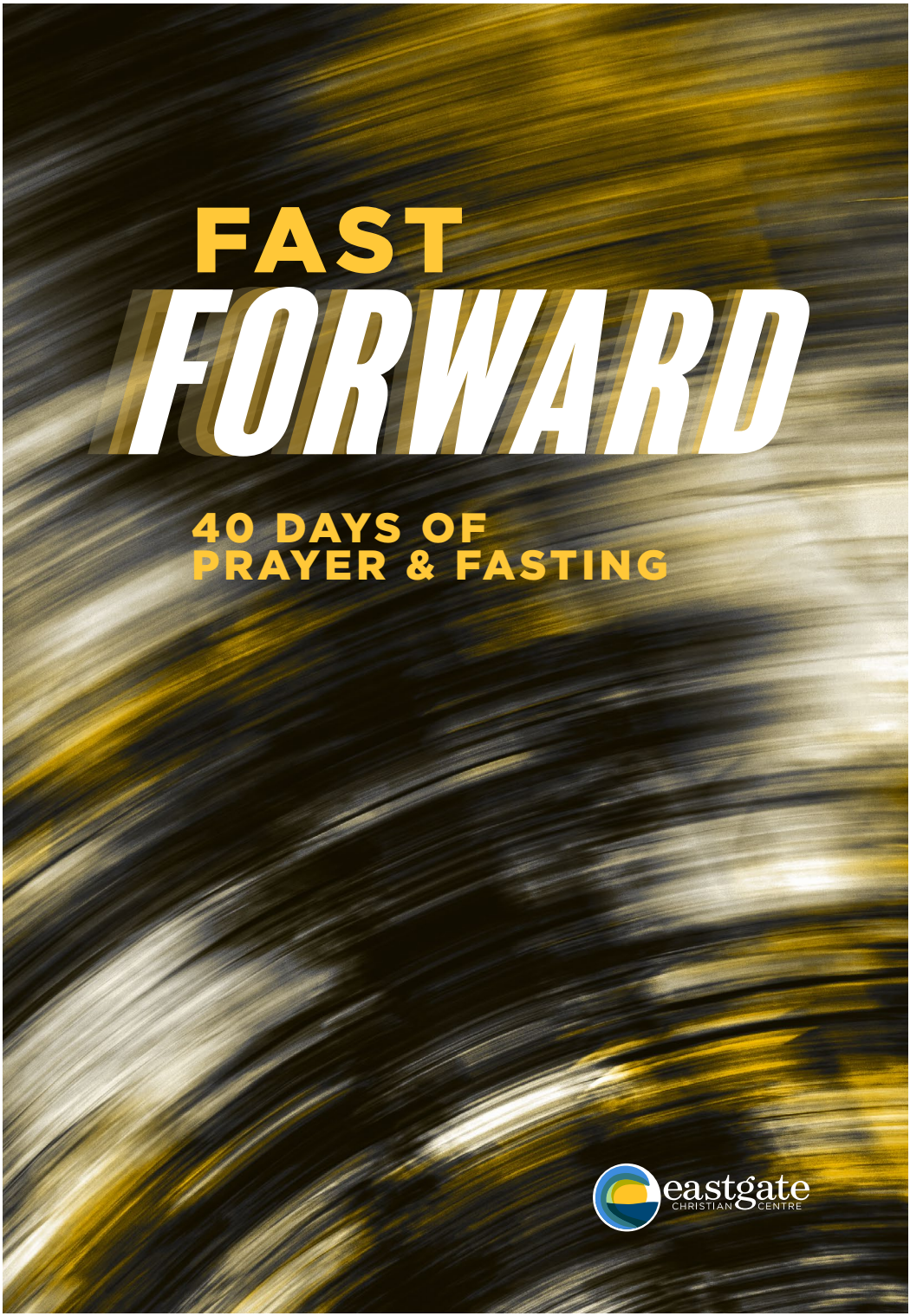
