

Dear church family,

We find ourselves in a brand new year full of opportunities to live life to the fullest in Christ. As I look at our church I get excited by what I see; vitality in our worship, joy in our fellowship, people growing in their walk with God and actively sharing His love with others. We are in a place of good health as a church and it is abundantly clear that God has blessed us in many ways. When I begin to think of our future I get even more excited by the potential we have to see God's Kingdom grow among us. This past year, God has put it on my heart to call our congregation to a 3-day fast in order for us to draw closer to Him and seek his direction, strength and blessing on our future as a church. I trust that this period of fasting will have a great impact on the course of our life as a congregation. Understandably there are many questions, thoughts and feelings that arise as you consider taking part. This letter will help give you guidance in making the most of this time.

### **About fasting**

Biblical fasting, simply defined, is abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. As Jesus began to teach his followers the right motives in fasting he said, "When you fast..." (Matthew 6:16). Jesus did not say "*If you fast*" making it optional, nor did he say "*You must fast!*" making it mandatory. Jesus assumes that fasting is a normal, voluntary practice of those who follow God. To understand why fasting is so important, it is helpful to look at the many examples in scripture where God's people engage in fasting. Here are just a few:

- Moses fasted before receiving the Ten Commandments and the Law of God (Exodus 34:28)
- Elijah needed to fast 40 days before he heard God's voice again. (1 Kings 19:8)
- Daniel fasted for the fulfilment of God's promises and received mighty revelations. (Daniel 10:3).
- Esther called the exiled Jews in Susa to fast for three days before she approached the King (Esther 4)
- Ezra proclaimed a fast to seek God's protection before travelling to Jerusalem. (Ezra 8:21-23)
- Anna the prophetess continually prayed and fasted as she awaited news of the Messiah. (Luke 2:37)
- Jesus fasted as he began his public ministry and resisted temptation in the wilderness. (Luke 4:1-13)
- The prophets and teachers in Antioch fasted and worshipped God resulting in the direction of the Holy Spirit in launching Paul and Barnabas' ministry to the Gentile world (Acts 13:2,3).

From these few examples we can see that there is a special blessing when God's people engage in fasting. In fasting we humble ourselves before God, concentrating our full attention on Him. Fasting causes us to break free from the things we think sustain us and instead depend upon God who truly sustains us (Matthew 4:4). Fasting can be a powerful opportunity to "feast" on God's Word and recognize our dependence upon Him. Fasting often reveals and exposes many of the negative things that control us and motivate us. Through fasting, countless believers have experienced increased effectiveness in prayer, clear guidance, new direction in life, freedom from bondage to sin and even physical well-being.

The purpose of fasting is not to get God to do what we want, rather it is to draw close to Him and focus our full attention on Him. It is important to acknowledge that our time in fasting can be dishonouring to God if our motives are not right. In Isaiah 58:4 the Lord rebukes the people saying, "Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high." The people went through the religious motions of fasting, wanting to enjoy God's benefits, but neglected to obey His basic commands and demonstrate love to others. God desires that our fasting leads to

greater obedience and love for others. Jesus also warns us that our prayer, offerings and fasting will be in vain if we do it to draw attention to ourselves rather than doing it secretly. In Matthew 6:18 he concludes, “and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” There are many good things that come with fasting and we can expect that God will reward those who humbly seek Him with the right motives.

The main purpose of this fast is for us as a congregation to draw closer to God, seeking his direction, strength and blessing on our future as a church. The hope with our congregational fast is that each of us will be willing to participate as we are able. We do not want to make anyone feel excluded or feel that fasting is an impossible task or a legalistic duty.

**Health concerns** are important to address since many people wonder if fasting can do physical harm. While there are actually many health benefits that come with fasting, it should be noted that expectant mothers, children, those with heart conditions, diabetes and other ongoing medical conditions requiring medication should not engage in abstaining from food. If you have any health concerns or worries that fasting would bring physical harm, you must seek medical advice beforehand. That being said, there are still alternative ways that you can participate in fasting. Fasting could mean abstaining from certain kinds of foods (like in Daniel 10), leisure activities, technology, entertainment, the everyday luxuries of life, setting that time and energy over the three days to instead focus on God in worship, prayer and feasting on His Word.

**Preparation** is crucial to having a meaningful experience during the fast. For many of us fasting is a very new thing, so it may be helpful to prepare by engaging in a few 24-hour fasts in the weeks leading up to the congregational fast. This could be done from lunch-to-lunch, missing dinner and breakfast. In preparing for the three-day fast it is important not to overeat beforehand. Before and after the fast, do your body a favour by eating lighter meals like soups or salads, avoiding heavy, greasy foods. If you are a cola, coffee or tea drinker it is also helpful to slowly wean yourself off of caffeine in the time leading up to the fast.

**During fasting** it is important to stay hydrated with purified water. In many cases people will abstain from all food but still drink clear fruit juices, especially if they begin to feel faint or dizzy or if their daily work requires more energy. In any case, your body will be going through withdrawal from your regular eating habits. This is not starvation, it is simply your body reacting to a change of pattern. Some people compare the stomach with a spoiled child that needs to be disciplined and told to calm down at times. While this can be the greatest challenge, in time you will find these hunger pangs pass allowing you to realign your focus back on God.

**Gathering during the fast**

Over the course of the 3-day fast you will be provided with devotional materials that will help keep us focused and unified in prayer. There will also be opportunities to be with others at the following gatherings at FBC:

<b>Wednesday</b> January 25	<b>Thursday</b> January 26	<b>Friday</b> January 27	<b>Saturday</b> January 28
<b>6pm</b> Soup and fellowship <i>...the fast begins</i> <b>7-8pm</b> Worship and Prayer	<b>7pm...</b> Guided prayer gathering in fellowship room	<b>7pm...</b> Guided prayer gathering in fellowship room	<b>6pm</b> Soup and fellowship <i>...the fast ends</i> <b>7-8pm</b> Worship and Prayer

May God bless you as you prayerfully consider taking part in this congregational fast. If you have any questions, concerns or thoughts, please contact one of the pastors. We will be glad to help guide you.

Pastor Steve Amorin