

A Call to Prayer and Fasting

September 20, 2016

by Rod Fillinger

The elders of OBC invite you to join with your brothers and sisters in prayer and fasting for the people, events and decisions that will be part of tomorrow night's Prince William County School Board meeting at 7:00 p.m. (For more information, read this [Letter to the Congregation](#) and listen to this [last Sunday's sermon](#)).

Fasting is not something we think of in the new covenant as a spiritual discipline. It strikes us as a relic of the past that involved sackcloth and ashes in the face of an impending invasion by an overwhelmingly superior military force. Perhaps our thinking though misses the significance and purpose of fasting. So what is fasting, for what purpose would we ask you to fast for tomorrow night's activities, and how do you go about fasting?

What is fasting?

Christian fasting is simply a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. (fn - See, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney for a thorough treatment of this spiritual discipline.)

It is an expected activity for disciples of Jesus Christ. He expected that his disciples would fast. His instructions were "when you fast" in Matthew 6:16-18.

Fasting involves both negative and positive commands with a promise. In this same passage that Matthew records, he commands the disciples to not look outwardly like they are fasting, but to go about in such a way that only God the Father knows. And, he promises that God will reward us.

What is the purpose of fasting?

In Scripture we see at least 10 purposes for fasting that Dr. Whitney highlights in his book. All 10 are applicable to the current situation we face in Prince William County. For the sake of brevity, I highlight the following:

1. To strengthen prayer. Fasting does not change God's hearing, but it does focus my fervency in prayer. It sharpens the focus of my petition and requests made to God. We see this in the examples of Abraham, David, Nehemiah, and Daniel to name just a few.
2. To seek God's guidance.
3. To seek deliverance or protection.
4. To humble oneself before God. Fasting is not humility before God, but an expression of humility before God. In other words, we are not more humble simply because we fast, but it can be an expression of the heart's desire to be humble before God.

5. Fasting can be a reminder to us to love God more than we love temporal things. Foregoing food reminds us that God and not comfort and ease, even of something necessary like food, should be our greatest desire.

How do I fast?

1. Pick a period of time between now and tomorrow evening to fast by abstaining from food. (This should be done only to the extent medically advisable and prudent. Nursing mothers, diabetics, athletes in training, those with physically demanding jobs or others may need to still eat but that does not preclude their participation.) In the Bible we see fasts from part of a day, to a night, to three days to 40 days.
2. Know your purpose for fasting. I am fasting because _____.
3. Spend the time you would spend preparing a meal, eating, and cleaning up to pray.
4. When you feel hunger, let that remind you to pray.

What should I be praying about?

1. Pray that God would be glorified and the Gospel advanced.
2. Pray for wisdom for and the testimony of those who will be addressing the school board. ([There is still time to sign up to speak.](#))
3. Pray that God will use what is said, what is written, and the prayers of his saints to soften the hearts of school board members.

Remember, fasting is not for the purpose of gaining God's favor. We have that in Jesus Christ through faith. But it is earnestly asking our Father in heaven for his favor because from him we receive every good and perfect gift.

In prayer,

Rod Fillinger