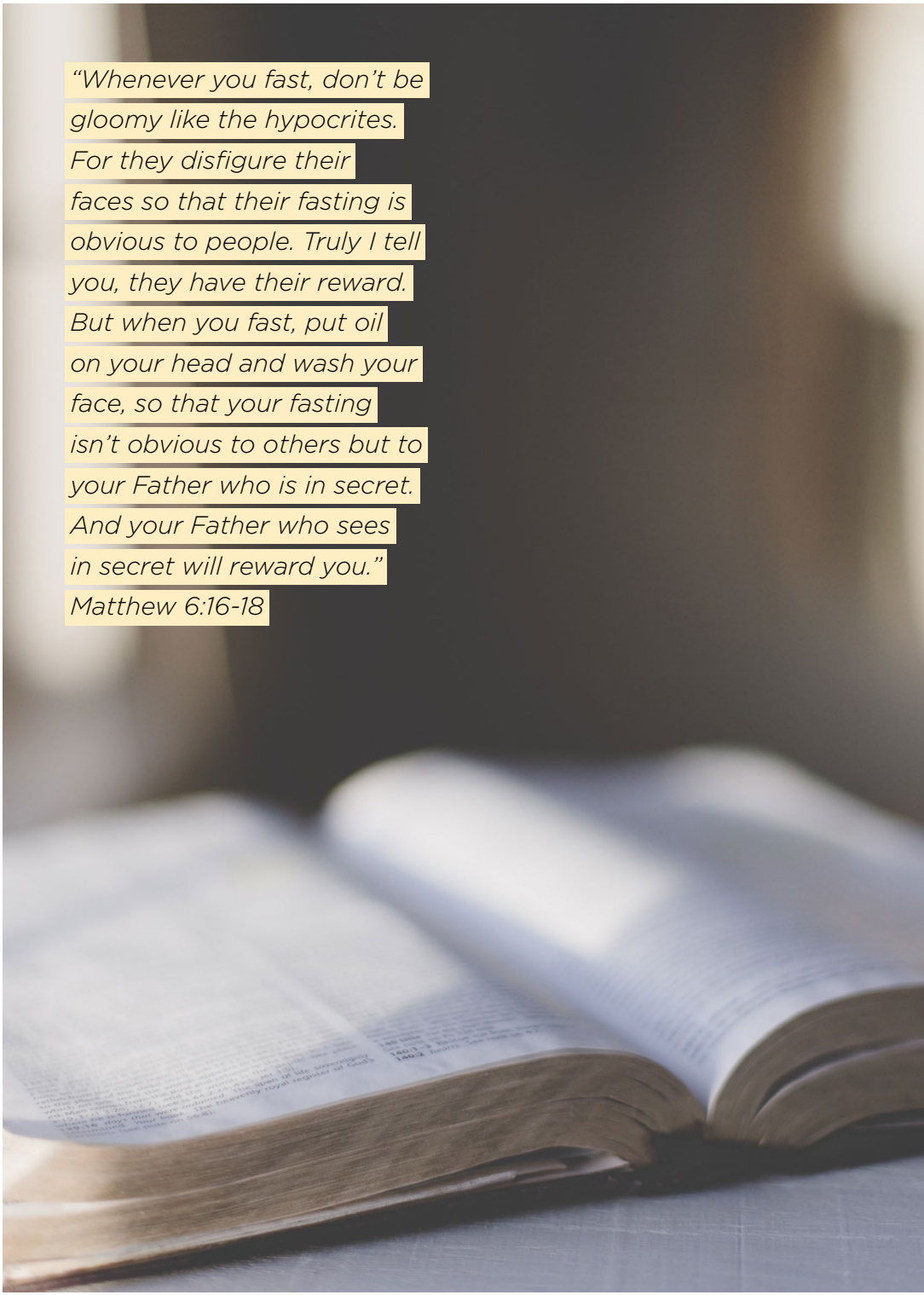

