

## Fasting Practical Resource

### Why should we fast?

Jesus expects us to fast and the early church practiced fasting. Followers of Jesus fast as a spiritual discipline. But there is much more in the Bible that answers the question of why should we fast. Let me just point us in the direction of a few of those.

1. In Acts 13:3 and 14:23, individuals fasted when leaders in the church were appointed. Fasting can be a great way to seek the Lord in appointing leaders in the church. It can also be a great way to prepare for ministry (Jesus Matthew 4, Paul Acts 9:9).
2. In repentance of sin and turning back to the Lord, an expression of humility, fasting can be a wonderful expression of your confession, brokenness and dependence upon the Lord (1 Sam. 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1,2; Joel 1:14; 2:12,15; Jonah 3:5)
3. When we are seeking the Lord's protection and mercy, his glory and the Lord's victory, fasting is a wonderful way to petition God for those things (Judges 20:26; 2 Chron. 20:3; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16; Esther 9:3; 2 Sam. 12; Jeremiah 36:9).
4. When we are in need for direction, provision and help from God we can fast (1 Sam. 1:6-7; Daniel 9:3). Some of the biggest decisions of my life involved times of fasting.
5. We can fast to secure our hearts in dependence upon God and love for Him above all other things, protecting us from the idolatry of addictions, excesses, and being controlled by the things of this world instead of being controlled by the Lord. We cultivate our hunger for God so that the other appetites of the flesh are not mastering our lives. Fasting leads us to ask and feel the question: Do I really hunger after God above all other things? Fasting can uncover the sins that can so easily hide beneath the surface of a well fed life. (John 4:34; Gal. 5:16; Phil 4:12-13; Romans 6:12; 1 Cor 6:12)
6. Jesus calls our attention to a reward in fasting here in Matthew 6. Jesus tells us that God will reward us if we fast the right way.

### How do we actually fast?

1. If you have never fasted before, if you have any existing medical concerns or you are going to undertake an extended fast, seek medical advice before the fast. If you are under 18 years of age, talk to your parents before you fast.
2. You can start fasting by just missing a single meal but let me describe a 24 hour fast as a great place to start. After supper tonight I would not eat again until supper tomorrow night. I miss two meals in a 24 hour period. During those meal times or during other designated times in the 24 hour period I would want to pursue activities such as prayer, bible reading, meditating on Scripture, spiritual purposes. 24 hour fasts are biblical fasts.
3. For a 24 hour fast the following guidelines are not as crucial but wisdom would apply them to all fasts, particularly lengthier fasts. A day or two before your fast, limit your intake of foods to things that are easy for your body to digest like fruit. Stop drinking coffee and other caffeine products several days before the fast. Drink lots of water. Prepare yourself for some attitude challenges such as impatience, crankiness, and anxiety. Don't be surprised by dizziness, headaches and different kinds of pains, like being hungry. All those things are normal and not necessarily signs to stop the fast. You should be in regular contact with your doctor if you have concerns. Break your fast gradually. Begin with meals that are light and easy to digest like light soups and non-acidic juices and fruits. The longer you have fasted, the more careful you need to be about breaking your fast.
4. If you have never fasted and you are going to try the 24 hour fast and you get to lunch and you are going crazy, mad at everyone, lashing out at the coworker who invites you to lunch, well, in addition to repenting for all that, just eat a cracker or something very light and continue to focus on the Lord. Don't beat yourself up as if you failed. The point is not to starve and ruin your witness in the process. The point is to seek the Lord, to deepen your dependence upon Him. I encourage you to try and make it for the whole 24 hours and if you don't make it, then try again and work up to making even longer fasts. But don't forget the thing that makes a fast a fast, is not the just the abstaining from food but the feasting on God.