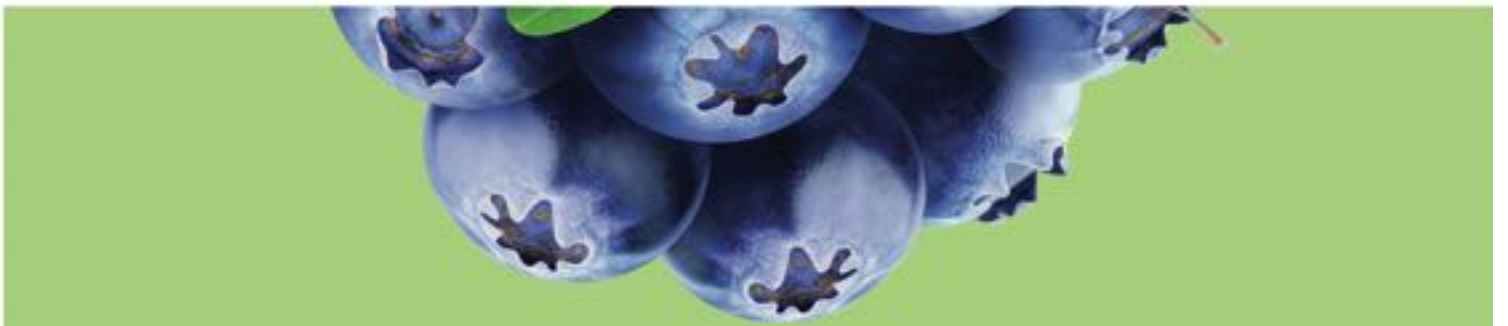




# **BREAKTHROUGH: Fasting for Change**



CHURCH OF THE SHEPHERD



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# INTRO FOR LEADERS

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First, thank you for answering the call to lead a group of people through our Lentent study. You have been invited (and you'll serve an important role as a small group leader or host), as Church of the Shepherd, to learn about and join together in **fasting for change**. We believe this will transform us. We also believe it will lead to Breakthrough with both our prayers and in our faith—not just for everyone as individuals, but together as Church of the Shepherd.

This will be an exciting spiritual journey for the life of the church; and yes, it will also definately be a stretch for all of us—emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. However, the Bible couldn't be more clear: Fasting leads to breakthrough transformation, and is a vital spiritual practice for our journey's in faith. Especially with everything that has been happening the last few years, this lent we felt called that it was time to lead our community towards Breakthrough. So, it is our prayer that everyone would join us, as one body in Christ, to lift our hearts, our minds, and our bodies in prayer through this fast to grow closer to Jesus.

Your leadership will be more important than ever during this FAST for many reasons. First, it will be very tempting for us all to focus on the FOOD we can or cannot eat, rather than the spiritual dimensions of the FAST. You will undoubtedly have to redirect the people in your group when the discussion becomes too focused on food. It will be helpful to talk a bit about recipes, the way we are feeling physically, but please try to help your group remember that the reason we are doing this is so that we are taking a season to FEAST ON JESUS, rather than abstaining from food.

While you'll find plenty of biblical support for fasting and the call to fast (Matthew 6:16-17), please remember that we all come from different faith traditions and backgrounds. Some people may not be ready to participate, or maybe they are not in a healthy place to participate fully. That is OK! In fact, we would love it if you would give them maximum space to participate or observe at the level they feel prepared and called to participate. We anticipate that there may be a fair number of people who will want to watch from the sidelines. We don't want to manipulate or shame people into fasting. Our prayer is that each person would search their own hearts (Psalm 139:23-24) and allow Jesus to direct their hearts.

Finally, we have been working hard to supply supplemental materials for you as Leaders/Hosts, and for you to share with your group members! You'll be able to find these on our APP or on our website. We want you to feel well supported and hope that these tools will help provide maximum encouragement for everyone to participate successfully in our 21 day FAST.

