

God Pleasing Fasting

Brother Yu Hongjie's Sunday Message on Aug 18, 2002

I think many brothers and sisters were very surprised to see this topic when they got today's program. How could we talk about the topic of **fasting which is pleasing to God**? Maybe you think that I am very insecure about the current economic situation. A while ago, we talked about prayers, to have faith and to be positive, and today we also want to talk about fasting. But, fasting has nothing to do with our economic crisis. When the Lord put this burden on me, I was communicating with my two ministers and two elders about this burden three weeks ago, and they all were agreed on the subject.

This is actually a very important topic. If anyone has seriously practiced fasting before, they could testify to you about the resulting blessings. But it is not an easy topic to speak about and even more difficult to listen to. This is because people don't like this practice. This subject is more difficult for Christians in the United States to speak and hear about, but please forgive me as I say that Christians in the United States need to listen to this topic the most.

Why? Because they don't worry about food and supplies in the United States, life is well provisioned. Brothers and sisters should remember Deuteronomy chapter 8; God warned His people in advance. God said that in the future, after you enter the land I promised, I am afraid you will eat enough, build beautiful houses to live in, the number of sheep will increase, the gold and silver will increase, and you then will become proud and forget the Lord your God.

Brothers and sisters, we have become wealthy. When we came here, we each carried a maximum of two suitcases. Now, when moving, who has just one or two suitcases? All our stuff is accumulated here, and we are well provisioned. The Lord said 'I am afraid that you will forget Jehovah your God' in this way, so I say that the first reason Christians in the United States need to hear about this topic is because the United States is too rich.

Secondly, Christians in the United States need to listen to this topic the most because all Christians should pay special attention to the importance of fasting. Brothers and sisters, if you pay attention a little bit, you will find that many people are practicing fasting. Apart from Christians, other religions are also teaching fasting. Don't say that just Buddhism and Catholicism have fasting.

Islam, now the fastest growing religion in the world, teaches fasting even more. Besides the usual practice, they have also set aside at least one month of the year, called the fasting month (*Ramadan*), they do not eat anything for a whole month from sunrise to sunset. When we went to Israel, the Muslim taxi drivers did not eat during the day.

Even Satanists fast. Once someone asked Satanists, “what do you teach about fasting?” They answered that their most common fasting prayers are that Christian leaders fail, and the family of God divides.

Today, there are many health-related lectures, qigong (a system of breathing and exercise designed to benefit both physical and mental health) lectures and others. They all talk about fasting. Even for asceticism and self-cultivation, people also talk about fasting.

However, it is strange that although there are so many fasting teachings and examples in the Bible, the proportion of God's children who practice fasting is very small. We will visit this topic this morning. Although the young people are here today, and fasting is like giving up their lives, the Scriptures we will read later, tell us that when the whole family of Israel declared fasting, not only older people came to participate, but even children were participating. This is a study of the entire family of God, before the Lord.

Let's read some important verses together. 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us, “*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*” **Don't underestimate our eating and drinking, or not eating or drinking! You all can have a relationship in God's glory, before God.**

Romans 14:17 says, “*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*” Paul tells us elsewhere in the Bible that food is for the stomach and stomach is for the food, but God caused both to be destroyed because eating and drinking is not the most important thing. There are more important things in God's kingdom; justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14: 6-8 talks about the children of God. Whether they eat meat or not, the one who eats, eats for the Lord, because he thanked God. Those who do not eat, they do not eat for the Lord and thank God. Brothers and sisters, whether we fast or not, an important key to whether we eat or drink is whether it is for the Lord. He said, “*For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*” It is the way of life and death, it is even so for eating or not eating. Brothers and sisters, when we talk about fasting today, we are not talking about a requirement, nor a practice, let alone learning what others do. **The key to the**

whole thing is whether it is done for the Lord. Saying that eating and drinking is not so important, or that eating or drinking or not, can all be related to the glory of God.

Let's look at Matthew chapter 6:16-18 again. This is the teaching of Jesus, Himself. Please pay special attention to Jesus' saying, "*while you are fasting,*" the Lord is not saying "if" you are fasting. In Matthew chapter 6 when talking about prayer, giving charity and fasting, the Lord did not add an "if" in front of them. The Lord does not say "if" when you fast, "if" you give or "if" when you pray, the Lord directly says that when you pray, when you do charity, and when you fast, it means that these three things are not indispensable and must be there.

