

A BRIEF WORD ON FASTING

The Bible speaks about fasting in both the Old and New Testaments. It is a spiritual discipline that would often accompany prayer. We see Jesus himself modelling fasting. In the gospel of Luke (Luke 4:1-14), we read that before the start of his own earthly ministry, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for an extended period of fasting and prayer. A time of seeking his Father's face in prayer, a time of wrestling with and overcoming the evil one, a time of dealing with the flesh and a time of preparation for what was to come.

In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), we are called to go and make disciples. Disciples are learners, followers of Jesus and as Christian disciples, our desire is to model our life on his teaching and example, following "His Way." Biblically, fasting is always giving up food for a set period of time in order to focus on prayer and to deepen fellowship with God, seeking him with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

In Matthew 6:16, we see Jesus addressing the topic of fasting, which was a subject that was very much in the rhythm of the Jews at that time. However, he starts off by saying, "*When you fast,*" not "*if you fast.*" In other words, there is an expectation that as followers of Jesus, we would engage in this spiritual discipline on a regular basis.

So, I would like to suggest four things we can do to make our fasting effective: Plan, Prepare, Pray and Persevere.

PLAN

As a church community, we have been led to designate the first 21 days of 2025 as a time of fasting and prayer. It is a call for us together to engage in this spiritual discipline as a preparation for what the Lord has ahead of us individually and corporately in the year ahead. But in order to make this effective, we need to plan. Review your schedule, make space in your diary, buddy up with someone, get hold of a resource on fasting and prayer, decide what type or rhythm of fasting you might want to do. Be intentional and set realistic expectations of yourself about how long you will fast.

PREPARE

If you have never run a 5K race before, then you will need to begin by doing a 100m walk. There is also that well-known Chinese proverb that states, "*The longest journey begins with the first step.*" If you've never fasted before or you don't do it regularly, you might want to consider setting aside a day or two to fast in the weeks leading up to January to do so. In addition, you need to ask some practical questions as well: Do you have any health conditions that might need consideration? Would you need to get some medical advice? Are you pregnant or going through some medical treatment?

We would love to do this as sensibly as we can, so preparation is quite key. Prepare your heart, Prepare your body, Prepare your diary!

PRAY

The teaching on fasting in the scriptures is always connected with prayer. So, make space to pray. You could use the space that would have been your mealtimes for prayer or join in with some of the corporate sessions we will be having as a church. However, this should be

no substitute for you carving out some space to seek God by yourself in worship and prayer. You could also consider going on a prayer walk, using a devotional on prayer and fasting, journaling as you read the scriptures, remembering that prayer is a two-way conversation. It seems an obvious thing to do, so pray, pray and pray some more!

PERSEVERE

Fasting is challenging! Abstaining from food is challenging! Your body will react (but will also adjust). Fasting is not just about the things we abstain from but also what we do to fill that void. You should expect that there will be physical and spiritual opposition during this period (*Jesus experienced it in the wilderness*), but keep your focus on God. Have an attitude of consecration and not convenience, which will hopefully help you push past the flesh's own desires. Lastly, keep in mind that "His grace" is sufficient to you. Look out for your brothers and sisters in our community of faith; stay accountable to someone. Continue to drink and keep yourself hydrated during your time of fasting. God is more interested in your attitude as you walk with Him, not how long you fast.

So why are we setting aside 21 days to fast and pray? In simplest terms, we want more of Jesus. Fasting will often result in a renewed closeness with the Father, an increased spiritual sensitivity and a reawakening of passion and zeal, as well as a posture towards fruitfulness as disciples of Jesus. We have spent the last year stating that we want more of him; this coming season of prayer and fasting is an opportunity for us to step away from the riverbanks into depths where we can experience even more of Jesus in our lives, our community, and beyond.

FASTING IN THE SCRIPTURES

There are many references in the scriptures about fasting; sometimes the kind of fast is specified (e.g., *No food, No Food or Drink etc.*), and at other times the type of fast is not specified, but the understanding is that it is generally abstinence from food. Setting apart other things or choosing not to focus on them during this period can aid your fellowship with God as you abstain from food.

You can use some of the scriptures below to reflect and study more about fasting:

Exodus 34:28, Judges 20:26, 1 Samuel 7:6, 1 Samuel 31:13, 2 Samuel 1:12, 2 Samuel 12:16, 2 Chronicles 20:3-4, Ezra 8:21-23, Ezra 10:6, Nehemiah 1:4, Nehemiah 9:1, Esther 4:16, Isaiah 58:3, Jeremiah 36:6, Daniel 1:12, Daniel 9:3, Jonah 3:5, Matthew 4:2, Matthew 17:21, Luke 2:36-37, Acts 9:9, Acts 14:23

***TOMORROW'S CONQUESTS ARE DETERMINED BY TODAY'S CONSECRATION* (Life Church)**