

## **Prayer & Fasting**

### **Why Fast?**

In Matthew 6, Jesus gave us specific direction on how to live as a child of God. That pattern addressed three specific duties of a Christian: Giving, Praying and Fasting. Jesus said, “When you give” . . . “when you pray” . . . “when you fast.” He made it clear that fasting, like giving and praying, was a normal part of Christian life. I believe that when all three disciplines—giving, praying and fasting—are at work together, you create an atmosphere for the complete power of God to be released in your life. It’s much like the lesson that Jesus taught in Mark 4. When you pray, you release the thirty-fold return. Praying and giving releases a sixty-fold blessing. But when you pray, give and fast, you will see a hundred-fold return!

### **What is Fasting?**

Biblical fasting is giving up specific foods and drink for a specified number of days for a specific purpose. The type and length of the fast you choose is between you and God, and should not be determined by what anyone else is doing. Every year our New Life congregation participate in a 21-day fast at the beginning of the New Year. We want to give God our best first.

Fasting, prayer and reading God’s Word go hand in hand. When you fast, also pray for God’s purpose and plan for your life to be revealed. Fast and pray about every major decision in your life. Simply put, fasting is a way to conquer the physical and open the door to the supernatural in your life. When you deny your body, you feed your spirit and grow closer to the Lord.

### **How Do I Fast?**

Before beginning a fast, write down a plan and make a verbal commitment to the Lord. When you approach it with determination, you’ll be less likely to waiver in weak moments. You may be surprised to find that fasting is not as daunting as you may think. But if you do find it to be a battle, don’t lose heart. God knows your weaknesses. His fasting principles allow you the flexibility to take care of your job and duties while still making a sacrifice to honor Him. If the traditional full fast has always made you shy away from this important principle, you may be surprised to know that there are actually many different types of fasts. With the various types of fasts and combination of fasts, you will be able to fit fasting into your life. For example, if you choose to go on a 21- day fast, you may want to begin with a full fast for 1 - 3 days and then continue with a Daniel Fast or some other type of partial fast for the remainder of the 21 days.

**\*Be sure to consult your physician before beginning any fast, especially if you have any type of medical condition. Also, be sure to drink LOTS of water!**

## **Types of Fasts**

### **Full Fast-**

Drink only liquids – especially water. On this type of fast you may also take in clear broth and 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices in order to maintain your strength. You establish the number of days for your fast in your prayer time.

### **Partial Fast-**

There are many options for partial fasts. Below are just a few for you to select from. The most frequently used example of a partial fast is found in Daniel chapter 10. The “Daniel Fast” is a fast from meats, sweets/sweeteners (including honey), breads/white flour, dairy, any animal product and any drink except water for a specific time period (Daniel 10:2-3). That means you are basically fasting all but vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts and water.

Partial Fasts can mean...

- Giving up one item of food or drink such as caffeine, coffee, soft drinks or sweets.
- Giving up one meal a day for a specific amount of time, one meal a week, etc.
- Doing a full or modified Daniel Fast for a specific number of days . . . one day, three days and so on.
- Choosing to fast during set times, like 6 a.m. to 3 p.m., or from sun-up to sundown. When doing this type of fast, consider your work and sleep schedule. The hours that you sleep should not be considered part of your fasting period, so the timeframe for this type of fast may vary.

Remember, the type of fast that you select is what you and the Lord agree upon in your prayer time.

### **Corporate vs. Private Fast-**

The Lord speaks of both corporate and private fasts in Scripture. A private fast is just that: your decision to fast for a particular reason and season. A corporate fast involves an entire group of believers. For example, your entire church, Life Group or other group may decide to fast together for a specific purpose. Esther called all of her people to fast for protection against danger (Esther 4:16). Samuel declared a fast for national revival (1 Samuel 7). The results can be quite powerful.

### **When Should I Fast?-**

If you want to make fasting a way of life, work out a plan for the entire year to include days or meals to fast that works into your lifestyle. You may decide to fast one day a month (consider the first day of each month) or one meal a week. Many people fast on their loved ones' birthdays. You may even decide to do a partial fast for one week every other month. The options are endless. The Lord may impress upon you to fast for a certain reason, or you may choose to fast because you need breakthrough in a

certain area, or you are facing difficult situations in your family or job, financial struggles, decisions, etc.

## **Other Common Questions**

**What if I have a medical condition?** Consult your doctor before starting any fast and have him or her help you decide what will work best given your specific health and medications. If your health condition prohibits you from fasting food, try fasting something else in order to concentrate more heavily on prayer and Bible study. God knows your heart.

**I forgot and ate something that wasn't on my fast; do I need to start again?** No, think of fasting as a marathon rather than a sprint. Don't give up! If you fall down, get up and keep trying. Conquering the flesh by fasting is difficult, but keep going!

**Do I continue to exercise while fasting?** For most people moderate exercise is OK. But it is best to always consult a doctor about fasting and exercise. If you are on a complete fast, you may not have the energy for exercise.

**What if I have a manual labor job?** If you have a job that requires you to expend a lot of physical energy, you may want to consider a full fast for one to three days or make your fast a partial fast that allows you to receive enough nutrition to perform your job.

**Can my Spouse and I be intimate during our fast?** Yes. Paul addresses this subject in 1 Corinthians 7:5, which says, "do not deprive one another (of sexual relations) except with consent, for a time; that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer." If there is mutual consent, a couple may choose to abstain during a fast. Scripture allows this for the purpose of fasting and prayer, but only with mutual consent.

## **Scripture References**

**Blessings of Fasting:** Deuteronomy 28:13-14; Deuteronomy 28:2; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 58:8

**Corporate Fasting:** 1 Samuel 7:5-6; 2 Chronicles 20-34; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 9:1-3; Joel 2:15-16, Jonah 3:5-10; Acts 27:33-37

**Daniel Fast:** Daniel 10:2-3

**Esther Fast:** Esther 4:16

**Fasting Do's:** Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting Don'ts: Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:9-14

Prayer and Scripture Goes with Fasting: Luke 2:37; Nehemiah 1:4; 1 Samuel 1:6-8, 17-18; Daniel 9:3, 20; Joel 2:12; Acts 10:30; Acts 13:2; 1 Corinthians 7:5

Preparing to Fast: Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; Romans 12:1-2

When to Fast: Matthew 9:14-15

Why Fast: Romans 12:1; Matthew 6:33, Mark 9:29; Isaiah 58:6; 1 Samuel 7:3; Luke 4:1-13