

# *Fasting Worksheet #1*

## **Introduction:**

Andrew Murray, who ministered in Cape Town, South Africa, said **“Fasting helps us express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves, to attain the Kingdom of God.”** Put broadly, fasting is giving up something so that one can focus more deeply and attentively upon God and His purposes. Historically, the vehicle for that pursuit of God and His heart and mind has been to give up something to eat or drink (a meal or meals), for a period of time so that our bodily need drives us to concentrate on our spiritual need. Scripture tells us that Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days. (I wouldn't recommend that as a starting place for your fast.) That definition has expanded in recent years to include fasts from social media (I wouldn't do this one now while we are separated from face to face contact.), TV, from sugar and/or caffeine, from chocolate, from certain activities or things that are important to us. Rather than set your initial goal too high and not achieve it, it is better to set a more modest goal and reach it. At critical times as you become more experienced in this discipline, set more challenging goals for your fasting. We do this to experience victory as we grow spiritually. But first, we fast so that each time we are aware of the absence of that food, drink, activity or item, its absence drives us to God.

## **Monday: Fast in response to grievous news.**

Nehemiah 1:3-4, *“And they said to me, ‘The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.’ So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”*

We fast in response to terrible news and loss. In this case Nehemiah grieves the news from

Jerusalem. His bodily response to that news is to not want food. He grieves and prays before God for his kindred and nation. He reminds God (who doesn't need reminding) of God's covenant obligations, so that he, Nehemiah, can remember who God is and what God's concerns are. When he remembers God's covenant with Israel, he remembers how he and his people have not honored their obligations before God. He is driven to his knees in confession of his sinfulness, his family's sinfulness, his tribe's failings and the nation's sort-comings.

When your lack of food, drink, something, or some activity comes to mind, bow down before God, remembering that you aren't God and that he is. Confess your sinfulness before God. Acknowledge your unworthiness of God's attention and care.

## **Tuesday: Fast in private!**

Matthew 6:17-18, *“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”*

Fasting is not a public act but one between you and God. It is designed to sharpen your attention toward God as the pangs of your hunger or the absence of that activity or thing to which you are accustomed calls you to mindfulness of your deeper need...Him.

Pray silently or privately acknowledging your need for God!

## **Wednesday: Know that your fasting will lead you to God!**

Jeremiah 29:13, *“And you will seek Me, and you will find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”*

Jesus echoed those words in Matthew 7:7, *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened for you.”*

Jeremiah, speaking for God, encourages us, “And you will seek Me, and find Me, when you search for me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

God’s promise is sure, when we seek God with all our being we will find Him. Fasting helps us to pursue God and a relationship with Him in this way. Pause from all of the hustle and bustle of your daily life to draw close to God so that He might direct your decisions and directions in the days ahead!

**Thursday: When we fast, we acknowledge our sinfulness, our need for God, and remember God’s faithfulness. So, fast to abstain from unjust, unholy or uncaring actions!**

*Joel 2:12-14, “Is this not the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? “Is it not to share bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not hide yourself from your own kin?”*

Fasting is an act through which we acknowledge our sin and seek God’s blessing. (Joel 2:12-14). Tom Ryan challenges us, “Our tendency is to think that God will love us **if** we change, but God loves us so that we **can** change.” As the prophet Isaiah reminds us (Isaiah 58:6-7), the fast God most desires from us is to abstain from unjust, unholy, and uncaring actions. That is, God yearns for a people who will share His heart and mind about His world and children and live accordingly. We fast so that when we look at the world, we see it and those in it as God does. Then we act toward them as our heavenly Father acts.

**Friday: Fast for your enemies!**

*Psalm 35:13-14, “But as for me, when they were sick, I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with head bowed on my bosom, as though I grieved for a friend or a brother; I went about as one who laments for a mother, bowed down and in mourning.”*

David was in dire need, under attack from multiple enemies when this Psalm was written. Yet, look

what he does. He prays for them as seriously as he would pray for his friends or brothers. He grieved for them in their situation as if it were his own mother who was sick. His fast is a sign of his commitment to the needs of others at this moment. Let your fast drive you to lift up the needs of those around you today.

**Saturday: Fasting is a response to a serious or sacred moment!**

In I Samuel 1:7 we see that Hannah goes up to the house of the Lord to pray for a child since she is barren. Under the pressure of her need and her rival’s taunts she is driven to fast and pray. She commits that child, if God would be so gracious to give her one, to Him. When God meets her need, she fulfills her vow. When the child, Samuel, is old enough she honors her commitment and offers him to God’s service.

In Acts 9, Paul fasts and prays for three days in response to God’s revelation of Jesus Christ to him on the Damascus road. Overcome by that experience, he does this to discern what it means and what God would have him do with the news revealed to him. Ananias, at great risk to himself, is sent by God to disciple and guide Paul. When we experience God in an intimate way, fasting is an appropriate response as you strive to understand what this experience means. When your pangs of hunger or absence occur, let them move you to seek understanding of God’s work in your life!

**Sunday: Even Jesus fasted and prayed! His fast armed him to contend with temptation.**

In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus, after his baptism by John and his anointing by God, goes into the wilderness to fast and pray. He does this for forty days and nights. (This is not a fast I’d recommend since your life is at risk after seven days of fasting in this way.) He is hungry at the end of his fast (no kidding)! Satan tempts him in three ways. He challenges Jesus to secure his physical state through food (what you have), his place through a display of power (who you are), and his authority through a display of position (where you are going). He blocks

these attempts through his knowledge of God's word. Although weakening Jesus physically, fasting has made him spiritually strong.