

## *Kingdom Perspective*

# **VOX CHURCH FASTING PLAN**

*Fasting, joined with prayer, is a powerful spiritual practice leading to real transformation. As we seek God, he shifts our worldly perspective to a kingdom perspective.*

*When we experience natural hunger, it's usually a craving or an urgent need for food. Spiritual hunger is also a craving—an inner cry for more of God. It's a hunger that yearns for more of him and less of me. But because it necessitates an intentional slowing down and deeper focus on our relationship with Jesus, it runs counterintuitive to our current pace and cultural values. However, as followers of Jesus, we are called to seek first his kingdom and righteousness.*

*This week, we will discover together that the ways of God's kingdom are often in direct contrast to the practices of modern culture. When the world moves fast, the way of Jesus often moves slow. When the world wants everything bigger, Jesus might call us to pursue smaller things.*

*Our biblical text for this week is found in Matthew 5:3–12, commonly known as the Beatitudes. These verses describe nine distinct conditions that, while we might consider a struggle or a weakness, Jesus actually calls them blessed. The meaning of the word blessed is incredibly fortunate, favored, or well-off. Yes, you read that correctly! Today's culture would more likely ascribe this description to a star athlete, celebrity, or millionaire. Jesus uses blessed instead to describe the poor in spirit, those in mourning, or the persecuted. What a sharp contrast God's kingdom is to the kingdoms of this world!*

*You are invited to join the Vox family in this sacred adventure seeking God. With Scripture and God's Spirit to guide us, God will shift our perspectives from earthly and natural to heavenly and kingdom-centered. Will you open your heart to his Word and Spirit and expect to encounter a new and truer reality? Will you allow God to change you from the inside out? God is eager to answer our prayers. Just watch and see!*

### **Step One: Set your purpose and share your vision.**

- Fasting can be a struggle when our timing is random, impromptu, and aimless. Use this guide to create structure and purpose for this week.
- Define your personal spiritual goals for this week. Ask God to help you as you take the time to write out what you desire for this week.
- Ask a friend to walk with you in this process. Talk through your fasting commitments and check in often during the week.

### **Step Two: Pick your fast.**

- Full fast: Drink liquids only. If you have a persistent medical condition, please consult your physician first.
- Daniel fast: Eat only vegetables, fruit, water, and juice.
- Partial fast: Skip one or two meals on specific days or abstain from certain foods.
- All-day food fast: Abstain from food for one day or multiple specific days.

### **Step Three: Adjust your rhythms.**

- Don't just abstain from food or activities—feast on God's Word and his presence.
- Turn off the TV and put down your phone. Instead, allow this week to be a time to take ground in Bible study and prayer.
- Use the guide to meet with God at the beginning and end of every day.

### **Step Four: Prepare your heart.**

- Enter this fast by faith.
- Ask for and expect an increased awareness of your need for God and his constant presence.
- Move away from self-reliance and lean into deeper spiritual dependence.
- Expect breakthrough! Believe for spiritual awakening and answered prayer for yourself and others.

### **Tips for using the fasting guide**

*As you use this guide daily, recognize that each section has a specific purpose.*

- **Reading**—These are the focus verses for today. Read them several times, slowly, silently, and out loud.
- **Scripture Reflection**—Use the prompts to meditate on God's truth as you journal. Don't rush through them. Invite God's Spirit to speak. Journal what you sense God saying to you.
- **The Exchange**—Each day, we are trading a natural and earthly perspective for a kingdom-of-God truth. Use this section as a prayer of faith to God. Believe he is doing a deep work in you as you seek him.
- **Vox Prayer Focus** — Use the prompt to pray in agreement over each Vox Campus.
- **Nightly Examen** — End your day with a sacred and focused time with God.

# MONDAY

## *Today I am fasting*

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### Read Matthew 5: 3–4.