This is our Group Guide for this series. You'll find that we adde some extra elements to enrich your and your group members experinece:

- A contract and list of acceptable foods for the fast are included in this guide for easy reference.

- Some of the Sunday sections have notes added to be used during the message.

- We have added a Sunday Review section so that you are able to review the message from Sunday with the group before moving on to the Group study.

- In the Icebreaker section, we are generally recommending that you use this time to check in your your group, and give them time to express how they are doing—especially when on the 21 day fast.

- We have added a journal section so that you can write down responses to the Daily Devotional (released with the second part of this guide). These could be prayers, thoughts, or pictures.

## Welcome from Pastor Jon

Hi Friends! I think you'd agree that we live in a fast food culture. We live "drive thru" lives— always on the go, working hard, playing hard, and moving through life at the speed of light! This often affects the way we eat. We have "grab and go" sections in grocery stores because we're always on the move. Our food choices are not always the healthiest (I know mine aren't)— and we often eat for all the wrong reasons!

Other parts of the world eat because they're hungry, but in America we eat when we feel tired, stressed, anxious, bored, or sad— you name it, the list of triggers goes on. Too often, our eating has little to do with genuine hunger and thirst. As a result, we feel sluggish & lethargic and caffeinate ourselves to get through the day. We promise ourselves to "do better" and cultivate a life that is balanced & healthy— nourished & growing spiritually in depth with Jesus— but never seem to follow through. Does that describe you?

What if I told you that in just 21 days, you could feel better physically, mentally, and spiritually? As your pastor, I'd like to invite you to join me in a life-changing experience that will deeply impact our entire church. For 21 days, thousands of us are going to unite and participate in a powerful spiritual discipline called a FAST. Fasting is refraining from physical food for a spiritual purpose.

Believe it or not, there is a direct link between your stomach and your soul or spirit! Throughout the Bible, we see that refraining from food for a period of time can bring you into a richer, deeper, more powerful relationship with God. In Matthew 5, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." Have you ever felt that way about God? Are you desperate for a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit? Are you more hungry for Him than a hamburger?

Over the next 21 days, we will be going through a church wide fast known as the Daniel Fast in which we cut the carbs and comfort food and eat "clean"— primarily fruit, vegetables, and water. This fast is based in the Old Testament book of Daniel which we'll also be studying in our Small Groups—or with a group of friends.

Please don't think of this as a diet— the focus of a fast is not losing weight (though that may be a pleasant side effect)! This 21-Day Fast is meant to tame our flesh and train our spirit to consistently choose Jesus over doughnuts, pizza, alcohol,

I know that sounds like a big sacrifice, but think of it this way: You may be missing out on some of God's biggest breakthroughs in your life because you've never completely tapped into His Spirit's power!

A word of warning: Don't attempt this fast alone! There's great strength in Christian community and we designed this Groups Guide so you can experience the Daniel Fast with a Small Group or with some friends. Each week, you'll gather together to study the Bible and learn about different kinds of fasts, prayers, and the miraculous results that happen when we seek God with an uncluttered heart.

For the next six Sundays, bring your Groups Guide to church so you can take notes on Sunday's sermon. In your Group, you'll dive into additional Scripture and pray together for healings, breakthroughs, and fresh revelation from God in our personal lives.

More than anything, we will be growing closer to Jesus as a community! Over the next 21 days, I will be locking arms with you in the fast and praying for our church every day. And then on Palm Sunday, we will come together to celebrate Christ's breakthrough in our lives.

Thanks for joining me on this amazing journey, friends. I can't wait to see the renewal God brings in our church and your personal walk with Jesus!

