

# FASTING

LENT | March 19, 2023

**Matthew 6:16-18**—*And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.*

## 3 THINGS FASTING DOES

### 1. Fasting places an exclamation point on our prayers.

**Acts 13:2-3**—*One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.*

### 2. Fasting is like an MRI on our soul.

**Isaiah 58:3a**—*"We have fasted before you!" they say. "Why aren't you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don't even notice it!"*

**Isaiah 58:3b-4**—*"I will tell you why!" I respond. "It's because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me."*

**Isaiah 58:6-9**—*"No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. "Yes, I am here," he will quickly reply..."*

### 3. Fasting is an infusion of power.

**2 Chronicles 20:3-4**—*Jehoshaphat was terrified by this news and begged the Lord for guidance. He also ordered everyone in Judah to begin fasting. So people from all the towns of Judah came to Jerusalem to seek the Lord's help.*

**2 Chronicles 20:13-17**—*As all the men of Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, wives, and children, the Spirit of the Lord came upon one of the men standing there. His name was Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite who was a descendant of Asaph. He said, "Listen, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Listen, King Jehoshaphat! This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid! Don't be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow, march out against them. You will find them coming up through the ascent of Ziz at the end of the valley that opens into the wilderness of Jeruel. But you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the Lord's victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out against them tomorrow, for the Lord is with you!"*

**2 Chronicles 20:21-23**—*After consulting the people, the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising him for his holy splendor. This is what they sang: "Give thanks to the Lord; his faithful love endures forever!" At the very moment they began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves. The armies of Moab and Ammon turned against their allies from Mount Seir and killed every one of them. After they had destroyed the army of Seir, they began attacking each other.*

**Ephesians 6:12**—*For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

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*All verses quoted in New Living Translation unless otherwise noted.*

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# LENT STUDY GUIDE: WEEK 5

Begin with prayer.

## TESTIMONY

Each week have someone share their testimony (their Jesus story). Only share what you feel comfortable sharing with the group. Schedule who will share next week.

## ENGAGE/EXCLUDE

Take a few minutes as a group to discuss the LENT challenge. How are you doing with the LENT challenge? Do you have any praise reports to share

## READ TOGETHER

Matthew 6:5-18

## WORD FROM PASTOR ADAM

Fasting is one of those spiritual disciplines that is not required of us for salvation, but is so effective and impactful if we incorporate it into our spiritual walk. It is rarely easy but always worth it! Jesus said in Matthew 6:16, “when you fast,” not “if” you fast. This is clearly an invitation for all who follow Jesus to find some way to fast at some point in their walk with Jesus. Not only is this a powerful tool we have to seek the Lord, but it does so much in our own hearts. The discipline it takes to abstain from food or other comfort redirects our focus and places God back on the throne of our hearts. As we talked about on Sunday, fasting does three things: 1. Fasting puts an exclamation point on our prayers. 2. It is like an MRI on our souls revealing areas we need to correct our hearts. 3. And it is an infusion of power when we need it most. If you have not tried fasting, I encourage you to try, even if only for one meal. I believe God is calling his church to align our hearts with His and do what it takes to DRAW NEAR TO HIM!

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. If someone asked what fasting was, how would you respond?
2. Read Matthew 6:16-18. Jesus said, “when you fast,” not “if” you fast. Clearly, He is inviting all of us to try fasting in some way, shape, or form. What has been your experience with fasting? Have you ever tried fasting? Do you agree that fasting is for all of us?
3. Mathew 6:18 says: “And your father, who sees everything, will reward you.” What do you suppose “reward” means in this context? If you have tried fasting, what have you seen God do?
4. Read Acts 13:1-3. Why do you suppose the people of the church of Antioch were fasting and worshipping? What do you know of Saul’s (Paul’s) actions from that point forward in the early church? (Hint: reflect on most of the rest of the NT).

5. Read Isaiah 58:1-9. How were the people missing the point of fasting? What kind of fasting is God asking of His people?
6. Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-17. Jehoshaphat heard of the great army coming against him. What was his response to this terrible news? Who was part of the fast? Do you think there is something significant when people pray together in unity? How did God respond to Jehoshaphat's fasting?

## MEMORIZATION CHALLENGE

Matthew 6:17-18

## PRAYER

Take some time to check in on last week's prayer requests and then share new prayer requests. Make a list of people you know who need Jesus and pray for them.

## DAILY PRAYER FOCUS

Monday: College students and young adults who are questioning their faith.

Tuesday: Hope for those who are in difficult times.

Wednesday: Forgiveness for the ways we fail to love.

Thursday: Increased desire to follow God's Word.

Friday: Ability to see others as Jesus does.

Saturday: For persecuted Christians around the world.

Sunday: More awareness of God's work in my life.

## DAILY BIBLE READING

*For those participating in our Read the Bible in a Year weekly reading plan.*

Monday: Hebrews 12, Exodus 14, Psalm 56

Tuesday: Hebrews 13, Exodus 15, Psalm 57

Wednesday: Hebrews 14, Exodus 16, Psalm 58

Thursday: Hebrews 15, Exodus 17, Psalm 59

Friday: Hebrews 16, Exodus 18, Psalm 60