#### Scripture Reflection

What does it mean to be *poor in spirit*? It's quite contrary to today's individualistic culture. Americans are expected to be self-reliant and independent. From a young age, we thrive on competition and are taught that reward is based on one's ability to work hard and win. The text doesn't suggest a passive approach to life. It is, however, describing the blessed life of a follower of Jesus as one marked by dependence, humility, simplicity, and a sense of abandonment to God. One who is poor in spirit is keenly aware of their urgent need for redemption. At the root of their lives is a grace that allows the dismantling of self-will, self-reliance, and a competitive spirit. This condition of soul and spirit is only possible through surrender to the transformational work of God's Spirit.

- What areas of your life are you comfortable and self-sufficient?
- Where are your eyes so fixed on earthly success that remaining poor in spirit is challenging?
- Bring these areas to God and allow him to speak to you.

*Those who mourn* are expressing grief or sorrow over someone or something lost. In the heart of the follower of Jesus, mourning is also expressed as a lament over one's own sin, another's oppression, or the rampant injustice we see in the world. Someone once said, "Mourners are aching visionaries, longing to see his kingdom and his will done on earth as it is in heaven." However, mourning and lament are both costly and inconvenient – that's why often our first instinct is to turn away from our pain and the suffering of others. The good news is that our Jesus is "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." Learning to mourn with God and others is perhaps one of the greatest means of spiritual transformation, as God walks with us in our suffering.

- What losses have you denied or buried?
- How will you make time to invite Jesus into mourning these losses?
- Who in your life needs you to "weep with those who weep"?

#### The Exchange

Father, I lay down my self-reliance and ask you to teach me to be poor in spirit, ever dependent on you and your grace.

Father, I bring every loss and sin I have avoided into your presence. I run to you with these. Heal me. Cleanse me. I receive your comfort, your peace, and your love.

Amen.

#### Vox Prayer Focus

Pray that God's kingdom would come, and his will be done in every leader and every member of the Vox New Haven and Branford campuses. Allow God's Spirit to direct you in prayer.

#### Nightly Examen

Begin with one minute of silence. Consider these questions:

- What am I most grateful for right now?
- When did I resist facing my (or someone else's) pain today?

Reflect, repent, and respond as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Closing Prayer: *Father, I receive your love for me. Lead me in the way of trust. Amen.*

# TUESDAY

## *Today I am fasting*

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### Read Matthew 5: 5–6.

#### Scripture Reflection

In God's kingdom, ***the meek shall inherit the earth***. Our world cannot fathom strength, gain, or power proceeding from meekness. This stems from a misunderstanding around the biblical meaning of meekness. It does not mean indifference or weakness, and it does not come naturally. Meekness is a willingness to lay down our fixed opinions, certainties, and objections. It's teachability. It's a childlike readiness to learn the ways of Jesus. It's recognizing the deep need, as God's chosen ones, to clothe ourselves with the virtues of God's kingdom. It's the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. This spiritual strength is a product of deep trust in God. It's always a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will.

- Where in your life are you prone to always desire to win the argument? How can you begin to trust God in those situations and listen more?
- Think through your closest relationships. How are you displaying the spiritual strength of gentleness with each one?
- Bring these areas to God and allow him to speak to you.

***A hunger and thirst for righteousness*** are critical for Christian growth and maturity, representing a desperately felt need. What we long for is where we expend the most heart and energy. Sadly, that desire is often misplaced towards things that will never fully satisfy. The relationship, the promotion, the acceptance, or the next thing money can buy. Could the great barrier to a desperate hunger and thirst for righteousness be simply a failure to desire it enough? Is our fundamental aspiration not to upset life but to keep it as is—ultimately, keeping us from the true and abundant life Jesus offers? Remember, God's lovingkindness leads us to repent or turn away from anything we put before him. He is always after our good. *"If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great."* —John Piper

- As you read the quote, what resonates with your heart today?
- What areas of your life are so *stuffed* there's no room for God?
- How is God inviting you to respond today?

#### The Exchange

Lord Jesus, I desire to learn from you. I lay down my self-reliance and stubbornness. By your Spirit, begin a work of meekness in my soul. I want to be more like you.

Lord Jesus, please forgive me for being satisfied with worldly things and neglecting my life in you. I turn away from them and towards you. I receive a changed heart that hungers and thirsts for your righteousness.

