

## WORSHIP

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP SONGS:

Let the Praises Ring, Everlasting God, Lion and the Lamb, God is Able

## WELCOME

**Experiencing Fasting.** What do you usually fast for? Share briefly your most memorable fasting experience.

## WORD

### MATTHEW 6:16–18

<sup>16</sup> “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face <sup>18</sup> so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Food is everybody's favorite subject. We love and enjoy eating. What is more amazing is that even while eating we are still talking about food.

While we recognize that food is a basic necessity in life, we also remember that the Bible reminds us there is more to life than food (**Matthew 6:25**). A good question we need to ask is whether we treasure God and His word even more than our "necessary food" (**Job 23:12**).

Fasting on a regular basis is encouraged and expected from 'legit' followers of Jesus (**Matthew 6:16**). Jesus did not say “if you fast” but “when you fast...” so while fasting from social media and other forms of entertainment in order to make time to be with God is good, it is important to go back to the very basics of fasting — abstaining from food.

### THE BASICS OF FASTING

During the time of Jesus, the Pharisees fasted twice a week (**Luke 18:11-12**). While Jesus criticized the hypocrisy of their fast, he never said that fasting itself, as a practice, must be stopped. But only that it be done with the right heart. Today, we may be motivated to fast in order to lose weight and shed some inches off our waist. Indeed, the Bible warns us of the possibility that fasting can be done for the wrong reasons. The Lord asked the Israelites, "was it actually for Me that you fasted?" (**Zechariah 7:4-5**).

Arthur Pink reminds us that "the mere non-partaking of food is not fasting any more than the mere moving of the lips is prayer. So, what is fasting exactly?"

Fasting is the expression of our hunger for God. The goal is not to abstain from food but to be able to focus on God and show that He is more important than

anything else. If we call ourselves followers of Jesus and we do not hunger for God, then, something is wrong. When two people who have been designed to be intimate and yet one has no desire for intimacy with the other, then, maybe, there's somebody else that provides that person satisfaction.

### THE BLESSINGS OF FASTING

So, how and why should we fast? In **Matthew 6:17-18**, Jesus was very direct with how he expects his followers to make fasting part of their lifestyle and what they should expect in return as well:

**Just be normal (v. 17).** This does not mean that we should take pains to keep our fasting a secret. The point is that we are not doing it for a show so that people around us would notice.

**Know that God is a rewarder (v. 18).** The greatest reward for fasting is God Himself. But there are 'collateral' blessings to fasting: it improves blood sugar control, fights inflammation, improves blood pressure, triglycerides, and cholesterol levels, aids weight loss, boosts metabolism, increases growth hormone secretion, and it may even help in delaying aging and preventing cancer. Take these as a bonus from a God who knows how to reward His people.

The Bible tells us some vivid examples of what happens when we hunger for God and fast:

1. *Direction* — fasting help us to seek and find God's direction for the right decisions we need to make in life (**Exodus 34:27-28; Acts 13:2-3**). Keep in mind what Craig Groeschel said, "The decisions you make today will determine the stories that you tell tomorrow."

## WORD (cont'd)

2. *Intervention* — fasting helps us face critical situations in life or in someone else's life especially when we need God to supernaturally intervene, e.g., serious health challenges, marital issues, and even national crises. God shall surely do something (**2 Chronicles 20:2-3, 12-15**). Fasting is an amazing declaration of our total dependence on God.
3. *Repentance* — we may not realize it but sometimes we need prayer and fasting for our own personal repentance (**Jonah 3:4-5; Nehemiah 9:1-2**). Sin will overthrow your life. Slowly but surely, it will plunge you into chaos. When we understand the seriousness of sin and its consequences, we will learn to humble ourselves, fast and pray in repentance.
4. *God Himself* — ultimately, our greatest need and our greatest reward is God Himself (**Luke 2:36-38**). Do we long to be in the presence of Jesus and commune with Him knowing that someday we shall be with Him for eternity?

### CONCLUSION

One time, the disciples of John asked Jesus why his disciples do not fast. Jesus replied that the “*attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them.*” When he returns to His Father, His followers shall indeed fast (**Matthew 9:14-15**). But one day, that fast will be broken — when the bridegroom and the bride finally comes together in the marriage supper of the Lamb (**Revelation 19:7,9**).

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

*(Leaders: Please choose questions that are appropriate to the level of spiritual maturity of your members)*

1. **Do's and Don'ts.** What are the do's and don'ts of fasting according to Jesus in **Matthew 6:16-18**?
2. **I Fast For.** What are the blessings/benefits that Christians may experience through fasting?
3. **Hungry for More.** How much do you hunger for God? In what specific ways will fasting help you grow in your intimacy with God?

## WORKS

### PRAY CARE SHARE IN ACTION

Pray then commit to God a regular schedule of fasting (weekly, monthly, etc.), wherein you will devote time to pray for your personal prayer points and the people you intend to share Jesus with.

### WEEKLY PRAYER POINTS

#### I. Thanksgiving

- Worship God for who He is, what He has done, and what He will do in our lives

#### II. Country and the World

- Upright and moral governance of Public Servants and a God-centered Philippines
- Repentance and Salvation

#### III. Church

- That CCF Members would honor and love God and make disciples
- Elders, Pastors, Leaders, and Families
- Ministries and Churches worldwide

#### IV. CCF Facilities

- Worship and Training Center
- Prayer Mountain

#### V. Personal Concerns

- Deeper intimate relationship with God
- Righteous living
- Salvation of family and friends