The Bible emphasizes that it is not intended to be seen by others. It says that fasting is very important, but it is not meant to be shown to others. It is not intended to be known to others, but Jesus says that your Father is looking on in secret, He will certainly reward you. Brothers and sisters, true fasting will definitely be valued by our heavenly Father. **If there is someone who really fasts for God, God will bless him.** This is not what I say, this is what Jesus said. So, I hope our brothers and sisters can learn to value this issue.

Finally, let's read Isaiah chapter 58:3-9. This is an important passage in the Bible regarding fasting. The people say, "*Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?*" But God said, "*Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.*" *If we fast but do evil in the presence of the Lord, this fast will not work. "Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord?"* Fasting is hard work, and fasting is acceptable to God. But, "*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"* The important purpose of fasting here is to release the bondage of people, whether it is the bondage within ourselves, the people around us, family members or brothers and sisters who are tied up by the enemy. Fasting allows us to take God's power here and be released from bondage, from sin, from disease, from misfortune. It is also mentioned here that the poor man who is wandering should be taken home, and when he is naked, we cover him with clothes and care for his flesh without hiding. A person who fasts can break away from being self-centered and be able to love others. Then God talks about fasting that is pleasing to Him, and how God will bless, "*Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of*

the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'”

Brothers and sisters, many times we cannot pray because we have not fasted. I am not saying that we must treat ourselves with distress so that God sympathizes with us. That is asceticism, the concept of redemption from sin, this is not the ideas of Christians. But why does God so easily hear those who fast and pray? Because fasting shows that we are so serious and urgent to face God, our own errors are corrected by being close to God. We pray urgently and God accepts our prayer.

I. What is “fasting”? (Zechariah 7: 5, Ezra 10: 6, Esther 4:16, Acts 9: 9, Daniel 10: 2-3)

—Don’t eat or even drink for God and His will

We have finished reading a few important verses; let’s look at what fasting is. In the history of the church, most fasting means not eating, but people need water to drink, so some people call this *normal fasting*, people just don’t eat but still drink water. If it is *complete fasting*, there will be neither eating nor drinking, but this cannot be too long. We see examples in the Bible for up to three days, so if you don’t eat or drink for more than three days, you must have special guidance to do that, and don’t do it casually. Moses did it. He pleaded for God’s people for forty days and nights on the mountain, praying, not eating nor drinking. In the Bible, Ezra did not eat or drink when he was sad for the family of God. In the book of Esther, when the entire people of Israel were in danger of extermination, Esther said to them, “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day.” In Acts 9, when Paul saw the vision, he could not see, eat nor drink for three days. Brothers and sisters, these examples are *complete fasting*, no eating nor drinking.

Now let’s look at *partial fasting*. In Daniel 10:2-3, “*In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks.*” Here, we see that it’s not just about not eating or drinking, but on our appetite to deal with some of our special cravings, and put them down in the presence of the Lord, even for things besides food, for example, he didn’t anoint his body.

So, to the young people here, if you really feel that fasting is so difficult for you, there are many things we can learn to put down for God’s will. I’ve heard many brothers and sisters practice stop watching TV for a period of time, stop watching movies, or stop drinking or eating something in particular, because those things attract them, especially. This is a relatively broad fasting. Some people fast from speaking. Sister Nancy may object to this one as this morning she just talked about communication between husband and wife in our Sunday school class. But not speaking does not have the intention of not communicating. We learn to have a sacred rest in walking with

God, and we reduce all unnecessary conversations. Brothers and sisters, **fasting can be multifaceted. The key is not to eat or drink for God and God's will's sake.**

II Why do I need to fast? (Under what circumstances do I need to fast?)

Why do I need to fast and under what circumstances do I do it? I will quickly mention seven points. For the convenience of everyone's memory, I will divide them into three categories: from the perspective of God, from the perspective of man, and from the perspective of the enemy.

(A) From a human perspective

From a human perspective, the first reason for fasting is to practice Godliness, the second is when facing important decisions, and the third is when for special needs, difficulties, or for crises.