Amen.

#### Vox Prayer Focus

Pray that God's kingdom would come, and his will be done in every leader and every member of the Vox North Haven and Middletown campuses. Allow God's Spirit to direct you in prayer.

#### Nightly Examen

Begin with one minute of silence. Consider these questions:

- When was I teachable today?
- When did I love others well today?

Closing Prayer: *Holy Spirit, clothe me in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Amen.*

# WEDNESDAY

## *Today I am fasting*

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### Read Matthew 5: 7–8.

#### Scripture Reflection

Showing mercy is one thing; being *merciful* is another. While doing acts of mercy should be a hallmark in the life of a Christian, what does it mean to *be* merciful? This deeper walk of being merciful seems to require more than outward action. Could it be the ability to get inside another's skin – to see as they see, feel what they are feeling? Does it mean to suffer with the suffering? One thing is for sure. It seems costly as it demands involvement and investment in a world where preoccupation with self is prevalent.

Today, God is inviting us to walk as Jesus did. To see a person as more than a problem and to see someone suffering. To see his sense of hopelessness or worthlessness and his longing for hope and change. To see him as *we each desire to be seen*. Someone in need of mercy. God's Spirit exercises mercy through us to bring the real, tangible hope of the gospel to the world. The first step to being merciful is a deep awareness of one's need for mercy.

- Use Blue Letter Bible app or another search engine, and search the New Testament for verses about **mercy**.
- Spend time meditating on two or three verses. Commit them to memory.
- Journal the truth you are discovering about mercy.

***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*** Pure in heart. Seems impossible, huh? This world can make our hearts feel heavy. It can pull our eyes down to focus on the people and things around us. It convinces us to prioritize image above substance, while God invites us to find true identity in Christ.

Fear of rejection or failure drives us into hiding. Social media doesn't help, as we curate an image others can admire. But God whispers to you and me, "***Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see me.***" If you're reading this, you also long to see God. How do we find a pure heart beating inside us? We begin by taking our eyes off ourselves and setting them on Jesus. We place our faith and trust in his life, death, and resurrection, knowing that the work of the cross is enough. Knowing that the life we live, we live by faith in Jesus. Our hearts are stripped of self and filled with the fullness of God—our vision shifts from self to Jesus. We fix our eyes on him, and we see God.

- In what areas of your life do you need to lay down an image you've curated for the approval of others?
- Read Romans 5:1–11, Galatians 3:23–29, or Ephesians 2:1–10. What do these passages say about God? Journal what you

#### The Exchange

O God, I am too quick to judge or distance myself from hurting people. I lay down preoccupation with my own needs and judgment of those struggling. I don't want only to *do* acts of mercy; I want a merciful heart. Please do this work in me by your Spirit.

O God, I exchange my curated and false identity for true identity found in Christ. Help me fix my eyes on you. Create in me a clean and pure heart. I trust in you.

Amen.

#### Vox Prayer Focus

Pray that God's kingdom would come, and his will be done in every leader and every member of the Vox Hartford, Springfield, and Worcester campuses. Allow God's Spirit to direct you in prayer.

#### Nightly Examen

Begin with one minute of silence. Consider these questions:

- When and to whom did I express God's mercy today?
- Did I hide behind any shred of curated image today?

Closing Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for being merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. I rest in Christ alone tonight. Amen.*

# THURSDAY

## *Today I am fasting*

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### Read Matthew 5: 9–10.

#### Scripture Reflection

In verse 9, Jesus tells us, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*" Human nature tends to divide the world according to people like us and those who are not. Simply put, us versus them. Our brains are wired to trust those who look like us, act like us, and even like the same things we like. We tend to be suspicious of those who are different. But Jesus is calling us to a higher level of living. He is calling us to life in his kingdom. He is calling us to sonship. But how is this even possible?

Scripture tells us that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father." This means we are no longer slaves to human nature. We are sons and daughters of God. By his Spirit, we put off the old man, with its prejudices and practices, and put on the new man. It's a lifelong journey of obeying God's Word through the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

- The first place to begin peacemaking is our closest relationships. Ask God to show you the next step.
- In what area of your life have you fostered an *us-versus-them* paradigm? Seek God for specific ways to change that narrative. Commit to the process.

