our desire to grow in the "grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ" on this topic (2 Peter 3:18).

We offer this pastoral letter, however, with an attending concern. We do not wish to place a new “law” or “regulation” in the WEFC family. Indeed, we celebrate the wonderful and liberating truth that the Christian’s acceptability to God is based on His love, grace, and mercy in Christ Jesus. As Paul proclaimed in Romans 8:1-4:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

We affirm that neither fasting nor any other human effort is a means of salvation, nor is it a penance to earn God’s love or forgiveness. With thanksgiving to God that we are under His grace, we urge you to receive this instructional statement not as the means whereby we can experience God’s approval and favor, nor as a spiritual gimmick to manipulate God for our own purposes, but rather as an aspect of the dynamic Christian’s life in the Spirit, reflecting a full surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

As you read through this letter, it is our prayer that God will use it to help you experience His grace and power in a new and fresh way. To the extent that this is the outcome, we lift high the Name of Jesus and give the glory to our Lord and Savior!

Fasting: An Introduction

Fasting as a spiritual discipline has been practiced by the people of God in the Old Testament, New Testament, the early Church, and throughout Church history. The ultimate example of the importance of fasting is our Lord Jesus Christ who fasted on many occasions. **Fasting is nearly always linked to a time of seeking God in prayer.**

The humility expressed through fasting saturates and energizes our petitions with a special and unusual intensity. The teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:16-18 in the Sermon on the Mount places it as a spiritual discipline along with financial stewardship and prayer.

The central principle of biblical fasting is the voluntary denial of the otherwise normal function of eating food and drinking fluids for the purpose of intense spiritual activity. The biblical record of fasting reads like a “Who’s Who” of Scripture. Some biblical examples of fasting include:

- Abraham’s servant when he was seeking a bride for Isaac
- Moses on Mount Sinai
- Hannah when she prayed for a child
- David on several occasions
- Elijah after his victory over Jezebel
- Ezra when he was mourning Israel’s unfaithfulness to God
- Nehemiah when he was preparing his return trip to Israel from the Babylonian captivity
- Esther when God’s people were threatened with extermination
- Daniel on several occasions
- The people of Nineveh (& their animals!) when confronted with God’s coming judgment
- Jesus when He began His public ministry
- Paul at the point of his conversion
- The Christians at Antioch when they sent Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey
- Paul & others when they appointed elders & pastors in the churches they planted

Three Types of Fasting

There are three types of fasting illustrated in biblical examples:

1. The **“Normal Fast”**: Going without food but drinking fluids, such as water, various juices, etc. This type of fast could last for up to forty days.
2. The **“Complete Fast”**: Going without food OR fluids. Obviously, this fast should last no more than a few days. Examples of this type of fast in the Scriptures can be found in Acts 9:9, Ezra 10:6 and Esther 4:16.
3. The **“Partial Fast”**: A Normal Fast that is on occasion interrupted due to health restrictions or social obligations. A biblical example of this type of fast can be found in Daniel’s life in Daniel 10:3. Though less demanding than a Normal Fast, the Partial Fast is a legitimate form of fasting and is to be respected, as illustrated by Daniel’s action that resulted in great victory over the powers of Satan.

The Purposes of Fasting

There are five primary reasons why people fasted in the Bible, each of which represents a different life-context and situation for the child of God:

1. To seek God intensely when there is a great or urgent need. An example of this can be found in Ezra 8:22-23.
2. To develop a deeper intimacy with God. Examples of this are found in Isaiah 58:1-12 and Zechariah 8:18-23. The goal of this purpose of fasting is the development of a life of deeper knowing and following the Lord Jesus. This category includes fasting as an act of repentance for sin.
3. To seek God for revival and the special anointing of the Holy Spirit. A wonderful biblical example of this can be found in the passages of Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-15, and 2:28-32.
4. To bring deliverance to those in bondage, whether spiritual, emotional, sexual, chemical or any other kind of bondage or spiritual oppression. A biblical example of this is found in Mark 9:14-29. That God responds to fasting to bring deliverance to those in bondage is vividly seen in Isaiah 58:6.
5. To seek God’s wisdom and guidance. This is illustrated by the Church in Antioch as they were deliberating whom to send on the first missionary journey. As Acts 13:1-3 records, out of such prayer and fasting they selected Paul and Barnabas.

A Spirit of Humility: The Key to Fasting

In the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount the key to fasting is readily apparent. In Matthew 6: 16-18 Jesus calls us to fast with a spirit of humility, rejecting the spiritual arrogance and hypocrisy so characteristic of the Pharisees.

Boasting of one’s fasting, drawing attention to the fact that one is fasting, and a competitive spirit of wanting to fast more than others are all attitudes completely inconsistent with the instructions of Jesus. Instead, our Lord instructed that our fasting should be obvious “only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:18).

Like other spiritual disciplines, fasting should not be practiced as some legalistic way to gain God’s

favor. Instead, it must be understood as a humble way to seek God for specific answers to our concerns. Fasting does not prove us to be spiritual. It is instead a way for us to develop our intimacy with God. We do not fast in order to attain spiritual power. Rather, as we fast and pray, we understand the nature of God's authority and power, and His lordship over our lives.

“Declare a holy fast... “

As we have discussed... this matter in recent days, we have sought the Lord's guidance about how to minister to the church family about this spiritual discipline of fasting. In still other conversations and times of prayer, we have sought the Lord for His Spirit to bring healing to those who are oppressed. In response, we believe that God has led us to the word He spoke to the prophet Joel in Joel 1:14:

“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.”