Hungry & thirsty for more of Him,

*Pastor Jon*



**PART ONE | Introducing the Spiritual Practice of Fasting**



## SCRIPTURE: DANIEL 1

<sup>1</sup>In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

<sup>2</sup>And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

<sup>3</sup>Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— <sup>4</sup>young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. <sup>5</sup>The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

<sup>6</sup>Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>7</sup>The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

<sup>8</sup>But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. <sup>9</sup>Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, <sup>10</sup>but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see

you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

<sup>11</sup>Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, <sup>12</sup>"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup>Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." <sup>14</sup>So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

<sup>15</sup>At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. <sup>16</sup>So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

<sup>17</sup>To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

<sup>18</sup>At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>19</sup>The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. <sup>20</sup>In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

<sup>21</sup>And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

## SERMON NOTES

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

Matthew 5:6

### I. FAST FOOD

Most of the world eats for survival.

But as Americans, we eat when we feel...

- T \_\_\_\_\_
- ST \_\_\_\_\_
- TE \_\_\_\_\_
- BO \_\_\_\_\_
- S \_\_\_\_\_

### II. WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is... refraining from

PH \_\_\_\_\_ food for a

SP \_\_\_\_\_ purpose

*“Fasting has always been a normal part of a relationship with God. When you eliminate food from your diet for a number of days, your spirit becomes uncluttered by the things of this world and amazingly sensitive to the things of God.” — Jentezen Franklin*

Fasting is NOT....

DI \_\_\_\_\_ (about weight loss)

SU \_\_\_\_\_

SP \_\_\_\_\_ (for monks in a cave)

OP \_\_\_\_\_ for a Christ follower  
(see Matt 6:16-17)

### III. TYPES OF FASTS

Biblical Fasting has been a secret source of power in the lives of men & women of Faith down through the ages!

• AB \_\_\_\_\_ fast  
*Esther 4:16 (Esther) • Acts 9:9 (Paul)*

• SU \_\_\_\_\_ fast  
*Exod. 34:28 (Moses) • Matt. 4:1-11 (Jesus)*

• PA \_\_\_\_\_ fast  
*Daniel 1:12 (Daniel) • Daniel 10:3*

### IV. THE DANIEL FAST

#### • THE RESOLVE

*Dan. 1:8*

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal F \_\_\_\_\_ and W \_\_\_\_\_...

#### • THE REPLACEMENT

*Dan. 1:12* “Please test your servants... Give us nothing but V \_\_\_\_\_ to eat and W \_\_\_\_\_ to drink.”

#### • THE RESULTS

*Dan. 1:15* At the end of the ten days they looked H \_\_\_\_\_ and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

*Dan. 1:17* ...And Daniel could understand V \_\_\_\_\_ and

D \_\_\_\_\_ of all kinds.

### CHALLENGE

Take a look at the contract and start praying about taking 21 days of

If so, bring back the enclosed Contract next Sunday & we'll begin together!



Blessed are those who  
hunger and thirst for  
righteousness.

**MATTHEW 5:6**





# CONTRACT

**CONGRATULATIONS** on your commitment to join Church of the Shepherd for our 21 day church-wide fast! Whenever a fast is recorded in Scripture, it's followed by an outpouring of God's miraculous power! As you join with other believers in drawing closer to Christ over the next 21 days, I believe your commitment will result in closer intimacy with God and breakthrough in your life and family.

I will be fasting for our entire church, asking that God would pour out His Spirit on us in a fresh way! I can't wait to see what He does!

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." - Matthew 5:6*

*Pastor Jon*

## THE FOCUS

Fasting is a spiritual discipline designed to connect us more deeply with God. Fasting involves giving up something PHYSICAL (ie: comfort food) for the sake of something SPIRITUAL (ie: a fresh filling of God's Spirit). Over the next 21 days, we will sacrifice some of our regular food intake and replace it with Bible reading, prayer, and journaling. The overall goal is to work up a greater appetite for God Himself that will provide a breakthrough in our lives! Remember:

The focus of this fast is spiritual (a greater sense of dependency on God that leads to breakthrough in our lives). This isn't about weight loss or legalistic rules, so don't fixate on the menu... fixate on the heart behind it! Above all, God's most interested in your heart & hunger for Him!

