

APPLICATION

- How may you dedicate more time in prioritizing seeking our Father over your physical needs?
- Do you have time for a personal fast and fasting with your church community? Commit to join a regular time of prayer and fasting with your local church and set aside time to regularly and personally seek God in fasting.
- How can your fasting not just grow your relationship with God but also your heart for others? Commit to include in your prayers those who have yet to know God as their Father.

PRAYER

- Thank Jesus for the example that He has set for us on what it truly means to fast.
- Pray for a greater desire to seek God and be closer to Him through fasting. Pray that as you take the time to seek Him you will have sharper ears to clearly hear His voice.
- Pray that as a church community, our corporate prayer and fasting will serve as an open door for more people to know God and grow in their relationship with Him.

Rhythms OF GRACE

Fasting | When You Fast . . .

WEEK 3

WARM-UP

- What activities do you enjoy doing together as a family?
- Share about your relationship with your parents or guardian when you were a child.
- When listening to a loved one, what are the things that usually distract you from giving them your full attention?

WORD *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."* **MATTHEW 6:1**

(Read also **MATTHEW 6:16-18.**)

Spiritual disciplines are practices that help us know and experience God more, be more like Christ, and continually rely on and be filled with the Holy Spirit. These are not meant to help us earn God's favor or our salvation, but help us position ourselves to receive God's grace every day. Fasting is abstaining from certain things, mainly food, as a spiritual discipline. During a fast, a greater amount of time than usual is devoted to prayer. This was a normal practice in both the Old and New Testaments. It can be done as a personal spiritual discipline and as a community. Today, let us learn what Jesus said about fasting.



1 | We are called to fast.

"And when you fast . . ." **MATTHEW 6:16**

Fasting is ingrained in Jewish tradition. It involves humbling ourselves before God, turning away from sin, and showing mercy and compassion to those in need (Isaiah 58:5–7). As followers of Jesus, we too are called to fast to seek God. When we fast, we deny our physical bodies its necessities, so that our inner being can be more in tune with the Spirit of God. Fasting is not simply a suggestion, but an essential part of our walk with God. When do you usually practice the spiritual discipline of fasting?

2 | When we fast, we do not do so to be seen by others.

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." **MATTHEW 6:16**

For many, fasting has become a vain tool because people have used it to gain others' attention and make an impression. The Jews had a regular time of denying themselves food, yet many missed nurturing their spirits when they fasted. To some, it became about letting others see their obedience on display. However, the point of fasting is not so others would be amazed by us. Jesus said that

because they had fasted with this heart, they had received their reward—to be recognized and seen by others. In Isaiah 58:3, why was God not pleased with the fasting of His people?

3 | But when we fast, we do so before the Father.

¹⁷"But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

MATTHEW 6:17–18

The primary reason we fast is to draw near to God, so we can know Him. Though God is already near, we need to take time off our busy schedules to take pleasure in drawing near to Him in our hearts. Our goal is definitely not about coming to God and twisting His arm until He meets our agenda or set of requests. Our goal should be to seek Him, know Him, hear Him, and seek His will. As we fast, we are to take joy and delight in having time with our Father. As we know God and His will, we experience how close God is to us, we will have a thriving relationship with Him, and our faith will grow. How has your relationship with our heavenly Father grown through fasting?