Thus, we invite the Watertown EFC family to give prayerful consideration to incorporating the truths of Scripture on fasting into your walk with Christ as He gives you leading. In need of God's wisdom and guiding Hand, we believe that we should approach the Lord together on this matter with prayer and fasting.

We are impressed by the anointed statement of Jonathan Edwards, one of America's greatest theological minds, in 1742:

“I have often said it would be a thing very desirable, and very likely to be followed with a great blessing, if there could be some contrivance, that there should be an agreement of all God's people in America, that are well affected to this work, to keep a Day of Fasting and Prayer to God; wherein, we should all unite on the same day... Some perhaps may think it's being all on the same day is a circumstance of no great consequence, but I can't be of that mind... it seems to me, it would mightily encourage and animate God's saints, in humbly and earnestly seeking God, for such blessings which concern them all; and that it would be much for the rejoicing of all, to think, that at the same time, such multitudes of God's dear children, far and near, were sending up their cries to the same common Father, for the same motives.”

Accordingly, we encourage that each brother and sister in Christ in the Watertown EFC family give prayerful consideration to joining the Ministry Staff and the Board of Elders in fasting and praying on Friday, December 7 – Sunday, December 9.

Congregational prayer times will be:

Friday 12/7 @ 7 p.m.

Saturday 12/8 @ 7 p.m.

Sunday 12/9 @ 6 p.m. (Child care will be provided from 6 -7 p.m. Sunday)

The purpose of our prayer times is the following:

1. To ask the Lord for **revival and the special anointing of the Holy Spirit** on our congregation, resulting in the Deeper Life experience for all our people, and the joy of the Lord that accompanies being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.
2. To ask, specifically, for **Heidi Osborn and others whom God puts on our hearts** for the restoration of the joy of their salvation stolen through enemy attacks and mental illness.
3. To ask the Lord to continue in 2018-2019 to bring **many people to saving faith in Jesus Christ** through the people and ministries of the WEFC family.

Recognizing that Friday-Sunday may not fit everyone's schedule, we invite you to select another day(s) of the week for participation in this prayer and fasting.

Clearly, fasting can have significant health implications for an individual. We urge thoughtful caution before beginning a fast. Many should seek a physician's counsel. A person's health considerations may permit participation in a Partial Fast only, if at all, especially if prescription medications are being taken or a chronic condition exists. Good stewardship of the physical care of our bodies is a clear biblical mandate, as well as obvious common sense.

We are inviting you to make this commitment for all or part of Friday, December 7 from 7 p.m. through Sunday at 7 p.m. However, we trust fasting will become a regular part of our life in Christ, and a special day of fasting may be called by the elders from time to time.

Like the first time you prayed out loud or shared your Christian testimony, fasting may seem to be difficult at first. Do not be discouraged. God will honor your step of obedient faith as each of us in the WEFC family seeks to know Him and to make Him known.

A Suggested Guide to an Hour of Prayer

The following is a suggested guide on how to spend an hour in prayer in place of eating. Each of these segments is intended to be approximately five minutes in duration.

1. Giving **praise** to the Lord for who He is
2. **Waiting & listening** to the "still small voice" of God
3. **Confession** of sin as the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin
4. Reading **Scripture**
5. **Worship** by singing or listening to Christian music or by personal meditation
6. **Thanksgiving** to the Lord for His goodness and provision in your life
7. **Intercession for individuals** in the Watertown EFC family
8. **Intercession for God's wisdom & guidance** for our church as we make decisions about our future in a spirit that seeks to be faithful to the Lord in responding to His work in the continuous growth of our church family
9. **Intercession for others**, such as friends, relatives, etc.
10. **Personal petitions**: What does the Lord need to do in your life?
11. **Waiting & listening** to the Lord
12. **Close** by giving praise & worship to the Lord

Suggestions for a One Day Normal Fast

- A one day Normal Fast means that you do not eat food for one twenty-four hour period. You do, however, drink plenty of water or other fluids during that time.
- Fasting is a private experience. However, if you live with other people, in kindness, you may wish to inform them of your decision to fast.
- If you drink coffee, tea or soft drinks with caffeine in them, you may experience headaches during your day of fasting. This is a natural occurrence.
- If you have health issues related to food, such as diabetes, you should check with your physician first. A partial fast may be the best form of fasting for you. Remember, self-denial is a matter of the heart before God.
- Determine to spend the time you would normally be eating in worship and intercessory prayer. Consider this schedule:
 - Morning**: Begin with personal worship, praise, and personal heart preparation through reading Scripture and prayer.
 - Afternoon**: Begin with a confession of sin and listening to God in His Word and silence. Use this time to intercede for our church and ministries you are concerned about.
 - Evening**: Use this time to intercede for your family, for friends and other personal issues.
- If you can't fast for an entire day, you may want to try doing it for one meal a week or one meal a day. In any case, use the time made available by not eating for prayer.

Suggested Bibliography

The following bibliography is suggested for your study to learn more about fasting:

1. Eastman, Dick. Love On Its Knees. Tarrytown, NY: Christian Literature Crusade, 1989
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3. Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1978
4. Sanders, J. Oswald. Prayer Power Unlimited. Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1977
5. Wallis, Arthur. God's Chosen Fast. Fort Washington, PA: 1968

This letter has been adapted from a similar letter written & used by Grace Church of Edina.