## THE FAST

We'll be participating in a partial fast called the "Daniel Fast." During this time, we will limit our diet to eating fruits and vegetables, and drinking only water. "Please test your servants... Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink." Daniel 1:12

Although we'll eliminate some common things from our daily diet, there are generous options available (see reverse-side for "Foods to Eat" and "Foods to Avoid"). If you have any condition\* which might prohibit you from being a part of the Daniel Fast, there are other options, i.e.: You may choose to eliminate caffeine, coffee, soda, or sweets. Remember: the details are not as important as the Spirit in which you participate.

*\*If you have any known medical conditions or suspect such conditions, consult your doctor before beginning any fast.*

## THE FINISH

**START: Sunday, March 20** – Return this Fasting Contract on Sunday, March 13 and begin your preparations for the fast. We will end our last day of normal eating on March 12.

**FINISH: Saturday, April 9!** We will come together on **Palm Sunday, April 10** to worship and end the fast together. This will be an incredible breakthrough celebration.

### MY REASON:

I am Asking God to...

# LIST OF FOODS



## EAT (Fresh, Frozen, Dried, Juiced or Canned)

### FRUITS

Apples, Apricots, Bananas, Blackberries, Blueberries, Boysenberries, Cantaloupe, Cherries, Cranberries, Figs, Grapefruit, Grapes, Guava, Honeydew Melon, Kiwi, Lemons, Limes, Mangoes, Nectarines, Papayas, Peaches, Pears, Pineapples, Plums, Prunes, Raisins, Raspberries, Strawberries, Tangelos, Tangerines, Watermelon

### WHOLE GRAINS

Barley, Brown Rice, Oats, Quinoa

### LEGUMES

Black Beans, Pinto Beans, Chick Peas, Lentils, Kidney Beans

### VEGETABLES

Artichokes, Asparagus, Beets, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Chili Peppers, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Garlic, Ginger Root, Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Mushrooms, Mustard Greens, Okra, Onions, Parsley, Potatoes, Radishes, Rutabagas, Scallions, Spinach, Sprouts, Squashes, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes, Turnips, Watercress, Yams, Zucchini

### NUTS & SEEDS

Almonds, Cashews, Pecans, Macadamia, Peanuts, Walnuts, Sunflower & Pumpkin Seeds

### LIQUIDS

Water, Natural Fruit Juice

## AVOID

Meat\*, Poultry\*, Fish\*, Pork\*

All bread and baked goods

Soda

Coffee & Tea

Energy Drinks

Alcohol

Dairy (Milk, butter, cheese etc.)

Refined Sugar (raw, granulated, brown, artificial sweeteners)

Processed Foods (preservatives, additives, chemicals)

Fried Foods

White Flour, Solid Fats (lard, margarine)

\*If you have children or students, consider allowing turkey, chicken, fish.



## SIGN

*"I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips... until three weeks were over." - Daniel 10:3*

I WILL FAST FROM:

//

UNTIL:

//

MY REASON:

I am Asking God to...

WHO I WILL ASK TO PRAY WITH ME:

*"So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer." - Ezra 8:23*

I believe that God is the only One to answer my prayer and that fasting will draw me closer to Him. Therefore, God being my strength and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast.

NAME:

EMAIL:

CELL:

SIGNED:

DATE:

//

Complete to receive the 40-Day devotional

## OPENING

Begin your time together in a period of prayerful silence—whether 30 seconds or for a full 2 minutes.

**LEADERS' NOTE:** This may be a little awkward at first. Everyone may be new in your group and still getting to know each other. Leaders often have to share first to break the ice for the rest of the group. Your vulnerability is important if you want your group to be able to share. Don't be afraid of silence. In fact, let there be silence for at least 1 entire minute before you start talking.

## ICEBREAKER

Have you ever fasted before? If so, did you fast alone or with others? Did you fast for medical, spiritual or other reasons? Share your experience with your Group. If you have never fasted before, share your concerns and questions with your Group.

