

DISCIPLINES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

1. THE DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

Read Matthew 4.1-4, then Matthew 6.16-18 and finally Matthew 9.14-15

Jesus said, "When you fast". Have you ever fasted before?

- If yes, what's your experience been?
- If no, what's stopped you from practising it?

Hungry – Jesus is All I Want (Matt 9)

Fasting is a form of prayer that uses your body to express your longing for Jesus & his Kingdom.

- Have you thought of it like this before – fasting as a sign of mourning and yearning?
- Why do you think it's important for us to use our physical bodies and appetites to express our prayer and spirituality?

Happy – Jesus is All I Need (Matt 4)

Fasting is a sign that reminds us that we don't live by bread alone, but through our relationship with Jesus.

- Have you ever experienced a joy in fasting, despite the self-denial?
- How can we as a Hub practise fasting together in a way that isn't hypocritical or just for show?
- How can we encourage each other individually and celebrate as a Hub without making it an expectation that people feel pressured to follow?

BIG IDEA: Disciplines develop Disciples. We fast, not for show, but for our Father as a physical sign of our complete dependence on Jesus and our longing for his Kingdom. When we fast, He will reward.

For more reading, encourage people to check out [this podcast](#). Go through the simple guide to fasting on the next page together. Signpost people to the website page where they can download it themselves – woodlandsmetro.com/talks/the-discipline-of-fasting.

Work out as a Hub what you want your response to be to this call to Fasting Thursdays. Will you look to engage together as a Hub, or is it just for a few individuals? How can you encourage each other in your secret devotional life to your Father?

Take some time to pray for the needs of those within the group, but also for the areas of life and work they're involved in. Pray that we would see our city impacted by the grace of God and the love of the Bridegroom.

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO FASTING

BEFORE YOU FAST

Preparation is important. The way you gear yourself up for a day of fasting can make all the difference to the fast itself.

- Make up your mind ahead of time what you're going to do. If it's a one day fast then have a definite time the evening before to stop eating and a definite time to start again. It doesn't necessarily have to be a strict 24 hours – evening meal to evening meal is fine. But set your mind on what time you will go to and stick to it.
- Think about cutting down on your coffee intake the day before. It can help stave off withdrawal headaches when you fast. Avoiding alcohol can also help.

WHEN YOU FAST

Like all disciplines, fasting gets easier the more you do it. Having a plan for your fast day will make it more successful.

- Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water.
- Start easy if you feel daunted. You can begin with a liquid only fast, or a fruit juice fast. Another type of fast is the 'Daniel Fast' where you just eat bread and water.
- Sometimes it helps to allow yourself a hot drink. You can go for something without any calorific value, like herbal teas or hot coffee, or you can permit yourself a tea or coffee with milk. We're not being religious here – it's when **you** (individual) fast.
- Use the time you would normally take to eat, to pray. Have a quiet devotion first thing in the morning, create some space for prayer at lunchtime. That might look like finding a quiet spot, or it may mean going for a prayer walk where you work.
- Think about making a prayer journal to record things you feel God put on your heart through the day, prayers you prayed, Scriptures you focused on.

AFTER YOU FAST

The strange thing about fasting is that often you get the benefit once you've finished. It can be an act of self-denial that hurts in the moment but brings blessing afterwards.

- Break with a simple time of thanksgiving and prayer. Mark it and make it holy. Don't just wolf down the nearest thing to hand.
- Share anything you felt during the fast, or wrote in your journal, with a friend or mentor.
- Use your fast day as a springboard for more prayer and devotion in the week ahead. Let it be something that re-energizes your daily devotions.
- Break your fast with something delicious. You smashed it.

One final aspect of fasting to consider is identifying with the poor. You might want to gift the money you saved from not eating to a charity that cares for the needy.

However you go about fasting, remember you're doing it in your way for your Father. Do it with faith that He will reward you.