WHAT IS BIBLICAL FASTING?

*Biblical fasting is private dedication of giving up specific food and/or drink for a specified number of hours or days ... which, linked with prayer is for the purpose of consecrating ourselves before God, and opening the gateway to increased spiritual growth and power.*”

- Notice first that Biblical fast is a *private dedication*. Even when the fast is corporate such as the St. James congregation fasting together for breakthrough in our legal issues, it is always a *personal* discipline.

- Secondly, there is a *giving up of food or drink* for a specified time. Can you fast other things ... such as media or entertainment or sinful temptations? Yes, but the Biblical fast of which Jesus and the apostles spoke always related to abstaining from food or drink.

- Thirdly, Biblical fasting is always linked with *prayer* – more prayer, more consistent prayer, more fervent prayer. There is no such thing as Christian fasting without increased prayer.

- Fourth, Biblical fasting is for the purpose of *becoming more dedicated to God* in order that we might be closer to Him. In drawing nearer to God, we become more open to His power for spiritual breakthrough in our lives.

WHAT IS THE EZRA FAST?
The Bible speaks of both individual (personal) and corporate (group) fasting. Of special interest to the people of St. James is the fast in Ezra, chapter 8. Often called the “Ezra Fast,” this fast is undertaken especially to *solve problems, undo heavy burden and overcome barriers*. Ezra was a priest and was appointed to rebuild Jerusalem and restore the Law. Although Ezra had permission from the King, Israel had enemies who were out to stop the Jews from doing God’s will. Ezra didn’t know what to do, so he proclaimed a corporate fast:

> Then I proclaimed a fast ... that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him safety for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.  
> Ezra 8:21, 23

At this time in our history, the people of St. James are called to stand for the Word of the God in our culture. We recognize there are difficulties, a legal struggle set before us. It is time to “humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him safety for us, our little ones and all our possessions.” And so, we are embarking on a corporate 40-Day Fast, seeking God and believing that through prayer and fasting, He will answer our cries.

SIGN UP ONLINE SO WE CAN SUPPORT YOUR FAST – Go to our website at [www.stjamesnb.org](http://www.stjamesnb.org)

As we embark together at St. James on our Corporate 40-Day Fast, we ask individuals families and small groups *commit to fasting at least one meal, at least one day each of the weeks in the 40 days*. You will determine the day on which you’ll fast and the type of fast you will choose and the meal or meals you will fast. **BY SIGNING UP ONLINE** for this Fast, you will let the clergy and leadership know of your commitment and we will be praying for you during the 40 days. We will send periodic emails to encourage and strengthen you in your commitment. We pray that at the close of this 40 day fast, we will all have demonstrated our desire to grow closer to our Lord in humility before Him – and that He will hear our cry and respond to our need.
WHY FAST?
There is much in Scripture, both Old and New Testament, about fasting – proving that this spiritual dedication or discipline is important to the heart of God. Fasting is identified throughout the Bible as the SECRET WEAPON, the SUPER-CHARGER of effective prayer. Jesus assumed that Christians would fast. In the Beatitudes in Matthew 6, Jesus provided a pattern by which each believer is to live as a child of God. That pattern addressed three Christian duties. Jesus said, “When you give .... When you pray... and ... When you fast.”

For much of the history of the Church, fasting at least one day each week was customary and considered normative for Christian life. Christian leaders from history who have embraced fasting include: John Wesley, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.S. Lewis, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, J. Oswald Chambers, Edith Schaeffer, Bill Bright, John Wimber and David Yonggi Cho.

There are many reasons to fast. It is found throughout Scripture as a part of a committed life of faith. Fasting cleanses the body as well as the soul – studies show that those who fast are less likely to have diseases which are common in our culture like cancer. Fasting helps normal believers live a super-normal life for Jesus Christ. And perhaps most important, fasting is a lifestyle of humility before God that we might have power to serve our Lord and to accomplish all that He has intended for us that Christ may be glorified on earth.

