

Fasting, Call, and Community at Cleveland Chapel Baptist

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Pastor Brown was living in Atlanta with his wife when the opportunity to come pastor Cleveland Chapel Baptist Church presented itself. Torn with what to do, his wife and he both entered into a week long fast. At the end of the fast, they reached the decision that they felt God had presented to them. This was to make the move to Spartanburg to lead this church.

According to Pastor Brown, fasting allows one to become open to God's grace. It is the literal expansion of the body to receive God and his wisdom. For Pastor Brown, it is a "spiritual edification." When asked about his personal fasting practices, he found them difficult to articulate. He stated that fasting helped him feel "more in-tune" with his spiritual self. On a community level, Pastor Brown said that these practices were done to show the precepts and the doctrines of the apostles. He related this specifically to John's disciples who fasted to express poverty and edification. Pastor Brown said that fasting was done also in remembrance of the death of Christ. At his old church, he felt that there was more community fasting. This is something he is attempting to make more prominent in Cleveland Chapel.

The Cleveland Chapel Baptist Church partakes in a forty-day fast during Lent. During these forty days, there is no eating from midnight until six the next evening. On the eighteen hour fasting day, only water is permitted. If one must eat for medical

purposes, one is required to surrender another habit as a result. This was a voluntary activity for all of last Lent in this congregation.

This coming year, Pastor Brown has decided to make it mandatory for all clergy to fast for these forty days. During the times of hunger, believers are asked to pray. Each day there is a specific group to pray for, for example, preachers, politicians, or teachers. The clergy in this coming Lent will perform these prayers together at the church. There are three members of the clergy: Pastor Brown and his two associate ministers. They will also break the fast as a group. They will leave their homes for dinner and dine together to break the fast.

Pastor Brown notes that fasting is an act of humility done before God. It is partaken in to show a servant's humility and should be done with moral reformation. The humility is accomplished through the fast itself. Moral reformation takes place through the prayers for others with an assumed pure heart. Fasting is not mandatory in the Christian faith; however, it is much encouraged by the Biblical text. The fasting habits of this community show its desire to allow the body to be a vehicle for God's grace and the clergy's humility before the entire church.