

STUDY NOTES

Vision 2020

A Series At New City Church

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The following content is based on the message "Preparing to Fast" on 1/19/20 at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this study guide effectively, you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these study notes for group study and reflection should read the biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective community groups.

PRAYER

Pray and ask God to lead the discussion as everyone gets to share.

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 6:16-18; MATTHEW 9:14-15

BIBLICAL FASTING

A biblical fast is a personal, willful abstention from something — typically food and/or drink. It is different from a hunger strike, and it is not a weight-loss plan. There are numerous examples of people fasting in the Scripture, including Jesus, yet there aren't any direct commands for us to fast today. However, in the passages that we just read, Jesus assumes that we are going to fast.

The Bible presents fasting as something that is good and beneficial, and even a normal part of the Christian life.

- *What is your experience with fasting?*
- *What are you hoping to experience if you are doing the Daniel fast?*

TIMES TO FAST

What good is it to do a fast? When you read the Bible, we see there are lots of reasons to engage in a fast. These include:

1. When you have a major decision to make.
2. When difficult times hit you or when you are mourning.

3. To call for justice.
4. When you feel too attached to the comforts and pleasures of the physical world.

In 1 Corinthians 9:27, the apostle Paul says, "But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." We are encouraged to be able to control our urges and impulses. Fasting can help us learn to control our desires.

- *Are you fasting for any of these reasons? If so, which one(s)?*

WHY SHOULDN'T WE FAST?

Fasting can be a powerful spiritual discipline, but it is not beneficial in and of itself. God isn't looking down on us and rewarding us with spiritual blessings just because we fast. Fasting positions us to interact with God—it opens our hearts to the work of the Holy Spirit. Fasting always reminds us of our weaknesses, and consequently, our deeper need for God as the source of our strength. This was Jesus' point in Matthew 4:4. Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights and then Satan tempted him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The primary purpose of biblical fasting is to seek a more intimate relationship with God.

- *In your experience, how does a fast humble you and remind you of your frailty?*
- *How are you being reminded that you need God (whether you are fasting or not)?*
- *What are some practical ways that you have reminded yourself that God is enough for you while fasting (or not fasting, for those who aren't)?*

HOW TO ACT WHILE FASTING

So, how should we act while we are fasting?

- 1) Act normally
- 2) Pray and read the Bible
- 3) Ask God for strength
- 4) Share in Jesus' suffering
- 5) Ask God for direction

- *Which of these behaviors are the hardest for you? Which ones do you want to focus on during this fast?*
- *Pray with each other to grow deeper in relationship with Jesus.*