It would be helpful if you introduce this topic gently with plenty of grace! Remind your group that we are all at different spiritual places and come from different spiritual backgrounds - and there are no "SUPER SPIRITUAL" among us! Be aware that many in your group will have very different experiences. There is no right or wrong answer and you may have to coach the members of your group not to react with disbelief or superiority. Allow plenty of time to let your Group members ask questions, but remind them that Fasting is in no way a way to get God to do things for us — the overwhelming purpose of our Fast is to know Jesus better!

## SUNDAY REVIEW

Take 5-10 minutes to review Sunday's message. What stood out to you? What questions do you have? Where was the Holy Spirit speaking to you?

This is a new section added by request of our surveys. Many felt that they would like to have an opportunity to discuss the teaching on Sunday before moving onto new teaching. Use this as much — or as little — as

you think is needed. Since Fasting may be new for many in your Group, they may have questions.

## A | APPLY THE BIBLE

Fasting is a very powerful and important method of drawing closer to Jesus. However there can be an inherent danger in fasting. It is the same danger that is found in any spiritual discipline. We can turn fasting into an end unto itself, instead of a means to an end. In other words, it can be reduced to a habit — an external practice — without heart. Read Luke 18:9-14.

- Q.** *Can you summarize the story Jesus is telling? What is the attitude of the Pharisee? What is the attitude of the Tax Collector?*
- Q.** *Who does Jesus say is justified in the end?*
- Q.** *What does this story have to do with fasting?*

Steer your group to see that as always, Jesus turns the tables on us — he tells us, in essence, that we are to have hearts like the Tax Collector, who remembers his brokenness before the Lord and is humbled by this. We can Fast, Pray, Tithe, Read our Bibles and Give to the Poor, but still be far from Jesus. Jesus is interested in our hearts; and less interested in the things we DO for him. There will be a temptation in your Group for people to focus on the food they cannot eat - you will have to continually steer them back to Jesus.

When we focus on the food we can - or cannot have - during the fast, we can become legalistic about the kinds of food we are eating and forget that our PRIMARY FOCUS during a fast is about getting closer to Jesus! Fasting is not so much about food as it is about focus. We want to have an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul — much like the tax collector!

- Q.** *Brainstorm ideas with your Group about how you can encourage one another to look within, instead of focusing on doing without.*

Remind your Group members that we will have 21 Day Devotionals available to support them every day of the Fast! See Bear Burdens section for more ideas.

# 1

## GROUP DISCUSSION FAST FOOD

Fasting is not a means of seeking God's blessings, as much as it is a means of seeking God. Remember, Daniel had a purpose to his fast. Have someone in your Group read: Read Daniel 2:23.

**Q.** *What was Daniel's purpose?*

Daniel praises and thanks God. He asked for wisdom to be able to live for God in an ungodly culture.

**Q.** *How did God answer him?*

God allowed Daniel to interpret the dreams and visions of the King! This allowed Daniel to gain trust of the King and God used Daniel in powerful ways!

**Q.** *What is the purpose of your fast? Go around your Group and discuss potential purposes of your fast.*

List your plan in the notes section below:

You may have to coach your group here a bit. We want to avoid the idea that IF we FAST for 21 days, God will give us \$1,000,000 — or a bigger house — or a husband or a wife! This not a wish list, nor is it a way to manipulate God to do what we have been asking Him to do. Remember that Daniel asked for wisdom and discernment to advance the Kingdom! You and your Group members may have been waiting for a breakthrough — to be free from addictions, strongholds or to hear God's voice. While there are not necessarily 'wrong' answers here - you may have to direct the discussion.

### B | BEAR BURDENS

Break into Groups of 2-3 to pray together for Breakthroughs! Find one person in your Group who can serve as an accountability partner for you for the 21 day FAST! This will be difficult! We want to be able to reach out and ask others to pray for us as we are tempted.