FAST
FORWARD
40 DAYS OF
PRAYER & FASTING
eastgate
CHRISTIAN CENTRE



"Whenever you fast, don't be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."
Matthew 6:16-18

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED FASTING?

This spiritual discipline has been around since the earliest days of the Christian faith. It involves abstaining from food and/or drink for a set amount of time to strengthen your focus on God. Fasting isn't just about giving up food, though. It also cultivates the spiritual fruit of self-control. By denying yourself food, you're placing your commitment to God's glory above your own physical needs, and it's helpful to use the time to pray. This short booklet is designed to help you understand fasting, its significance in the Bible, and how you can join us in 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting.

WON'T I DIE IF I DON'T EAT OR DRINK FOR 40 DAYS?

Yes, most likely! But we're entering a season of prayer and fasting, which is not about stopping eating and drinking altogether. As we seek God and ask Him to pour out His blessing during this time, our focus will be on knowing Him more intimately. Specifically, we will pray for God's favour upon our church, its ministries, and our upcoming Christmas Walkthrough event. We desire the Lord to move powerfully in our congregation and community through this season. Fasting is a part of this spiritual emphasis, but that doesn't mean completely removing food or drink from your life for the full 40 days!

We'd REALLY like you to avoid dying of hunger and thirst before Christmas, and we'd like you to seek God more during this period, not fast forward your experience to seeing Him face to face! This booklet is to help us all get a better understanding of fasting and make some realistic plans for our prayer and fasting season.

SO WHAT, THEN, IS FASTING?

Fasting is, first and foremost, a gift to us from God—something that is assumed to be a regular practice of those who place God first in their lives. Denying ourselves food reminds us that God is God—He has our first allegiance. Our first obligation is to Him, not our stomachs, bodies, needs, or desires.

Fasting interrupts the patterns and priorities of our lives. Usually, we drink when we are thirsty and eat when we are hungry, but what happens when we don't?

REINTERPRETING THE SIGNALS OF HUNGER AND THIRST

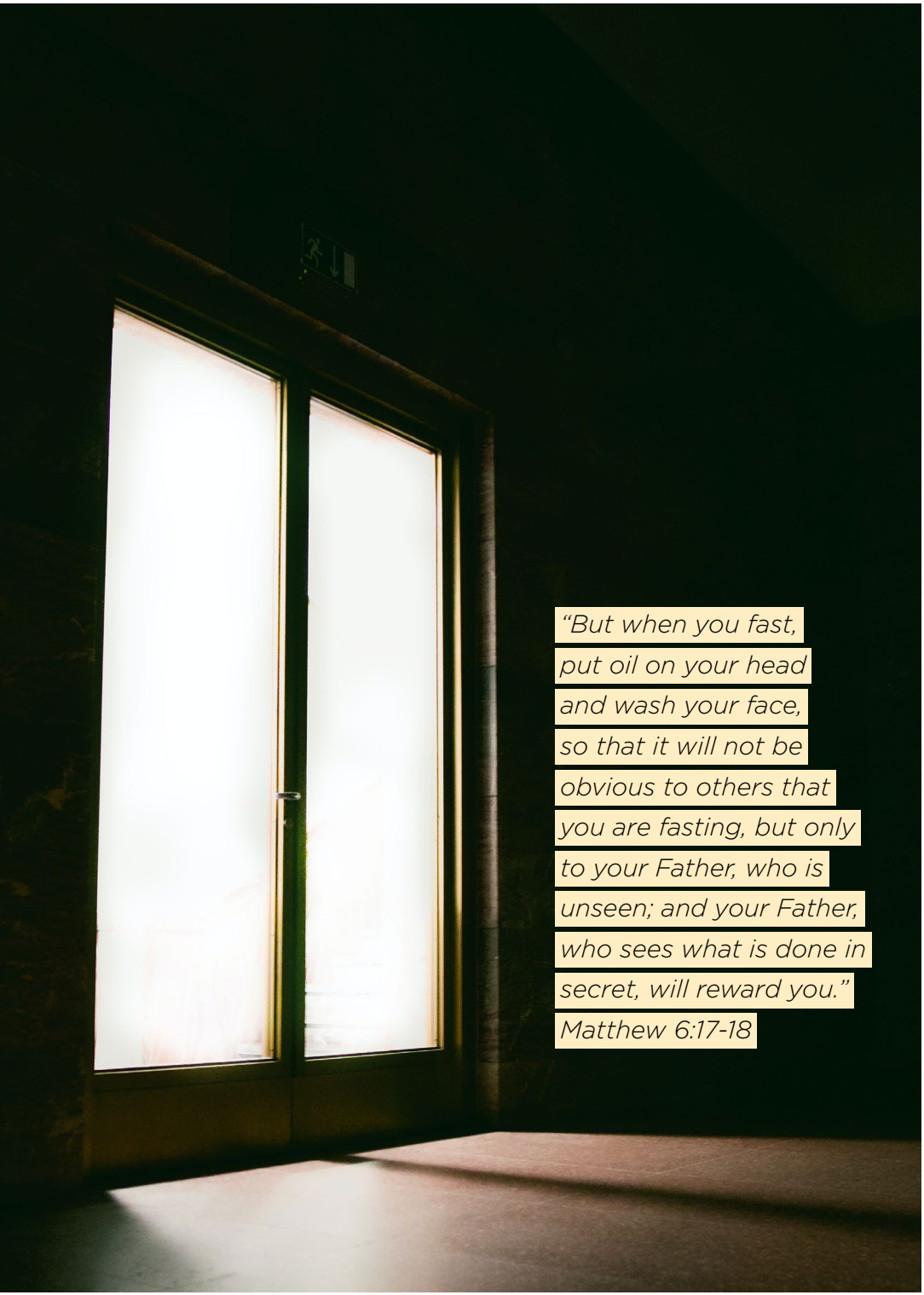
Rather than sitting down at the dining table, reaching for the biscuits, or heading down to Maccas or KFC—we don't do that when we fast. We notice we are hungry or thirsty, which prompts us to turn to God in prayer. We hunger for Him, we thirst for Him, and we reach out for Him.