(1) Godly exercise

- **Sorrowful and remorseful for sin** (Nehemiah 9: 1-2, 1 King 21:27, 1 Samuel 7: 6)

When it comes to the practice of Godliness, the most basic thing is when we are sad and regretful of our sins. When the people sinned there, Nehemiah gathered the Israelites in sackcloth and dusty heads, they separated from all the Gentiles, stood and confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers. When God inspires us and lets us see individuals, the whole family, or the entire church's debt or sin before the Lord, we declare fasting. Like King Ahab in 1 Kings 21:27. He was such a bad king, Elijah rebuked him and said, "*You have sold yourself, ... Jehovah ... would cause disaster to your whole family.*" After Ahab heard this, he tore his clothes, fasted, and wore linen, and he lay on the bed and walked slowly. Brothers and sisters, even such a terrible King Ahab, when he was reproved, he had such a deep sense of guilt. In today's generation, forgive me for saying this, but it is a very dark generation, we cover our ears and do not like to hear others reproach us. When God inspires us, and when God's word comes to us, there seems to be a lack of reaction and lack of feeling in us but we see Ahab rising to tear his clothes and fasting. In addition, in the book of Samuel we see God's people gather before Jehovah, fasting and saying, 'we have sinned against Jehovah,' and Samuel was there to judge God's people. So, the first aspect of Godly discipline speaks of our sorrow for sin.

- **Conquer myself and discipline my body** (1 Corinthians 9: 26-27)

Another aspect of Godly practice is to “*discipline my body and keep it under control.*” Paul tells us, “*So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control.*”

Brothers and sisters, if you don't practice fasting, you can't appreciate how much food binds us. The book “The Power of Fasting and Praying” (by Bill Bright) has many testimonies. This is a book written by the founder of the Campus Crusade for Christ (now CRU). He received many emails, letters, and faxes regarding their testimonies of fasting for forty days.

When people started fasting, many found that food had such a strong binding on them. The whole person felt uncomfortable without a meal. In the end, they couldn't do anything. All we think about is food, we start to feel dizzy, start to have headaches, and many feelings and thoughts begin to come out. Those who have spoken about fasting have consulted doctors. Fasting for fewer than three days or occasional fasting or partial fasting will not harm your body. The hungry situation is because the human body is used to eating more naturally. The feeling of hunger is different from your true hunger. If you really fall into hunger, there will be problems in nutrition and health.

Hunger is felt by almost everyone at any time, especially teenagers, who feel hungry every day. When fasting, we learn to conquer ourselves and discipline our bodies. If you are a slave to food, you will find that you have no way to fast from food; if you are slaves to television and movies, you will find that you cannot help but watch TV or movies; the same is true for online gaming, drugs, smoking, drinking, etc, ...

Paul said, “*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.*” **How do you know if you are under control? It is to learn to let go. If I cannot be free in this matter, I will say that I have been under its control.** The Bible says, “*Do you not know who you obey, who you are slaves to?*” Brothers and sisters, that hunger will lead us to the food. There's a joke and it goes like this: a wife always wanted to fast but she couldn't as she just loved to eat. Finally, she made a good reason to think that there is a fat ghost in the food and said to drive that ‘fat ghost’ away, she was free to eat what she loved. Her husband told her humorously, “If this kind of ghost doesn't fast, we can't drive it away.”

Brothers and sisters, I am not saying that we must learn to practice penance, this is not what I meant, we want to learn to be free in these things that bind us. I have had severe migraines myself. The doctor and books both said that hunger was the easiest way to stimulate a migraine. My own experience was the same. When I was hungry, I had a migraine. Five or six years ago, when I started having migraines, I immediately faced a challenge, whether I should fast and pray. Brothers and sisters, in the presence of the Lord, I am not willing for spiritual blessings to be

taken away, due to the weakness of the body, so I would rather have a headache when necessary. I don't want to let go of fasting prayer. The body is temporary, God's will is forever.

- **Praying more attentively or crossing the spiritual barrier** (Luke 2:37, Acts 9: 9, 11)

We fast, also, to be able to pray more intently, when we are crossing the spiritual barrier, or when we need a breakthrough, spiritually. In the second chapter of Luke, the 84-year-old prophet Anna often fasted and prayed in the temple, **so fasting was helpful to pray more attentively and to face God more seriously.**

Fasting is more than just not eating. If we teach fasting only to make brothers and sisters feel that we sometimes can't eat, then it is completely misunderstood. There are instances when you don't eat. When your wife doesn't make dinner for you or when you get up late in the morning and you must catch up with work, you may not have eaten a meal. So, what is fasting? Fasting is when we can pray more intently facing God, or when there is a spiritual barrier to pass.

