

Congregational Fast

January 9-27, 2017

2017 VISION FOCUS:

Fasting For Discernment and Direction



United Institutional Baptist Church

802 East Market Street

Greensboro, NC

Rev. Dr. Johnny R. Freeman, Pastor

2017 Congregational Fast

“Fasting For Discernment and Direction”

**Fast Time Period:
6:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.**

No meat, No sweets (desserts), No soda

All other foods permissible except items listed above Fish, Fowl (chicken, turkey, duck)

Children’s Fast (with Parental Guidance)

6:00am – 6:00pm

No sodas, No sweets, No video games, No secular music,

No TV (*except for school assignments*)

NOTE:

If you are sick and/or under medical care, taking medication(s), have a diagnosed medical condition or disease, pregnant or lactating, or younger than 21 **PLEASE CONSULT WITH YOUR DOCTOR OR PARENTS OR GUARDIAN BEFORE FASTING.** United Institutional Baptist Church is not responsible for adverse effects of fasting under the above mentioned conditions.

JANUARY 9: SEEK GOD'S WILL DAILY

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: No one accidentally receives God's direction. When it comes to decision-making, or living in harmony with God's perfect will, discernment and direction are the result of a series of intentional steps that we take day in and day out. The point to get here is that God's will must be sought out day by day. I'm reminded of a line of a well-known hymn of the church that says 'daily walking close to Thee, let it be dear Lord let it be...' Discerning God's will for our lives is the result of those steps we take, by seeking God's will daily, through time spent before God in prayer, and through the regular study of what God's word says about the situations we face in life. That's how we know what God's will is on the matter and then we ask God to help us follow through with the right action. Remember this; there will always be a tension between God's will and your will, so don't be surprised when God's will may be directly opposed to what your flesh really wants to do!

A PRAYER FOR DISCERNING GOD'S WILL DAILY: Lord, I recognize that sometimes I struggle with the command to seek Your will first each day, and I'm tempted to just go through the day doing what I want to do. Give me that daily nudge, through the presence of the Holy Spirit working in my life, to take the time to seek You so that You will speak to me daily and reveal Your perfect will for me! In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 55:1-7, Jeremiah 29:11-14

JANUARY 10: ARE YOU DIRECTIONALLY CHALLENGED?

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: We are bombarded daily with subliminal messaging that is packaged in ways that appeal to our human impulses. It's easy to be drawn in by something that seems to speak to some felt need or desire. That's why we need discernment and direction! We need to know the difference between a clever disguise by the enemy, of making something look like it's good for us versus the real thing. The bible says 'satan disguises himself as an angel of light.' It's easy sometimes to become directionally challenged when you're faced with so many options day after day. However, we have God's promise that when we seek God, we will receive sound direction to help us know what is both right and righteous to do in any given situation.

A PRAYER FOR THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S DIRECTION: Dear Lord, I confess to being pushed and pulled in so many different directions that can lead me away from You. Help me seek the comfort You promise those who draw near to You and bless my life with Your perfect direction. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Psalm 32:8, Psalm 37:23, Isaiah 48:17-18

JANUARY 11: FIX YOUR EYES AND MOVE

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: I'm sure we've all heard the term 'freezing like deer in headlights.' Most deer freeze when they see headlights. Their focus changes, and they cannot see past what is right in front of them. Have ever been there? For a brief moment the disciples were so focused on watching Jesus ascend into heaven, they forgot that He commanded them to move, and "go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit." Sometimes we need a gentle reminder that while we have our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will be able to keep moving forward with God's direction, even when life comes at us and be overwhelming to us in the moment.

A PRAYER FOR A FIXED FOCUS ON JESUS: Holy Spirit, remind us to move and trust Your direction when life comes upon us like a flood! In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Acts 1:9-11, Hebrews 12:1-2

JANUARY 12: EMPOWERED WITH DISCERNMENT AND DIRECTION

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: There's a well-used saying that 'information is power.' The dictionary defines empowered as 'giving official authority or legal power to...' Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised that the disciples would be empowered with the Holy Spirit, which means that they would be equipped and unleashed with God given authority to live in victory over all things! As born again believers in Jesus Christ, we too have been empowered by the Holy Spirit, Whose presence dwells in us today, to discern God's will and enjoy the benefits of God's direction for our daily lives. Let's commit to seek God daily so that His empowering presence will continue to help us discern the times in which we live and walk in our God given authority in the world.

A PRAYER FOR GOD'S EMPOWERING PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES: Dear Lord, may we experience Your empowering presence day by day, and moment by moment that we may walk in our God given authority over satan's attempts to make us doubt who we are and what You have given us. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Acts 1:8, John 14:16-21, John 16:7-15

JANUARY 13: TOTAL SUBMISSION

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: In a perfect world our life looks exactly the way we plan. We envision exactly what we want and map out where we want to be by this time next year, in the next five years and so on. How many of you know that God can show up and rearrange our plans by allowing us to experience a setback? What do you do, and how do you respond when things don't work out the way you've planned? Setbacks are a reminder to us that our plans can be altered, and that we need to build our futures on that which neither time nor circumstance can change. The hymn writer reminds us 'to build your hopes on things eternal hold to God's unchanging hand!' God is in control no matter what our life may look like. Mary, the mother of Jesus was faced with an unexpected pregnancy as she was planning for her wedding and chose to submit to God's plan for her future. She trusted that God's plans would ultimately work out for her good even though the situation didn't necessarily feed good.

