Spiritual Encouragements to Fasting & Prayer and Practical Guidelines

"Beyond question, fasting is a basic Biblical experience of our love relationship with Jesus Christ. Believer, is it not time for us to get serious about seeking God with all our hearts? May God guide us to genuine fasting that is fully willing to deny earthly appetites. May we experience a fast that is more than going without food. Let us pray that God will work into our hearts the glorious reality of Matthew 5:6, *'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled,"*' (G. Frizzell, excerpt from "Local Associations and United Prayer").

Dear Christ Community Church family,

We do understand that prayer accompanied by the fasting of food may be new to some. If you are not accustomed to such fasting, follow what the Lord shows you is right and good for you, personally, during this week of seeking Him together. Some of you may have medical concerns that necessitate modifying or abstaining from a food fast. Others of you may desire to begin to learn the practice of fasting food and may begin with a modified version. The following are guidelines related to fasting and prayer drawn primarily from Bill Bright's work, *Releasing God's Power Through Fasting and Prayer*:

Why We Fast
Down through the centuries, godly people who have done mighty things for the Lord have testified to the necessity of prayer with fasting. John and Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards were used mightily by God during the Great Awakening. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Charles Finney, Andrew Murray, and many more experienced the spiritual power of fasting and prayer, carrying this discipline into their historic ministries. Why were they so convinced of the need for fasting and prayer? How does fasting cause the fire of God to fall upon the life of the individual and the Church? The writings of Scripture, the church fathers and many Christian leaders of today offer several biblical insights into the spiritual need for fasting.

How does fasting help? Fasting can sharpen our awareness of our dependance upon the Lord and redirect our physical hunger towards spiritual hunger. As we humble our souls, we can become more receptive in faith to the special work of the Holy Spirit to revive us which transforms our relationship with God and takes us into a deeper life in Christ. Many attest to experiencing holy brokenness, a deeper yieldedness, greater self-control and renewed spiritual vision. It strengthens faith and inspires a determination to follow God's revealed plan for our lives.

The fire of the Holy Spirit brings power over the lusts of the flesh, and over the lies of the enemy of our souls enabling us to walk in the ways of the Lord. In his book *Fasting*, Derek Prince describes fasting as "…a tremendous lesson in establishing who is the master and who is the servant. Remember, your body is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master."

In Joel 2:12-13, the Lord commanded, *"Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God*." In the Old Testament, fasting was a way individuals and God's people humbled themselves, leading them into effective repentance, spiritual renewal, and appropriating special helps. Ezra called a fast to seek God's protection for the Jews returning from exile to Judea (Ez. 8:12).

Jesus set the example by fasting forty days after His baptism, during which time He overcame temptation and then received power for ministry. He also indicated that His disciples would fast when the bridegroom was taken away, addressing them in Matt 6:16 saying, *"When you fast..."*

When to Fast

Some teach that you should fast only when led by the Holy Spirit to do so. Yet we are also free to proclaim a fast whenever we sense a desire to draw closer to God, or we feel the need to seek special help in certain spiritual conditions and life circumstances and choose to press into the Lord in faith and prayer accompanied by fasting.

In his book, *Fasting: A Biblical-Historical Study*, author R. D. Chatham tells of a pastor's wife who kept a diary of her fasts. She recorded how she and her husband were changing pastorates and they felt overwhelmed by their new responsibilities. They realized they needed God's help. Together they fasted for ten days. She wrote that if she had not fasted – and as a result received special strength from the Lord – she would have "gone under."

There are times the Holy Spirit will prompt you to fast, not seemingly connected to anything you can perceive. It is particularly important to receive a leading of the Lord before beginning an extended spiritual fast, as his strength will be needed to carry it out. God does not commend harsh treatment of the body for its own sake and in the human-driven expression of extreme asceticism for spiritual display, as referred to and condemned in Colossians 2:23. However, a Spirit-led extended fast for God's purposes can bring God-ordained powerful results.

Consult Your Doctor

I strongly recommend that you consult your doctor before fasting. Consider that many doctors have not been trained in the realities and benefits of fasting, and have limited understanding. Even so, I encourage you to consult with your physician, especially before beginning an extended fast to make sure you are in good health. You may have a physical issue that makes fasting dangerous or unwise. Also, consider your medications. It is particularly important to check with your doctor for any possible detrimental effects if you combine meds with fasting.