For example, we are longing for the Holy Spirit but cannot find the way, or you are called to serve the Lord full time and wondering if God really wants you to lay down your profession and serve Him. Or when God calls but you can't build up your strength, and promise to come ... brothers and sisters, fasting and praying can often help us to get through or take us through.

(2) In the face of important choices or decisions (Judges 20:26)

In Judges 20:26, the Israelites failed twice in a row in fighting against Benjaminites. They wondered if God wanted them to fight Benjaminites. You find that they all prayed for God before they went to fight, but after losing twice in a row, they were completely confused. It was clear that Benjaminites should be beaten but why would they fail continuously? In the end, could they fight with them again? So, chapter 20 tells us that they went up to Bethel, sat before the Lord and wept, fasted until the evening, and sacrificed before the Lord. That day, after they fasted and sacrificed, they understood the will of God, and this time they went up and won. Brothers and sisters, **we often need to come to prayer for important things. If this matter is so important in your life, it deserves fasting and prayer.** For example, if we have a big decision to make in marriage, or if we are going to have surgery or receive medical treatment from a doctor, brothers and sisters, when something big comes to us, we should all go to the Lord and pray.

I remember in 1992, when I was called to serve, I didn't know where to go to serve the Lord. I prayed for three places at that time, the first was to stay in place, the second to a city to the north, and the third to a city to the south. Nancy and I drove to the city to the north, and after praying there, I thought it was not the one. After returning, I always prayed to go south or to stay in

Cupertino. At that time, if I wanted to, I would have prayed to leave here, but because this matter was too important, I fasted and prayed in the presence of the Lord. After we talked, we decided to stay. Brothers and sisters, there are often many such important choices in our lives.

(3) For special needs, difficulties, or crises (2 Chronicles 20:3, Ezra 8:21)

Oftentimes, difficulties come to us, we are either seriously ill or our family is facing a crisis. If you often fast and pray, you may not come to this point. But many times, there are sudden difficulties, such as an extramarital affair crisis or an economic storm. As 2 Chronicles 20 says here, the Ammonites, King Moab, King Aram, and even the people of Mount Seir united to fight the Israelites, and Jehoshaphat was afraid, but he decided to seek Jehovah. He proclaimed fasting throughout Judah. Not only did he fast and pray by himself, he declared that the whole nation would come to fast and pray together. In Ezra 8:21, when Ezra was about to lead the people to go back, they knew that enemies would come to attack and kill them along the way. So, before they set out, they declared fasting by the river.

In many cases, difficulties make us pray more urgently to the Lord, not necessarily for our own difficulties, but also fasting and praying of those whom we love. On several occasions, when the children of our brothers and sisters needed to have major operations we all prayed for them and fasted. Or when they encountered some major difficulties, we often needed to pray for them. Brothers and sisters, we must pray for ourselves, for those we love, and for the difficulties of those around us. More often, we should pray and fast for the church that God loves.

(B) From God's perspective

(1) For the manifestation and execution of God's will (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23)

As Acts 13:2 says, while they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" They fasted and prayed, laid their hands on their heads, and sent them away. You find that **when we fast, the Holy Spirit speaks**, and when it comes to sending workers, we should fast and pray. In Acts 14:23, where they elected the elders, they fasted and prayed to entrust them to the Lord in Whom they believed. So, we can pray for God's will to be revealed and carried out. When we come to the house of God to buy a property, the house of God's ordination and commanding affairs, we should be fasting and in prayer. The family of God is also like an individual; we will face important choices, special needs, difficulties or crises. This is when we fast and pray for God's will to be manifested.