A PRAYER FOR TOTAL SUBMISSION TO GOD'S PLAN: All-knowing God, when we can't see or understand Your plan for our life, remind us that You know what You're doing and that no word from You will ever fail to achieve the results You intend! In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 55:10-11, Luke 1:26-55

JANUARY 14-15 REFLECTIONS AND RECOVERY

As we come to the close of Week One take the time to record the lessons learned from this time of fasting and prayer. This space is provided for you to journal your thoughts and experiences from this week. God bless you and keep your focus through the weekend! Use this time for recovery and renewal as we prepare for Week two on Monday at 6am!

Trust in the *Lord*
with all thine *heart*
and lean not to thine own
understanding in all thy ways
acknowledge him and HE shall
direct thy *paths*



Proverbs 3:5-6

JANUARY 16: GROWING IN DISCERNMENT

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: At the beginning of every year people make resolutions about what they want to accomplish in the New Year. Churches will see more of its members and visitors and gyms will see their attendance increase as people resolve to make important changes in their lives. There's an old saying that 'no pain no gain,' and in the Christian faith we say 'no cross, no crown!' God often allows our faith to be tested for us to find out how committed we are to grow spiritually. Growing in discernment requires us to develop the spiritual discipline of trusting God's guidance to make us more aware of how God seeks to reveal Himself and how God wants to work in us.

A PRAYER FOR GROWTH IN DISCERNMENT: Dear Lord, thank You for my trials and the chance to become the person You designed me to be. Help me to continue to grow more spiritually aware and in-tune with Your voice and direction for my life. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: James 1:2-8, 12-15, 22-25

JANUARY 17: THE NEED FOR FILTERS

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Filters come in different shapes and sizes with multiple purposes. Some deliver clean air while others filter water for purposes of human consumption. Without them we would receive the impurities filters are in place to catch. The Word of God is our spiritual filter. We must pass our thoughts, desires and choices through the filter of God's truth, to direct us as we live out our faith and convictions in the world. Are you allowing God's word to be the spiritual filter in guiding your decision-making?

A PRAYER FOR LIVING LIFE WITH A SPIRITUAL FILTER: Loving Savior, You have given us Your word to be the spiritual filter to guide our thoughts, our words and actions. Help us to continue living our lives with a strong spiritual filter in place so we may walk according to Your will. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Psalm 119:11,105, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 2:15

JANUARY 18: THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: The Apostle Paul said it best in Romans 7, ‘although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.’ Although every born again believer in Jesus Christ has a new nature, that follows after the things of God, the old nature that is opposed to God’s will remains an ever-present reality. It is the struggle between the new and the old nature that believers contend with daily. However, God’s word tells us that we are more than conquerors through Christ, according to the power of His presence at work in us, but we must seek God’s direction daily to help us be victorious in the struggle.

A PRAYER FOR VICTORY IN THE STRUGGLE: Heavenly Father, help us in the struggle to discern what Your will is and strengthen the new nature in us so that we may walk in the victory that You have already given us through Christ! In Jesus’ name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Romans 7:21-25, Romans 8:36-37, 1 John 5:4

JANUARY 19: CONQUERING EVIL DESIRES

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: As human beings we have desires. There is our desire for meaning and happiness and the desire for love and success. Our desires can be twisted and manipulated by satan for his own evil purposes. That's why we need spiritual discernment and direction from God. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us that we can win the war against impure desires. When our desires are aligned with God's perfect plan they lead to the fulfillment God designed for our lives. Are you living a defeated life today or are you a conqueror through Christ?

A PRAYER TO CONQUER EVIL DESIRES: Dear Lord, Your word has promised us 'victory through Him who has loved us!' Help us discern satan's schemes to twist our desires so that we may live the abundant and fulfilling lives Your word promises us. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: James 4: 1-10

JANUARY 20: STRENGTH TO WAIT ON GOD

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: The book of Proverbs promises that when you ‘trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path.’ God promises to direct and sustain those who live in daily communion with Him and trust in His guidance. However, discerning God’s will requires discipline and perseverance. We must be willing to wait on God, not by being spiritually idle but intentional in our openness to listen for God to speak and then obedient in our response to what God tells us to do.

A PRAYER FOR STRENGTH TO WAIT ON GOD: Dear Lord, Your word promises that when we wait on You for strength and direction You will guide and sustain us with Your grace! Help us we pray to stay before You daily so that we may receive from You what we need to continue on this journey of faith and trust. In Jesus’ name, amen!

