



## **The Church at Asheville**

Love God. Love People.

# **Fasting and Prayer**

### **What is a fast?**

Fasting is willfully abstaining from food, or certain foods. It is important in our walk with God, to make fasting a part of our regular life. Each of us must decide as an individual, how we will fast and for how long. Since, we are all in different places in our walk with God, and our health conditions vary from person to person, it is vital that we listen to the leading of the Spirit in choosing our fast.

Prayer is a part of fasting and should be part of any fast that you decide to do. Your attitude should be one in which you take time in meditation and prayer. There is no point in fasting without prayer. Whereas fasting subdues our flesh, praying and reading God's Word strengthens our spirit.

### **Why should I fast?**

Fasting is our spiritual tune-up. It helps clear our mind and looses us from the habits of our day to day existence and allows us to refocus on our Creator and the true Sustainer of our lives. As Jesus told us, "Man should not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Matt. 4:4 (KJV)

### **How do I fast?**

There are three basic ways to fast; full fast, partial fast, and activity fast. It can be one of these or a combination of one or more of the three.

### **Full Fast**

Drink only liquids, especially water using broths, and 100% fruit and vegetable juices. Be wary of overly processed or juices that contain high amounts of sugar. Concerning caffeine, going cold turkey will make you no friends and make you quite a grouch to be around. If the fast will continue for several days, slowly lowering your caffeine intake will allow your body to adjust to the idea.

## **Partial Fast**

A partial fast is giving up a specific type of food such as sweets, coffee, or chocolate cake. It can also be giving up one or two meals per day for a pre-determined amount of time. It can also be choosing to fast for a specific amount of time like from 5:00 AM – 3:00 PM or from sunrise to sunset. An example of a partial fast is the Daniel fast in Daniel chapter 1 where he ate only vegetables and drank only water.

## **Activity Fast**

Consider ‘fasting’ activities such as your computer time, social media, and television time. Any regular activity that has become a habit in your life should be considered. Rather than do your normal routine, replace it with time in prayer, reading the Word, meditation and worship. Allow yourself to become more in tune with God’s Spirit. Remember, fasting is also about disconnecting to the world.

## **How long should I fast?**

You can fast for a day, three days, a week, a month ... the important thing is to getting to a different place in your walk, a closer walk with God. Let the Spirit lead you into the length of the fast. This is your spiritual tune-up after all so it’s a personal decision between you and God. Since the goal is to be able to reset your own spirit to be more in tune with the Holy Spirit, the time may vary. Realize that you may need to readjust your goal during the fast as well. It’s your walk; it’s your relationship with God so listen to what He is telling you and what He wants from you during the fast.

## **What should I do while fasting?**

Scripturally, fasting is partnered with prayer. (See examples in Ez. 8:21, Luke 2:37.) Other things you need to do during your time of fasting are:

Worship (Neh. 9:1-3, Acts 13:1-3)

Petition (Dan. 9:3, 17)

Reading the Word of God (Neh. 9:1-3, Jer. 36:6)

Humbling yourself before God (Ez. 8:21)

Asking for direction and guidance (Judg. 20:19-46)

Mourning (I Sam. 31:8-13, Neh. 1:3-10, Esther 4:1-4)

Confession of sins (I Sam. 7:6, II Sam. 1:12, Dan. 9:4-18)

Repentance (Joel 2:12-17)

Just like prayer and fasting, reading the Word of God is about connecting to God in a more powerful way. Take time each day to read a chapter or more. Read consistently, prayerfully and expectantly. While reading, tune in to what God is trying to say to you. Apply the words that you have read to your own life, to what you are experiencing now.

Use wisdom and stay hydrated.

Remember it isn't the kind of fast that determines its effectiveness, but rather the changes that it brings about in you. May your fast stir your passion for God, give you clarity of vision, strengthen your faith, and take you to new depths in His Spirit.

## **Scriptures:**

### **Isaiah 58:6 NIV**

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

### **Matthew 6:16-18 NIV**

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

### **Ezra 8:21 NIV**

There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.

### **Luke 2:37 NIV**

and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

### **Worship (Neh. 9:1-3, Acts 13:1-3)**

#### **Nehemiah 9:1-3 NIV**

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God.