(2) For the revival and blessing of God's family (Daniel 9:3, 17-19)

When Daniel heard that the people of God could return after seventy years, he fasted in sackcloth and ashes, determined to pray to God, and he especially prayed for revival in chapter 9, verses 17 to 19. Brothers and sisters, **every revival of the church is based on mature and urgent prayers.** When the church is weak, sinful, and does not obey God's words, those who love God must never stop in just criticizing, lamenting, or sorrowing, but must rise to pray for the restoration of the family of God. As Daniel's urgent prayers say, *“Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.”* It is the same for children problems in the family, couples or other family issues. If we often have such an urgent prayer before the Lord, you will find wonderful things and transformations begin to happen.

Why is our church announcing fasting and prayer next Tuesday? When I was communicating with my brethren three weeks ago, I said that I had two important burdens and wanted to ask my brothers and sisters to fast and pray.

The first one is because of the beginning of our new ministry year. I hope that all of those who are involved in the ministry will dedicate themselves to God. We are not just doing things in the church and helping out, we are here to serve the living God. I hope that each of us who is in the ministry is alone - as if we came to the altar and dedicated ourselves to God. For our coming year's ministry, we ask God for grace, to bless us, to fill us with God's spirit and to use us.

Secondly, I especially have a burden for our children as the new semester has begun. As children grow up, we understand more and more about their situation in school. I believe that parents here will worry about not only the safety issues, but the entire environment and their friends' problems. We don't know what kind of people they encounter. We need to pray that God will keep their integrity, even if our parents seem to neglect it, or if we want to help them but we can't. Not only do parents need to pray for these children, the children here, before starting the school year, must have a good prayer life and pray for them to go through this world without being polluted or hurt. I hope brothers and sisters, if time permits, we all come to fast and pray on Tuesday night. I want to mention it again that if you have personal health problems, you don't need to fast, but on the other hand, brothers and sisters, we don't need to be so considerate of our weakness. A meal is really nothing compared with other brothers and sisters who often practice fasting for twenty-one or forty days. If you like, you can even fast all day long. Brothers and sisters, we are to pray for restoration and blessing for the family of God.

(C) From the enemy's perspective

(1) When facing spiritual warfare (1 Peter 4:1-3, Matthew 4:1-2, 17-21)

When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, He gave us a good example for fasting forty days and nights before God. I believe that there are many temptations around us. Some temptations may be easier to overcome. Others may directly touch our hearts and touch us deeply. These are often the places where our spiritual life loopholes are. If we ignore them or don't take care of them, then we will live lives of receiving the blessing in the presence of the Lord but also missing the blessing some other time, repeatedly. **We need to pray urgently before God for the most vulnerable parts within ourselves.** Regardless of whether it is in the deception of money or lust of the flesh, at any point, you need to seriously pray before God if you know your most vulnerable point. In Matthew 17, Jesus also tells us, *“as for this type of demon, it will not come out but by prayer and fasting.”* Some enemies are so powerful that **we need to fast so the Lord's authority will be unhindered through us.** Some demons will be cast out in the name of Jesus. However, in Mark 9 and Matthew 17, the disciples couldn't cast out the child's demon in the name of God. We are very much like this too. Many times, regardless of how we pray, our difficulties are still there. Is it because our Master has saved some tricks and has not taught them to us? Or is there something wrong by calling on His name?

The name of God is always above all names and it is always right to call His name. But when the authority and power represented by the name of God pass through us, we often obstruct them. It's not because of God's name, it's because of us. Therefore, when this type of demon does not come out but by prayer and fasting, it is not because there is something wrong with God's name, it's because of us.

One of the most important things about fasting is that I can put down my right to eat for the sake of God and the enemy. When we have a lot of old flesh, God's power and authority are often discounted in us. **When we are more willing to deny ourselves, God's power and authority can then come out of us, and fasting is a testimony and declaration of self-denial and a reality.**

Because eating is not sin, and eating is the most legitimate power and enjoyment for a person, **when I know God's will, in order to permit God's will to pass through me and defeat the enemy, I can let go of my most legitimate enjoyment and right. This will make the enemy afraid and make God's authority and power come out of us without any compromise.**

(2) When facing enemy attacks (Nehemiah 1:4, Esther 4:3, 16)

When Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed, the gates were burned by fire, and the people were tortured and humiliated, he sat down and wept and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. Brothers and sisters, when church, your health, family, economic environment, or spiritual life is under attack from the enemies, I urge you to fast and pray.

