

# Fasting Guide

## *Congregation Fast*

As we ask for God's direction, both personally and as a church, prayer and fasting are like our left and right hands that come together to seek the Lord. Prayer and fasting are intended to change us in God's presence and to align our hearts with His. Take time to consider what God may be asking you to give up so you may focus on Him in this season of prayer and fasting.

## *The Purpose of Fasting*

Fasting is an ancient spiritual discipline that we see throughout the Bible. Fasting is a way to rearrange the attentions of our heart and mind and discover the Lord's desires for his people. As Daniel writes "I gave my attention to the Lord God..." (Dan 9:3) Literally the verse says "I set my face..." It is a picture of focused concentration on the Lord ready to admit our desperate need of Him. In the Bible, there are two reasons for fasting and one warning.

### **A humble admission of need.**

The need may be forgiveness of sin, comfort over some grief or sorrow, concern over the situation of an individual, a church, a city, or a nation, or the need for guidance

and direction from the Lord. For examples see Nehemiah 1:4-11, 1 Samuel 7:6; 31:13; 1 Kings 21:27-29; Nehemiah 9:1; Esther 4:1-3; Isaiah 58:5-6; Psalms 35:13; 69:10; 109:24.

### **A humble request for help.**

This is closely linked to the first reason. Before we will ask for help we have to admit we have a need – a need only God alone can meet. This can include seeking the Lord's guidance for a decision, for healing or for safety and protection. For examples see 2 Chronicles 20:3-4, Daniel 9:3, Isaiah 58:7-12, Jeremiah 36:1-9, Judges 20:26, 2 Samuel 12:16-23, Extra 8:21-23, Esther 4:16. In the New Testament, we find examples of those who sought the Lord with their whole heart at a time of great need or as an expression of humble dependence on the Lord to guide or provide in some way. Like Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2) or the dependence of the early church (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23).

### **A warning.**

Scripture warns us that we cannot use fasting to manipulate God to get our own way. Isaiah 58:1-4 is one of the clearest rebukes to a proud heart full of selfish motives. That kind of fasting was of no benefit. In Luke

18:12, a ritualistic Pharisee found no response from God. God was not impressed with self-righteous fasting.

### *The Practice of Fasting*

To “fast” is to give up something important so we can give our attention to discovering what is on God’s heart, something far more important. For a fast to be successful, we must give up one thing and tangibly replace it with something else that pursues God. Being clear about what we are giving up and what we are replacing it with provides us focus to complete the fast. For example, “I will not eat lunch, so I can give my full attention to reading the book of Acts and praying for 30 minutes.”

### *Different kinds of fasts*

**A limited fast** – a person limits their diet for a time as a part of seeking to do the will of God. This is found in Daniel 1:8-13 where Daniel and his friends asked for a limited diet in order to follow God’s law and will.

**A standard fast** – a person eats no food but drinks liquids. This is the most common fast in the Scriptures. This kind of fast must be carefully considered if it is lasting beyond a few days.

**Alternative fast** – a person gives up something that draws their attention for a specific amount of time. This could include giving up technology

like television or social media, waking up an hour earlier or replacing an appointment so that time can be redirected toward your relationship with God.

### *Practical guidelines for fasting*

- Keep your focus on the Lord, trusting Him in the situation and need. (Hebrews 11:6)
- Stay in an attitude of prayer throughout the day.
- Read Scripture often during your time of prayer and fasting. You may want to write down some of your insights in a journal or notebook.
- When preparing to fast, we need to consider our health. Checking in with a physician to make sure a fast will not interfere with medical treatment is wise. If a full fast from food isn’t possible, perhaps fasting from certain foods could be another option. The point of the fast isn’t the food itself, it is the heart attitude of sacrifice in order to focus on the Lord.
- When doing a fast from food, drink plenty of water and/or juice. Sometimes there is a little dizziness, headache or nausea from not eating, but that is normal. When breaking a fast, eat light and ease back into a routine.

*“I turned my attention to the Lord God to seek him by prayer and petitions, with fasting...” Daniel 9:3*