Jesus sends us out as his disciples to preach the good news. We go as bearers of light into dark places. Often, this may result in being *persecuted for righteousness' sake*. To be persecuted means to be harassed, mistreated, or suffer hostility. This ranges from insults, isolation, and humiliation to arrest, torture, prison, or death. In Western culture, we suffer persecution that assaults our souls more than our physical well-being. Friends and family may mock or ridicule. Colleagues may distance themselves from us or humiliate us. Neighbors may exclude us or question our reputation. Friends may walk away, offended by your love for Jesus. However, the text tells us we are incredibly fortunate when we experience this persecution. So, how do we respond? Perhaps rereading the previous seven beatitudes would be a good place to begin.

- When have you shared your faith and been rejected? How did you respond?
- Reread Matthew 5:3–9. How do these verses speak to how you share the gospel with others?
- Search the *persecuted church* in Google. Read about those who suffer physical persecution because of the gospel. Make a prayer list that you will return to every day.

#### The Exchange

Jesus, I lay down my prejudice towards others different from me. Please fill me with your love. Holy Spirit, lead me in reaching out with honor and love toward those I have ignored or avoided.

Jesus, I am sorry for not sharing your gospel because of fear, busyness, or indifference. Please create in me a love for those far from you—an endurance to love even when I feel rejected and an awareness of the blessing it is to bring your light into dark places.

Amen.

#### Vox Prayer Focus

Pray that God's kingdom would come, and his will be done in every leader and every member of the Vox Greater Bridgeport and Greater Stamford campuses. Allow God's Spirit to direct you in prayer.

#### Nightly Examen

Begin with one minute of silence. Consider these questions:

- How did I walk in forgiveness today?
- When did I choose love over fear today?

Closing Prayer: *May my spoken words and my unspoken thoughts be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

# FRIDAY

*Today I am fasting*

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**Read Matthew 5: 11–12.**

### Scripture Reflection

No one likes to be insulted, taunted, or lied about. Our natural and earthly instinct is to retaliate. If you're more aggressive, you defend yourself or lob back an insult or two. If you're more passive, you retreat to an inward fuming with a running loop in your head of what you wish you had said. The world expects these types of reactions. However, Jesus told us that his kingdom is not of this world. Instead, when we are reviled, persecuted, or lied about, Jesus tells us to "**rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**"

Jesus gives us two keys to rejoicing. First, we must look away from a mere earthly perspective and look towards eternal reward. As followers of Jesus, we are convinced that this temporal and fleeting affliction prepares us for an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. Second, we are in good company as the prophets who came before us and the church worldwide have suffered and continue to suffer. Ultimately, our Lord Jesus was despised, forsaken, crushed, afflicted, and pierced. He suffered for our salvation. From this place, we learn to rejoice in all things.

- Settle into a few minutes of stillness. Then, honestly assess your typical response to an insult or a lie about you. Is there any need to turn from earthly reactions and turn towards Spirit-led responses?
- If so, pray a prayer of repentance. By faith, receive cleansing and forgiveness. Rest in faith. Lean into change.
- Is there anyone you need to apologize to because of a recent reaction? If so, ask God to show you how and when. Then, simply obey.

### The Exchange

Father, I release all my defensiveness and pride. I release my need to strike back when hurt or even lied about. I receive a heart of rejoicing. Open my eyes to the price Jesus paid for my salvation. Help me see the reward in heaven you have for me. Teach me to walk in love towards others like never before.

Amen.

### Vox Prayer Focus

Pray that God's kingdom would come, and his will be done in New Britain and Clinton as we launch these two Vox campuses this fall. Allow God's Spirit to direct you in prayer.

### Nightly Examen

Begin with one minute of silence. Consider these questions:

- How did I respond today when things did not go my way?
- Who did I love well today?

Closing Prayer: *Lord, I will never forget your Word, for by it I have life and peace. Give me an understanding heart as I incline my ear towards your Word.*