HOW TO FAST
Biblically, there are many different lengths of fast mentioned:

1. Partial day (fasting 1 or 2 meals): Daniel 6:18
2. One day (from sunset to sunset): 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35; Judges 20:26
3. Three days: Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9, 17-19
4. Seven days: 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 12:16-23
5. Fourteen days: Acts 27:33-34
6. Twenty-one days: Daniel 10:3-13
7. Forty days: Moses in Exodus 24:18; 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 18, 25-29; 10:10
   Elijah in 1 Kings 19:8 and Jesus in Matt. 4:2; Mk 1:13; Luke 4:2

Types of Fasts:
Just as there are many durations or lengths of Biblical fasts, so there are a variety of types or ways to fast. Only once in Scripture is there a fast which was abstaining from all food and water (Esther’s 3-day fast in the Book of Esther, chapter 4). This type of fast is NOT recommended and we ask that all those who participate in the St. James Corporate 40-Day Ezra fast refrain from attempting such a fast. Predominately, types of fasts can be broken into the following categories, each of which can be varied to meet our 40-Day Ezra Fast:

- **Full Fast**: Drink only liquids which includes drinking water and/or fruit juices. Avoid caffeine and sugary drinks, including high-fructose fruit juices. It is best to water down fruit juices – 50% water and 50% juice (or even less juice). Drink lots of water to keep hydrated and avoid hunger pangs.

- **The Daniel Fast**: Eat only fruits and vegetables. Eat no meats (beef, pork, poultry or other types), no sweets, no milk products, no caffeine or alcohol and no bread. Drink water and juice.

- **Partial Fast**: Eliminate the majority of foods which you typically eat and enjoy and limit your food intake to a few, specific foods. Suggestions: eat only bread and drink only water; eat only fruit and unsweetened yogurt; eat only a simple salad with broiled chicken and no dressing.
GOING ABOUT YOUR FAST
Jentezen Franklin, a modern-day pastor who is known for his teaching on fasting suggests the following as the way to lead a successful fast.

How to Begin
Start with a clear goal. Be specific. Why are you fasting? Do you need direction, healing, restoration of marriage or family issues? Are you facing financial difficulties? Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Pray daily and read the Bible.

   My purpose for this fast is: _______________________________________________________________

Preparing Spiritually
Confess your sins to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of weakness. Forgive all who have offended you and ask forgiveness from those you may have offended (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4). Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ and reject the worldly desires that try to hinder you (Romans 12:1-2).

   I particularly confess to the Lord: ______________________________________________________

Deciding What to Fast
The type of fast you go on is up to you. You could go on a full fast in which you only drink liquids, or you may desire to fast like Daniel, who abstained from sweets and meats, and the only liquid he drank was water. Remember to replace that time with prayer and Bible study.

   The fast I choose will be: _______________________________________________________________

Deciding How Long
You may fast as long as you like. Most can easily fast from one to three days, but you may feel the grace to go longer, even as much as 21 to 40 days. Use wisdom and pray for guidance. Beginners are advised to start slow.

   The length and frequency of my fast: _____________________________________________________

What to Expect
When you fast your body detoxifies, eliminating toxins from your system. This can cause mild discomfort such as headaches and irritability during withdrawal from caffeine and sugars. And naturally, you will have hunger pains. Limit your activity and exercise moderately. Take time to rest. Fasting brings about miraculous results. You are following Jesus’ example when you fast. Spend time listening to praise and worship. Pray as often as you can throughout the day. Get away from the normal distractions as much as possible and keep your heart and mind set on seeking God's face.

How to End
Don't overeat when the time comes to end your fast. Begin eating solid food gradually; eat small portions or snacks.

("Fasting" by Jentezen Franklin, 2006 by Charisma House)
PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Heavenly Father, I come to You weak and in need of You.

As I commit to this 40 days of fasting,
I confess that I am not strong enough to complete this commitment.
I am humbled before You. Please send Your Holy Spirit to strengthen my will and my body
so that I may complete this fast faithfully and to Your glory.

Guard me from complacency and from lack of commitment.
Guard me from pride and thinking of myself more highly than I should.
And guard me from the powers of darkness which do not want me to complete this fast.

I ask that You will use this fast to bring me closer to You,
to break down the barriers that would prevent my church from completing Your mission,
and for the salvation of my loved ones and others who do not yet know You as Savior and Lord.

Let Your kingdom come and Your will be done in this fast as it is in heaven.

In Jesus’ Name, Amen.