Scripture Readings: 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10, James 5:13-15

JANUARY 21-22 REFLECTIONS AND RECOVERY

As we approach the final week of our congregational fast capture those lessons learned from Week Two. During this time of recovery and redirecting for Week Three, take time to journal your thoughts and experiences and begin to process what you need to do this upcoming week. Remember to stay focused through the weekend and let's get ready for another powerful week of fasting and prayer for discerning God's will and receiving the direction needed for an awesome year in 2017!



Trust in the Lord
with all thine heart
and lean not unto thine own understanding
in all thy ways
acknowledge Him
and He shall direct thy paths
Proverbs 3:5-6

JANUARY 23: DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: God does still speak to His children. God knows that we need to hear from Him on a regular basis and understands the importance of making His will clear to us. God promises that those who 'seek Him will find Him when you search for Him with all your heart.' God speaks to us through His word, through visions and signs and through the urgings, and peace the Holy Spirit gives to us. Jesus said "I know My sheep and My sheep hear My voice!" When we have a personal relationship with Him, we can be confident that God will make His voice known to us.

A PRAYER FOR DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE: Dear Lord, in the midst of all the competing voices in the world, that seek to claim our attention, help us through the Holy Spirit to hear Your voice above all others so that we may follow You. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: John 10: 14-16, Hebrews 11:6

JANUARY 24: A DISCERNING HEART

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: As a young boy, thrust into the spotlight, as the third king of Israel, King Solomon lacked the experience that most nations expect of their leaders. Although his father King David had no experience in governing his leadership in commanding men on the battlefield did afford him an opportunity to develop as a leader. On the other hand, what Solomon lacked in experience he made up for in heart. Solomon prayed for a discerning heart to know how to lead God's people. The discernment of the heart means that we learn to operate in a deeper, spiritual level of sensitivity and awareness, at the very center of our being: mind, spirit, desires, hopes and dreams.

A PRAYER FOR A DISCERNING HEART: Heavenly Father, as Solomon prayed for a discerning heart, in order to know how to lead Your people, we pray for discernment in all areas of our life so that You will guard and guide us in every way. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: 1 Kings 3:3-12

JANUARY 25: DISCERNMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: The need for discernment reminds us not to take for granted, that we don't know it all, and are capable of making mistakes especially when it comes to relationships. God wants us to trust His guidance in helping us discern what is best for us in the area of our relationships. As born again believers in Jesus Christ we have the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to help us when it comes to matters of the heart as well as learning how to develop and sustain healthy relationships.

A PRAYER FOR DISCERNMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS: Dear Lord, too often we leave You out when it comes to matters of the heart. We get caught up on physical qualities over spiritual character, and we tend to seek Your guidance only after we've chosen wrongly, or allowed our relationships with others to become something other than what You designed them to be. Bless us to be more discerning in our relationships, so that we may enjoy healthier and more fulfilling relationships with others. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Genesis 18-25, Ephesians 5:21-6:4

JANUARY 26: DISCERNING LEADERSHIP

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Leaders are expected to see the big picture and help those they lead understand where God wants us to go. That's why leaders need to be discerning. Leaders need to recognize what God is saying and where God is leading. Just as leaders need to be sensitive and responsive to God's voice and guidance, it is equally important to pray for our leaders that God will speak to them and make His will clear to them so they know which way to lead us.

A PRAYER FOR LEADERSHIP DISCERNMENT: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of godly leadership. We pray for our leaders that You will open their ear to hear Your voice, and an open heart to respond to the leading of Your Holy Spirit, so they may guide us in doing Your perfect will. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

JANUARY 27: DISCERNMENT AND FINANCES

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: As born again believers in Jesus Christ we are in a unique position to enjoy the blessings of God's favor upon our lives. God has promised 'to supply all your need according to His riches in glory...' However, we need to have discernment in how we use the blessings God gives to us especially in the area of our finances. Too many believers live under the weight of too much debt, and financial insecurity because they don't use discernment in how they spend money. We need to pray for discernment in our finances so that God will help us become better stewards of everything that He gives to us and prosper in every area of life.

A PRAYER FOR DISCERNMENT IN OUR FINANCES: Dear Lord, Your word says every good and perfect gift comes from You. We praise You for every blessing You have given us. Teach us how to be better stewards in the area of our finances so that we may enjoy the abundant life You promised in every way. In Jesus' name, amen!

Scripture Readings: Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 16:1-12

JANUARY 28-29 REFLECTIONS AND REVELATIONS

Congratulations! We made it through the fifteen day congregational fast! Believe me, when I tell you, that God has already started a new work in us for the New Year! However, as it is in anything, in our lives that we want to change the process is everything. Now you have to decide how bad you want what God wants for you in 2017. In order to build upon the new spiritual momentum we have at the start of this New Year, what you do after the fast is just as important as the decision you made to commit to the fast. So let's decide right now to commit to continue seeking God, in the coming days, weeks and months, and watch God do just what He promises and give us the discernment and direction we need for the New Year!