#### **Acts 13:1-3 NIV**

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

### **Petition (Dan. 9:3, 17)**

#### **Daniel 9:3 NIV**

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

#### **Daniel 9:17 NIV**

"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.

## **Reading the Word of God** (Neh. 9:1-3, Jer. 36:6)

### **Nehemiah 9:1-3 NIV**

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### **Jeremiah 36:6 NIV**

So you go to the house of the LORD on a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words of the LORD that you wrote as I dictated. Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns.

## **Humbling yourself before God** (Ez. 8:21)

### **Ezra 8:21 NIV**

There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.

## **Asking for direction and guidance** (Judg. 20:19-46)

### **JUDGES 20:19-46**

The next morning the Israelites got up and pitched camp near Gibeah. The Israelites went out to fight the Benjamites and took up battle positions against them at Gibeah. The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day. But the Israelites encouraged one another and again took up their positions where they had stationed themselves the first day. The Israelites went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and

they inquired of the Lord. They said, “Shall we go up again to fight against the Benjamites, our fellow Israelites?”

The Lord answered, “Go up against them.”

Then the Israelites drew near to Benjamin the second day. This time, when the Benjamites came out from Gibeah to oppose them, they cut down another eighteen thousand Israelites, all of them armed with swords.

Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the Lord. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord. And the Israelites inquired of the Lord. (In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there, with Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministering before it.) They asked, “Shall we go up again to fight against the Benjamites, our fellow Israelites, or not?”

The Lord responded, “Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands.”

Then Israel set an ambush around Gibeah. They went up against the Benjamites on the third day and took up positions against Gibeah as they had done before. The Benjamites came out to meet them and were drawn away from the city. They began to inflict casualties on the Israelites as before, so that about thirty men fell in the open field and on the roads—the one leading to Bethel and the other to Gibeah. While the Benjamites were saying, “We are defeating them as before,” the Israelites were saying, “Let’s retreat and draw them away from the city to the roads.”

All the men of Israel moved from their places and took up positions at Baal Tamar, and the Israelite ambush charged out of its place on the west of Gibeah. Then ten thousand of Israel’s able young men made a frontal attack on Gibeah. The fighting was so heavy that the Benjamites did not realize how near disaster was. The Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel, and on that day the Israelites struck down 25,100 Benjamites, all armed with swords. Then the Benjamites saw that they were beaten.

Now the men of Israel had given way before Benjamin, because they relied on the ambush they had set near Gibeah. Those who had been in ambush made a

sudden dash into Gibeah, spread out and put the whole city to the sword. The Israelites had arranged with the ambush that they should send up a great cloud of smoke from the city, and then the Israelites would counterattack.

The Benjamites had begun to inflict casualties on the Israelites (about thirty), and they said, "We are defeating them as in the first battle." But when the column of smoke began to rise from the city, the Benjamites turned and saw the whole city going up in smoke. Then the Israelites counterattacked, and the Benjamites were terrified, because they realized that disaster had come on them. So they fled before the Israelites in the direction of the wilderness, but they could not escape the battle. And the Israelites who came out of the towns cut them down there. They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them and easily overran them in the vicinity of Gibeah on the east. Eighteen thousand Benjamites fell, all of them valiant fighters. As they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, the Israelites cut down five thousand men along the roads. They kept pressing after the Benjamites as far as Gidom and struck down two thousand more.

On that day twenty-five thousand Benjamite swordsmen fell, all of them valiant fighters.

## **Mourning (I Sam. 31:8-13, Neh. 1:3-10, Esther 4:1-4)**

### **1 Samuel 31:8-13 NIV**

The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan. When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

## NEHEMIAH 1:3-10

They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

“Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’

“They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.

## **Esther 4:1-4 NIV**

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. When Esther’s eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.



## **Confession of sins (I Sam. 7:6, II Sam. 1:12, Dan. 9:4-18)**

### **1 Samuel 7:6 NIV**

When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.” Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

### **2 Samuel 1:12 NIV**

They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

### **DANIEL 9:4-18**

I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:

“Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

“Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.

“Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like

what has been done to Jerusalem. Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.

“Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. 16Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

“Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.

## **Repentance (Joel 2:12-17)**

### **Joel 2:12-17 NIV**

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing— grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’ ”