Esther said that Haman was coming to exterminate the Jews. They were planning to kill all men, women, and children on December 13 of that year. So, wherever the king's imperial rule went, there was lots of mourning, fasting, crying, wailing, wearing sackcloth and lying in ashes. It was a deadly situation, but Esther called on God's people to fast and pray and the whole situation changed greatly. **When God's family faces enemy attacks, we don't just cry, weep, or lie in ashes. We must raise up, fast, pray and cry out for God's salvation. God will turn our defeat into victory, and the enemies will be greatly shamed.**

III Things to watch out for when implementing fasting

(1) Focusing on God and fasting for God (Zechariah 7:5) Much different from penance and asceticism

There are a few things we need to pay attention to when fasting. Zechariah 7:5 tells us that it is fasting to God, so we are not fasting to show others and fasting is not asceticism. Ascetics allow the body to suffer in order to redeem their guilt and to cover their sins. Our fasting is toward God and for God, it is with such a clear objective and purpose.

(2) It is focused on your heart and truth (Matthew 6:16-18)

Secondly, fasting focuses on heart and honesty. Jesus said that we don't need to show it to others on purpose, but you don't have to hide or even lie on purpose either. If you happen to be fasting and go to other people's place and they ask you to come in to eat, you don't need to say sorry, I just ate, or I am not hungry. We don't mean to show it to others, but we don't need to lie to cover it up either, because God cares about what we really do. A brother said that once their church decided on fasting and prayer in order to buy a property, the church fasted and prayed at six o'clock, but he couldn't stand it and ran to the Kentucky Fried Chicken at 5:30 and ate snacks. What he meant was that he wasn't eating supper but his stomach was full, and then he went back to fast and to pray. This completely loses the meaning of fasting. Some people skip one meal and overeat the next. Some people know that they can't eat the next meal, so they eat double servings for this meal. Brothers and sisters, these are not right fasting. All other meals during this period should be normal, whether you fast one meal a day, two meals a day, or more, you need to be truthful.

(3) The focus is not on refraining to eat, or drink, or how long the fast is, but to be able to face God and the will of God more seriously in prayers (Isaiah 58:3-9, Luke 2:37)

The focus is not on not eating or drinking, and the focus is not on the length of fasting. It is unnecessary to go around and compare with others. Say, I am fasting for forty days, how many days do you fast? Oh, you are only for twenty-one days! Oh my God! You just skipped one meal! This is simply the fasting that God dislikes. Jesus specifically said, ‘the Pharisees said that I fasted for two days a week, and that I dedicated one tenth to God every week’, but God blamed the Pharisees for hypocrisy. Fasting needs to be real, and it is important that we spend more time praying to understand and face God's will. **Fasting without prayer does nothing and does not please God.**

(4) It is the Godly practice that we all should always have, but be moderate and balanced (Joel 1:14, 2:15-16, Jeremiah 36:9, Joel 2:12-13)

Fasting is a Godly discipline that we all should often practice. The first chapter of Joel tells us to consecrate a fast; to call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord. Throughout the Old Testament, it was a common occurrence for God’s people to be fasting throughout the country. Joel 2:15-16 says, *“Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.”* This fasting was comprehensive and age neutral.

Later, God talked about His responses. Jehovah was compassionate for His people and for His land. Jehovah answered His people and said *“Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations”* Finally, let us read together Joel 2:12-13. *“Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster.”* Brothers and sisters, God cares that we return to Him with one heart through fasting, and that we tear our hearts, not tear our clothes, and return to Him so that all the rich love and grace will come from God to us. It is not just for ourselves, but for the people around us, even more for God’s family. We need to have such prayers, often.

I hope that more people in our church will raise up, fast, and pray before our Lord often for the families of God, for ourselves, for our own families and children.

<Prayer>

Lord, you are a compassionate and merciful God. How you hope that we often come to the throne of grace, through prayers - we can come to you with one heart and understand you by prayers. You allow us to obey your will through prayer; to make your enemies fail, to revive your family, to bless your children, and to make your will pass through. Lord, please revive us! We often overlook that the world tempts and rules us so deeply through all kinds of enjoyment. Please let us be willing, for your sake, to learn to let go of our most legitimate rights, so that we can overcome our flesh and desire through various foods and enjoyments which rule over us. May there be more of us fasting and praying to God and for God. Bless us, be kind to your church, pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!