"You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you, my whole
being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water."
Psalm 63:1

WHY SHOULD WE FAST?

The first answer is that the Lord knows us and calls His people to fast. Like the command to rest each week, the call to fast is about remembering that we are not God and that it is not by our strength that God accomplishes His purposes. As we submit to Him, we discover the fullness of His grace.

Jesus says WHEN, not IF—so we are making 40 days of 'when', NOW. We're doing this so that we might seek God and experience His transforming grace through faith during this season.


“But when you fast,
put oil on your head
and wash your face,
so that it will not be
obvious to others 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.”
Matthew 6:17-18

EASTGATE
40 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING

This isn't about weight loss (in fact, when Daniel and his friends went on a no-meat, no-dairy, no-alcohol diet in Daniel 1, they got 'fatter and fitter' than the rest of their classmates!), nor is it about gaining God's favour. This is not a self-improvement plan or a way to twist God's arm. As beloved children of God, we fast because it makes us long for our Father all the more.

Jesus talks about fasting as something which can lend particular intensity to our prayers and effectiveness in our obedience to God. In Matthew 17 and Mark 9, when confronted by a demon-possessed boy that the disciples could not help, the disciples ask Jesus why they couldn't do anything. His response is a rebuke and a pointer to prayer and fasting. The disciples are rebuked because they lack faith, and they are instructed that prayer and fasting are ways of demonstrating faith. Prayer and fasting are outworkings of faith (from the inside out), not ways to get faith (from the outside in). We fast and pray as expressions of our relationship with God our Father in the power of the Spirit through trusting Jesus. We fast because we need God to do only what He can do—no effort on our behalf can build God's kingdom if we are not trusting in God to do the actual work.

Fasting is about seeking God Himself, seeking intimacy with God much more than seeking anything from Him. Fasting is about God, not about us.

The Bible is full of good reasons for fasting—the NIV Lifehacks devotional book lists 10 biblical purposes in fasting. You can read them by scanning the QR code.



"Food will not bring us close to God. We are not worse off if we don't eat, and we are not better if we do eat."
1 Corinthians 8:8

During this 40-day period of prayer and fasting, we are striving to strengthen both individual and communal prayer life, seeking guidance, power and provision. In humility, we look to fast out of a loving desire for God's glory and concern for others in need. We yearn for Him to move in mighty ways, specifically in this Christmas season—through our Christmas Walkthrough outreach in Pakūranga and the Te Kauwhata Christmas Parade witness—but also beyond these events. We are asking God to change our lives by releasing the power of the Holy Spirit, not simply to bless our existing plans and efforts.