Most fasting authorities believe that if you know that you are healthy and you fast properly, you will benefit from fasting physically as well as spiritually. Those who should never fast without professional supervision include:

- Persons who are physically emaciated
- Persons who suffer weakness or anemia
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, or blood diseases or who have recently suffered myocardial infarction.
- Persons who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs, or who take insulin for diabetes.
- Women who are pregnant or nursing.
- Persons who are afraid of fasting because they do not understand it. Better to become knowledgeable and overcome genuine doubts and fears.

Other conditions may require supervision as well. A good rule of thumb is that if you have questions or are under a physician's care, consult with your doctor before fasting.

How to Fast

1. **Set an Objective:** The first step is to set a specific objective. Why are you fasting? For how long and what type of fast? Is it for spiritual renewal, guidance, healing, for the godly resolution of a problem, for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Keeping your goal in focus will help you sustain your fast when physical desires and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.
2. **Lay a Spiritual Foundation**: The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. God requires the repentance of sin before He will hear our prayers (Is. 59:2). Ask the Lord to search your heart and to lead you to righteousness as in Psalm 139:23-24. Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit brings to your remembrance. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anything in your heart that is not pleasing to God. Know that 1 John 1:9 encourages us that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
3. **Make Physical Preparations**: Do not rush into a fast if you plan to go without food for several days. Eat smaller meals before you abstain altogether.
4. **Ask God for Guidance**:
    a. **Related to the actual physical fast**: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the kind of fast God wants you to undertake. Does He want you to go completely without food? Water only, or water and juices, teas & coffee? Until you have more experience in fasting, becoming more knowledgeable and comfortable with how your body responds to fasting, adding vegetable or fruit juices can be an important assist. Note that tomato and orange juice are advised against to those sensitive to acidity. Also, is He calling you to fast one meal a day, one day a week, several days? Is He calling you on a Daniel fast?
    b. Related to Setting aside special times for Prayer: Set your schedule for special times of prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to show you where to have increased times of giving Him your full attention in prayer. We can become so focused on the fast, we neglect to increase our time spent with the Lord…and listening & responding as much as praying.

You may wait quietly before Him. Be sure to submit yourself purposefully and actively to the Lord, including submitting your mind to Him. Be aware of and welcoming of His living Presence whilst meditating in the Word or upon the Lord in worship. The Bible does not endorse empty-mindedness which creates a vacuum for receiving fleshly impulses or demonic whisperings as is oft encouraged in pagan meditation.

Invite the Holy Spirit to minister to you and to bring to mind those things He wants you to pray about. As you go about your needful daily activities as you are fasting and seeking the Lord, know He can minister to you along the way, and honors your fast as you honor Him to the best of your ability in your circumstances.

It is good to plan to limit your activities while fasting as much as you are able. Exercise moderately. Rest as much as you can. Fasting brings your body into a more rested state from all the processes involved in digestion. This has the wonderful benefit of allowing the body extra time to heal and cleanse itself. This also affords time for turning your heart and mind to the Lord w/greater attentiveness.

You may experience symptoms related to your body metabolizing out toxins, especially during an all water fast - such as mild headaches, nausea, a pasty tongue and even a mild fever. This is coined, 'the fasting flu' that can occur, often lasting a day within the fasting time. Liquids help to flush out toxins. If it becomes overbearing, you may need to adjust your fast by adding juice or lite food.

How to Break Your Fast
Gradually reintroduce foods, beginning with broth, raw fruits (juicy like watermelon, grapes etc.) and cooked vegetables in small amounts. It is best not to introduce all food groups at once, as each group calls for different enzymes. Too much too soon can be harsh on your digestive tract, especially if you have been doing water only fasting and/or depending on how long you have fasted. Lead gradually into meat and milk products – based on your own sensibilities. There are excellent resources online about how to break fasts well.

Above All
"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart," (Psalm 37:4 ESV). and spend time in adoration and worship. Remember Jesus said, *"your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him,"* (Mt 6:8 NKJV); so *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil."* (Prov 3:5-7 ESV).

Fix your gaze upon the One who sees you and knows you – the One who delights in you and is waiting for you to come before Him, that He might shower you with His goodness.

Resources:

CCC Booklet, "Let Us Seek the Lord ~ Together. An Invitation to Prayer & Fasting"

God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis; This book is available free online:
https://cdn.bookey.app/files/pdf/book/en/god%27s-chosen-fast.pdf
It is also available online through christianbooks.com or Amazon.

CCC Website > click on "Pastor Search" > click on "Prayer & Fasting"
OR go to www.cccmontreat.org/pastor-search#prayer-and-fasting