



## Establishing a Fasting Rhythm

### The Biblical basis for fasting

Jesus never commanded us to fast. But it is clear from the Gospels that Jesus wants His followers today to fast. Jesus taught on fasting on a few occasions. He taught on fasting in the sermon on the mount in **Matthew 6:16-18**,

“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.”

Jesus has a clear expectation that His people will fast. He didn't say “If you fast” but “When you fast.”

If that isn't direct enough, here is what Jesus taught in **Matthew 9:14-15**.

“Then John's disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”

Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

The bridegroom being taken is a reference to Jesus' ascension back to the father. Jesus has ascended to the father. Now we fast.

They fasted in Acts – it is clear that Jesus' early followers knew to do this. We see this in **Acts 13:1-3**. They were trying to determine who God wanted to send on mission. They fasted and prayed to ask God for an answer and God responded by the Holy Spirit telling them what to do.

Then in **Acts 14:23** Paul and Barnabas fasted in order to have direction from God to appoint elders. We see in these two passages as well as in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 (Jesus' 40 days of

fasting in the wilderness to begin his ministry) that it is entirely appropriate to begin new things seeking God through fasting and prayer. As you begin your disciple making journey, it is important to make fasting part of your weekly discipline and later to teach this to others to reproduce these practices.

### **The reason for fasting**

Fasting isn't about our physical health (weight loss), it is for our spiritual health and connection with God. We fast because God is the supreme ruler of the universe. He is the Creator, Redeemer and our Sustainer. He supplies everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Because God is all of these things, we rely on God in all things and demonstrate this by setting aside food for a limited amount of time and turn our focus to God through prayer and listening.

Biblical fasting is about food and not other things (TV, social media, etc). We are saying to God that He comes first and everything else (even food) comes after God.

### **How to fast**

Shodankeh Johnson has said many times, "Start small to end big!" Fasting is a commitment. And we are committing to fast on a rhythm (the same set time each week). Because we are making a commitment to God we want to fulfill our commitment. In order to do that it has to be kept small enough to maintain for the long run.

Health Disclaimer – If you have reason to believe fasting might not be good for your health, please consult your doctor before moving forward.

You might start by not having breakfast on Tuesday. Eat dinner Monday and lunch and dinner on Tuesday. Repeat that for at least a month. During your fasting times, when you get hungry, pray and listen. You might read Matthew 4 (Man shall not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God). Express to God your trust in Him and your reliance on Him. Ask Him to help you grow in your faith, trust and reliance.

You will have other things on your schedule. You will have to live your life, work your job, etc. Just take some mental focus where you can and turn it to God during your fasting time.

After a month or more of this rhythm (same commitment every week) you might remove lunch that same day. So now you are going from dinner Monday, skipping breakfast and lunch on Tuesday and eating dinner on Tuesday. Some people might be able to stretch further than that. I would not recommend a 24 hour fasting commitment every week because you are going to compromise that at some point. We want to make good on our commitments to God.

## **The result**

There is no guaranteed result but I can speak from my experience. As I turn over this time to God each week and learn to trust God with more and more of my week and focus, I begin to find more peace in my life. As you begin to grow in your focus on God and trust in God, you begin to understand and experience that He is working on your behalf all the time. It all doesn't depend on you. That can give you the "peace that passes understanding" (Phil 4:6).

As your fasting rhythm grows out to (possibly) two meals one day a week you might begin to notice as time goes by (6 months+ out) that the peace you experience begins to run further and further into your week. What was at first peace with God one day a week might grow into two, three four days and beyond as the effects of this focused attention on God in total surrender during part of your week begins to affect more and more of your life.

### **Fasting is essential to being a disciple who makes disciples**

Establishing and faithfully executing a consistent fasting rhythm puts us in the proper mindset to make disciples who plant new churches because we are learning to trust God in all things and rely on Him because only God can make our mission successful. We cannot rely on ourselves or feel self-sufficient to this task. Fasting humbles us and helps us learn to make a habit out of relying on God in all situations. Those we disciple will also see this and learn this and this will help them make disciples who also learn to lean on God!