Complete fasts from food should not last more than 2-3 days at a time and should only be undertaken if you are fit and healthy. A fast from ALL food and drink should last 12-14 hours, 24 at most. It is much better to do something that drives you to prayer rather than something that will land you in the hospital!

Fasting and bingeing is NOT a helpful spiritual practice and is dangerous to physical health. After a complete fast of food or food and drink, reintroduce foods that are easy to digest, then return to your usual patterns of eating and drinking—i.e. moderation, not indulgence/gluttony.

WHAT IF FASTING FROM FOOD ISN'T AN OPTION FOR ME?

It can be dangerous to fast with certain health conditions—diabetes, heart conditions or having faced an eating disorder in the past (or present). This could mean that choosing to fast from food and drink is not a healthy option for you. However, fasting isn't necessarily about removing food, fasting is denying our daily wants, needs and desires for a defined time and purpose.



"The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear and do not refuse to help your own relatives."

Isaiah 58:6-7

IDENTIFY WHAT YOU LOVE AND HUNGER FOR

Technology: gaming, your favourite Netflix/Disney/Prime/TV series, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram…

Pastimes: soccer, rugby, hockey, reading, chess, hobby group, wood/metalwork, fishing, boating, surfing, tramping, hunting…

Indulgent foods: chocolate, snacks, alcohol, sugar in drinks, sugary drinks, meat, dairy…

Married couples: in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul addresses the idea of fasting from sexual activity—this kind of fast should be by genuine mutual agreement and only for a specified time. Fasting in this way should be abandoned if it leads to relational tension or sexual impurity for either partner in the couple.

Forgo these things—fast from them, and use the extra time in prayer, reading Scripture and seeking God. Allow your desire for the things you abstain from during the fast to drive you to prayer and dependence on God (don't spend the whole time telling God how much you miss the 'thing' and how grateful He should be for your efforts!) The idea isn't to make yourself miserable in the hope that this might make God happy or impress Him; at the heart of fasting, the aim is to teach our hearts to long for God more and more.

IDENTIFY WHAT YOU CAN DO SUSTAINABLY, HELPFULLY AND REALISTICALLY

Partial food fast:

- Skip one meal a day—e.g. lunch or dinner.
- Drop a specific food for the fast—e.g. chocolate, meat, cheese—something you love.
- Eat much more simply than usual—e.g. maybe choose the same breakfast for the 40 days.

Isaiah 58 fast:

- In light of Isaiah 58:6-7, take action to serve the disadvantaged and bridge divides. Break out of your normal rhythms and give your time to assist those in need. Seek God on their behalf.
- Clear your excess clothing out of your wardrobe—perhaps giving away some of the clothing you value the most—and give it to people experiencing poverty.
- Find a way to attempt to repair broken relationships, especially if they are with family members or folk from church. Reach out humbly and ask to reconcile.

THINGS TO REMEMBER IN FASTING

EVERYONE CAN BE INVOLVED

We are asking EVERYONE who is part of Eastgate to participate in seeking God together at this time. From our youngest to our oldest, our strongest to our most infirm, let's be united in this season, seeking God for who He is, to do what He can do. We can each find a way to sharpen our focus on God by denying ourselves something—fasting—so that we seek Him more earnestly.

FASTING EXPRESSES AND SHARPENS OUR NEED FOR GOD'S PROVISION *JUDGES 20:26-28*

The hunger or discomfort that we feel, the loss of our regular patterns of life, the giving up a hobby or a usual 'comfort'/'escape' brings a reminder to pray.

The temptation in discomfort is to skip straight to a quick-fix solution. Still, the discipline and joy of fasting drive us to seek God's Holy Spirit, THE Comforter, to go beyond our immediate needs. We seek not just to ask Him to do something, but to draw us close to Himself in fellowship. In fasting, we are supposed to feel our needs more keenly so that we are helped to bring ourselves, our needs, and our world before God.