You know your Group better than we do — would it be helpful if people had a partner they could text, call, email or in another way reach out to over the next 40 days? Accountability partner may be difficult for people to envision. Remind them that this is simply someone who is THERE when we need them. This is not meant to **CHECK UP** on one another - but more to **CHECK IN WITH** one another and be there when needed. You may have to explain this to your Group.

### C | CHANCE TO SERVE

Part of our fast includes care and service to others! How will your Group serve others during our Church-wide fast?

One great way to help focus your Group throughout the Fast is for you all to serve together. Try to have someone in your Group organize an outreach during your the Fast. This could be anything that your group feels called to do. It doesn't have to be something super involved either.

## GUIDE NOTES



## SCRIPTURE: DANIEL 10

<sup>1</sup>In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.

<sup>2</sup>At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. <sup>3</sup>I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

<sup>4</sup>On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, <sup>5</sup>I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. <sup>6</sup>His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

<sup>7</sup>I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. <sup>8</sup>So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. <sup>9</sup>Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

<sup>10</sup>A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. <sup>11</sup>He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

<sup>12</sup>Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.

<sup>13</sup>But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. <sup>14</sup>Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."

<sup>15</sup>While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. <sup>16</sup>Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I feel very weak. <sup>17</sup>How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."

<sup>18</sup>Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. <sup>19</sup>"Do not be afraid, you who are highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

<sup>20</sup>So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; <sup>21</sup>but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth.

## SUNDAY NOTES

### REVIEW

Fasting is... refraining from

PH \_\_\_\_\_ food for

a SP \_\_\_\_\_ purpose

Text: Daniel 10

#### • 21 DAYS

Dan. 10:1 *In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel... Its message was true and it concerned a great war.*

The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.

Dan. 10:2 *At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks.*

Dan. 10:3 *I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips... until the three weeks were over.*

#### • BREAKTHROUGH

Dan. 10:12 *Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.*

Dan. 10:14 *Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."*

Q: Do you believe God has a VISION for your life?

Things to Fast For...

Crisis Situation | Relationship | Marriage | Family or Kids | Salvation

Major Decisions | Healing | Addictions | Revival

### THE DANIEL FAST

#### • THE RESOLVE

Dan. 1:8

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal F \_\_\_\_\_ and

W \_\_\_\_\_...

#### • THE REPLACEMENT

Dan. 1:12 "Please test your servants... Give us nothing but V \_\_\_\_\_ to eat and W \_\_\_\_\_ to drink."

#### • THE RESULTS

Dan. 1:15 At the end of the ten days they looked H \_\_\_\_\_ and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

Dan 1:17 ...And Daniel could understand V \_\_\_\_\_ and

D \_\_\_\_\_ of all kinds.

### CHALLENGE

Will you commit to the Daniel Fast (or an alternative) for 21 days?

If so, hand in your contract today and we'll begin our fast together tomorrow morning.

# 2

## GROUP DISCUSSION VISION QUEST

### OPENING

Begin your time together with prayerful silence—whether for 30 seconds or for two minutes. You can invite the group to spend this time centering themselves for conversation, prayer, and reflection.

Consider having them focus on their breath as they breathe in and out. If you are familiar with the breath prayer, this would be a good time to introduce the practice—otherwise just encourage them to become more aware of their breathing.

### ICEBREAKER

What is the focus of your fast? Share with your Group (if you are comfortable,) and how will you observe the fast.

Remember that Leadership often requires that WE are vulnerable first. This sets the tone for the rest of the Group. Try to be specific and try not to be superficial. Pray to ask the Lord to help you determine what YOUR focus should be for the Fast so that you are able to share with your Group!

### SUNDAY REVIEW

Take 5-10 minutes to review Sunday's message. What stood out to you? What questions do you have? Where was the Holy Spirit speaking to you?

