# The Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

# 1. Jesus expected His followers to fast. In fact, He gave specific instructions for how to fast.

#### Matthew 9:15

"The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."

#### Matthew 6:16-18

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, 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 men 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."

#### 2. The church fasted in order to hear from God.

#### Acts 13:2-3

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.

#### 3. The church fasted on behalf of their leaders and those in service.

#### Acts 14:23

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

## 4. When more power is called for, fasting is required.

#### Mark 9:29

He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting."

## What can you expect to experience during a fast?

- 1. Hunger... your physical body needs food and is trained to expect food. You will probably experience both a physical and psychological craving for food (or for the food groups you are fasting from).
  - A. Turn hunger and craving into prayer. "Father, as my body craves food, I crave Your presence."

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:31-34).

B. Your hunger and food-craving will remind you to turn to God and to keep your mind stayed on Him. Consider hunger a positive feeling because it will turn your heart to the Father.

I have treasured the words of your mouth more than my daily bread (Job 23:12).

C. Hunger and food-cravings will give you the opportunity to present an offering to the Lord. Each time you deny your craving for the sake of your fast, you are placing a sacrifice on the altar. **The offering is not the food, but your obedience**.

\*Keep in mind that the physical aspects of a fast become easier with each obedience.

- 2. Crucifixion moments... God is always in the process of breaking the strength and power of your flesh (human nature disconnected from the Spirit's power). During a fast, as the Spirit of God sensitizes you to spiritual things, you may be confronted over and over again with your flesh's primary sin-patterns.
  - A. Recognize these moments for what they are: God's doing, not Satan's.
  - B. Recognize what God is revealing: the root of unrighteousness in your flesh that continues to grow a fruit called sin.
  - C. Be aware of the potential in these moments: to be progressively freed from attitudes that have long bound you.
  - D. Act on God's provision for these moments: flesh MUST submit to Spirit. (Read Romans 8:2.)

- 3. An increasing desire for the things of God... God will begin to create in you a spiritual craving that only He can satisfy. In this way, He will draw you deeper and deeper into the Spirit's Life.
- 4. An increasing awareness of the Spirit of God in you... you will find yourself putting less and less confidence in your flesh. In fact, you will become so aware of the emptiness and foolishness of your flesh, that you will cry out to God day and night to expose your flesh and crucify it.

## What should I do during a fast?

- 1. Set aside a daily extended time for prayer and listening to God. If you are fasting a certain meal, consider making that meal time your prayer time.
- 2. Keep a journal.
- 3. Consider partnering with someone for accountability, encouragement and sharing thoughts.

## What are we corporately fasting and praying for?

For God's perfect will and His whole plan to be accomplished for the prayer conference and in the life of the church.

Psalm 138:8: "The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever--do not abandon the works of your hands."

Matthew 6:10: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

"We are to function as one being, infused with one Life, intent on one purpose. This fusion of separate parts into one integrated whole is a divine act. Humans can come together to form an organization, but only the Spirit of God can give birth to a church."

From Heart's Cry by Jennifer Kennedy Dean

Although God will be dealing with each of us individually, our lives will flow together, like tributaries feeding one River. The Spirit's work flows through the Body. God's people, unified in extraordinary prayer, are the most powerful force in the universe.

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:10-11).

# Options for engaging in an extended corporate fast:

- 1. You might commit to an extended partial fast. A partial fast might be fasting from meat and desserts. A partial fast might be a "Daniel fast"—vegetables, fruits, and juices.
- 2. You might commit to fast a meal a day for the extent of the corporate fast and use that meal time to pray and be in the Word.
- 3. You could commit to fast a certain day each week for the extent of the corporate fast. If several people choose this type of fasting, we will have at least one church member fasting every day for the period of the fast.