FASTING DECLARES THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS OVER OUR LIVES

Jesus spoke about food often and enjoyed it (His critics accused Him of being a glutton and partygoer), and Jesus fasted and prayed. He spoke of how His disciples would fast after He had been crucified, risen, and ascended (Matthew 9:13-15; Luke 5:35). In abstaining from food, in deliberately making space for Jesus as we forgo pleasurable and even necessary things in life, we declare that He is Lord—to ourselves, to the powers and principalities, and in essence to the world around us. Our stomachs and our desire for leisure and pleasure are not the lords of our lives—Jesus is. Fasting makes that clear.

FASTING FUELS OUR PRAYER IN INCREASING OUR DESPERATION FOR GOD

The book of Nehemiah in the Old Testament begins with Nehemiah living in Babylon and hearing about the ramshackle state Jerusalem had fallen into—"When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of the heavens" (Nehemiah 1:4). The desperation Nehemiah felt was expressed in an abstention from food; it fueled his prayer in seeking to come under the Lordship of God who commands fasting (Leviticus 16:29; 31). Today, we too can express desperation for God to act through fasting, and fasting can help us know more clearly a desperation for God to act.



Will the fast I choose be like this:
A day for a person to deny himself,
to bow his head like a reed, and to
spread out sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast and a day
acceptable to the Lord?
Isaiah 58:5

FASTING HUMBLES US AND KEEPS US FOCUSED ON GOD'S HOLINESS

Fasting without humility is something God rejects; fasting humbly is something He rejoices and delights in. As we humble ourselves before Him, He will delight to exalt His name among us. Fasting helps us see that we must go beyond simple observance of outward appearance and allow God's Holy Spirit to change our hearts and lives. We cannot establish God's kingdom in our own strength; we are seeking God to work miraculously, powerfully, and eternally in our homes, communities, city, and country. We are asking God to change this world—fasting reminds us, again and again, that it is by His strength, according to His will and ways, not ours!

Self-denial is a way in which God is honoured ONLY when it is more about honouring Him than feeling good about ourselves. This is not a way of 'getting God to give us what we want'—fasting is for us, for our good. Jesus instructs His followers to avoid outlandish displays of false humility and to even conceal or at least not draw attention to the fact that we are fasting (Matthew 6:17-19).

Being miserable does not bring glory to God, so choose to fast in ways that increase your desire for Jesus without making you unbearable to be around. Holiness and intimacy with Jesus is marked by a deep and genuine joy, which leads to enjoying life and all good things more and more—it also marks out God's people as being enjoyable to be around.

God will not love you more if you fast, but you will love Him more in your fasting. You'll draw closer to Him and you will learn that the things you rely on, even the good things, are not as good as knowing God Himself.

God is not impressed by excess—excessive fasting is dangerous. If you are planning to fast for 40 days, then it should be a fast that you can achieve in a way that honours God and respects your own health and circumstances.

If you 'slip up' you're not a bad person and God still loves you. You can continue with your fast! Jesus spoke against human religious rules and external expressions that appear holy but don't match the condition of our hearts. Maybe 'slipping up' is because you set too strict a boundary or an unrealistic fast—this is all about drawing near to God and seeking Him. If you eat by accident when fasting, or if you break your fast in another way, don't turn it into a beat-up session. Instead, seek God in it, know you are loved, and begin afresh. At the same time, don't be dismissive of fasting either. If you're not fasting that's fine, but if you are, commit to the discipline and joys of this season together.

For clarity, this booklet quotes from several biblical versions when citing passages, in order to most clearly convey the intended meaning.

WAYS TO RESPOND TO GOD'S GRACE IN PRAYER— AS WE FAST

- **Commit to joining at least one Daily Prayer Meeting each week.**
  Perhaps join all the meetings each week as part of your fast—30 minutes in prayer with others from church—no matter where you are, join in.
- **Pray for your neighbours.**
  Even if you don't know their names—to have a deep hunger for God's grace in Jesus, to be open to coming to the Christmas Walkthrough, to be open to conversation with you about anything.



NOTES



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