### A | APPLY THE BIBLE

In the book of Joel, the Lord promises to be in the midst of his people even while there is destruction. When the people repent and turn their hearts toward him, He promises to restore what the locusts have destroyed. Have someone read Joel 2:12-13.

**Q.** *The “Even Now” indicates that the people have turned from the Lord. What is His promise even when we are far from Him?*

The beauty of God is that He is always with us even when we turn from Him! We want to remind the people in our Group of God's character. He wants us to know that He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Often we have false impressions of God, one that makes Him a capricious and unforgiving taskmaster who makes bad things happen in our lives, or an ATM machine - there at our beck and call when we need something.

Yet this passage helps us see the “Father Heart” of God. He waits for us to come back to us - allowing us realize (just like the prodigal) our desperate need for Him. Help your Group realize that part of this Fast is the realization of how far we have wandered from God (we all do every day) and yet there is no shame, no anger on God's part — just abounding love as we run back into his arms of love!

**Q.** *In v. 13, God calls Israel - just like He calls the prodigal son - to come home. He tells us a bit about himself in this verse.*

**Q.** *Why do you think God reveals himself in this way?*

- *Is this comforting to you? Why or why not?*
- *In what ways has your heart been far from God?*
- *Are you ready to “rend” your heart and return to God? Why or why not?*
- *What would a ‘Return to God’ look like in your life?*

You can pray a prayer of repentance right now. If you don't know how, ask your Group leader to guide you. Psalm 51 is a great model of a prayer of repentance. Have someone in your Group read it together.

Would you like to share this with your Group?

Repentance may be a new concept to people in your Group. Help them to see how really freeing it is to be open and honest with God! When we know Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are already forgiven! He says that our sins are as far as the east is from the west! (Psalm 103:12) Repentance is simply turning from



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one direction and moving in a new direction — towards Jesus!

Have someone read Joel 2:25-27

**Q.** *What is God's promise to His people? On a literal level, what did this mean for Israel?*

God's people had suffered the complete destruction of their entire harvest through swarms of locusts that marched like an insect army through the fields, destroying the crops, multiplying their number as they went. For four consecutive years, the harvest was completely wiped out. God's people were brought to their knees in more ways than one. But "the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people." God said, "Behold I am sending to you grain, wine and oil, and you will be satisfied (Joel 2:18-19). In the coming years, God said, their fields would yield an abundance that would make up for what had been lost: "The threshing floor shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. . . . You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied" (Joel 2:24, 26). This wonderful promise for those people meant that years of abundant harvests would follow the years of desolation brought about by the locusts.

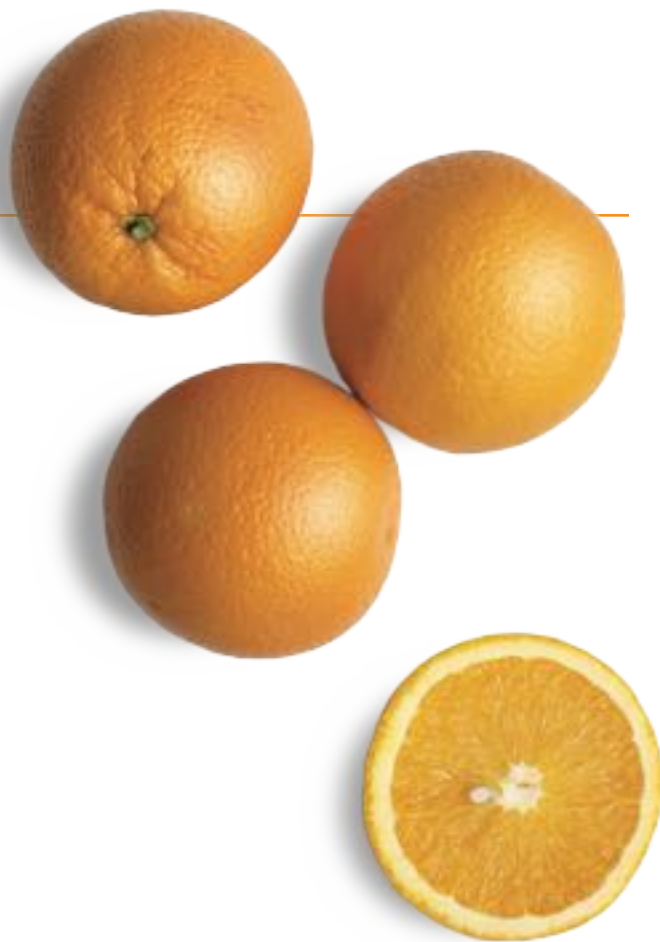
**Q.** *Are there areas of your life that the "locusts have destroyed?"*

**Q.** *Would you share them with your Group?*

God can restore lost, locust years. Here are some ways you can encourage your Group:

- God can restore lost years by deepening your communion with Christ. "You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God" (Joel 2:27). These people, who have endured so much, enjoy a communion with the Lord that is far greater than anything they had ever known before in their religious lives. Christ can restore lost years by deepening our fellowship with him.

You can ask your Group members if they would like to do this tonight! They can pray something like this: *Tell him, "Lord, I have spent too many years without you, too many years at a distance from you. Fill my heart with love and gratitude for Christ. Let the loss of these years make my love for Christ greater than*



*it would ever have been. Restore to me the years the locusts have eaten.* "

- God can restore lost years by bringing long-term gain from short-term loss. The effect of these great trials in your life will be that "the tested genuineness of your faith . . . may result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7). The praise, glory, and honor go to Christ because his power guarded you and kept you through the hardest years of your life.

God's restoration in our lives can look different for everyone, but it starts with deepening your communion with Christ. "You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God." [Joel 2:27]

**Q.** *Have you seen God's redeeming, restoring hand in your life?*

- *Would you be willing to share your story to encourage others in your Group?*
- *If you haven't, ask your Group to pray with you right now for eyes to see God's hand in your life. He is always at work in us and through us.*

Be sensitive to those who may be in the middle of the storm right now. It may even be worthwhile to

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## GROUP DISCUSSION VISION QUEST

pause the lesson and lay hands on them and pray for them! Remember, when the locusts are in the midst of the destruction, it is very difficult for us to think about God or that he will ultimately help us! That is why God reminds of us His Beauty, His Love, His Grace and Care for us! Be gentle with those in your Group and point them back to Jesus!

If you are in the middle of that difficult season right now, hang on! It could be that through this time of fasting and prayer, you will be able to seek God in a way you have not before. Remember this: God's love is so deep for His people that He promises to pour out his Spirit: *"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all*

*people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."* Joel 2:28-29

Have someone read Ezekiel 39:29

*"I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord."*

**Q.** *God's promise is that everyone will experience the outpouring of his Spirit - Does this give you hope today?*

Please remind your Group members that they are never, ever alone!

### GUIDE NOTES

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The Spirit of the Living God is with them. This is the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, who lives in us!

## **B | BEAR BURDENS**

Often, when we take a step of obedience and faith closer to God, the enemy will try to stop us. Share with your Group some obstacles or reasons that may have tempted you from starting the fast. Then pray for one another and remember what the Bible says: *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.* 1 John 4:4

Remind your Group members that there are plenty of things out there that will rob and steal our joy! We can find plenty of reasons not to fast, and so many distractions to distract us from abiding in God. But these things do not have ultimate power over us — Jesus is with us and in Him, we are more than conquerors! Let your Group members voice their concerns about the Fast and try to help them overcome their objections. Encourage them to participate even in a small way!

## **C | CHANCE TO SERVE**

How will your Group serve others during our Church-wide fast? Let Pastor Benjamin McWhorter-Rush know how you would like to be a group on mission.

My comfort



and deliverer.

PSALM 18:2



# Part Two Coming Soon...

