

FASTING

Thanks for taking the time to read this guide! For the next 7 days, we will be taking some time apart to pray and fast together. For over a thousand years, fasting has been one of the central practices of the Way of Jesus. It was common for apprentices of Jesus to fast twice a week until sundown—on Wednesdays and Fridays. Fasting was simply one of the things that practicing Christians did. It's not about legalism or ritualism. It's about us, as believers, growing more like Jesus, going deeper in our faith, and being able to stand together in agreement as we are led by the Lord.

By taking up our cross daily, we lay down the heavy things of this world that distract us, and we pick up what God has truly called us to. We follow wherever He leads. Dying to ourselves and carrying our cross to follow Jesus is often easier said than done. It's all too easy to fall into the trap of distraction day by day. Whether it's work, school, children, stress, social media, finances, relationship struggles, or unexpected problems and delays that arise—it can all feel overwhelming and drain both our time and energy. With each distraction, it's easy to slip into “autopilot” in our relationship with God. But God never intended for us to have a passive or neutral relationship with Him.

From time to time, in our walk with Christ, it helps to press pause on our daily routines and hit the refresh button on our spiritual lives. One of the best ways to reset and renew our relationship with God is to set aside intentional time for fasting and prayer. Fasting isn't a “quick-fix crash diet.” It's a spiritual discipline designed to help us shift our focus away from something (like food, social media, or TV) and redirect our time, attention, and hearts fully to Jesus.

When we fast, we put aside distractions—even essential things like food—in order to stir up a deeper hunger for the Lord. Some signs that it may be time to fast and pray include feeling weighed down, being stuck in a pattern of sin, feeling oppressed by the enemy, seeking God's direction or answers, or simply needing spiritual renewal. Fasting often reveals the raw state of our hearts. The goal of fasting is not to lose something, but to gain something—a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

There are different ways to fast. The most common is fasting from food, but there are many approaches. We have a church App and a page on our website with detailed information about different fasting practices. Feel free to adapt or combine them in a way that fits your context.

In the end, the most important thing is to ask the Lord what kind of fast He is leading you into. It's not about success or failure—it's about drawing closer to God, laying your daily needs on the altar, and declaring with your life that He is more important than anything else.

Over these next 7 days, we will pray together through the daily devotionals. Then we will break the fast together at the church table! I hope you have a wonderful time seeking the Lord.

Day 1 (26/09)

PRAYER POINT: WRESELING WITH GOD

Read: Genesis 32: 24-32.

In this curious story, Jacob is about to return home to face his brother Esau. But then in the night he is alone and he wrestles with a man. A mere touch on Jacob's hip is enough to make him limp, but he does not give up. He won't stop until the man blesses him. It's the strangest wrestling match in history! The man gives Jacob a new name, Israel: "because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." And he blesses him. By now Jacob realizes that this man is God.

It is okay if we wrestle with God. He won't throw us out of the ring with a flick of his wrist. Even when we wrestle with him, he wants to bless us.

What do you struggle with today? Do you struggle with distractions during fasting and praying? You are not the only one. Who do you struggle with? With God? You can only struggle with God if you are close to him. And if you are close to him, he can bless you.

What happened after the wrestling? Jacob and Esau got reconciled. Have hope, don't give up, and be blessed today.

Let us pray: God, you are dear to us, you are near to us. Hear our pains, hear our prayers, hear our praise. Embrace us,

encourage us, build us up. Your kingdom come. In Jesus' name. Amen

Day 2 (27/09)

PRAYER POINT: KINGDOM UNITY IN ADVERSITY

Since the pandemic, much has changed—and not all for the good. Division has grown in our world, our communities, and even our churches and families. It's not hidden; just look at the news or at the people near you. There is real pain, unrest, and discord.

Yet this shaking is also birthing both rebellion and revival. God is using this season to purify His Church. The middle ground is shrinking; there is no room for being neutral or lukewarm. A line is being drawn between those who love Him and those who reject Him—because light and darkness do not mix, just as oil and water cannot. **Read:** Luke 11:23.

We are called to live in the world but not be of it. This is not the time to hide or compromise out of fear. Jesus challenges us to take up our cross and truly follow Him—not with arrogance, but with courageous loyalty and love. **Read:** Matthew 10:16.

Nothing in this world can compare to the salvation Jesus has given us. We need divine wisdom and discernment so that the Word of God remains the only truth, above every ideology, tradition, or movement—otherwise even good things can become idolatry. He is calling us up higher, to know Him fully in all His facets—the Lamb and the Lion, the Prince of Peace and the Divider, the Alpha and the Omega. His desire is that we be closely interwoven with Him and with one another, like vine and branches, leaving no room for the enemy's schemes.

Jesus prayed: **Read:** John 17:22–23.

True wisdom, understanding, and discernment come from Him. Staying close to Him gives us the clarity and courage to choose well, stay obedient, and walk in unity with His people.

Let us pray: Lord, forgive us for the times we have compromised or grown fearful. Strengthen us to stand firm in all of Who You are. Keep us united in faith and close to You. Open our eyes to the enemy's schemes. Make us people who build bridges and multiply Your love. Give us Your wisdom, discernment, and courage to obey You no matter the cost. Help us to be the head and not the tail, because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. In Jesus's holy name, Amen.

Day 3 (28/09)

PRAYER POINT: FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness can be one of the hardest things we will ever have to do, especially if we do not receive an apology for an offense or wrongdoing against us. However, we cannot walk in full wholeness if we are carrying around bitterness or unforgiveness within us, even if it is justifiable by the world's standards. When we carry unforgiveness within us, we are hurting ourselves more than we are ever hurting anyone else.

Jesus said, **Read:** Matthew 6:14-15. This may seem like a rather bold statement, that our forgiveness is tied to how we forgive, but the truth of the matter is, we were forgiven before Jesus ever received an apology.

Read: Romans 5:8. In comparison, the way we forgive others is minimal compared to how we have been forgiven.

Today, make the bold decision to release those who have offended and wronged you, whether they ever have or ever will apologize. Forgiveness does not deny consequences, but it means we give our right for justice to God.

But this does mean you get to walk a little lighter today! When we forgive, the enemy loses!

Let us pray: God, I thank You that You forgave me for everything I have ever done or will ever do long before I ever even thought to apologize and repent. Today I choose to reflect

Your love by releasing and forgiving [name person or people]. I set them free as an act of my will from any unresolved issues or bitterness, and I choose to show them an abundance of grace as I have been shown an abundance of grace by You. I choose to bless them and ask that Your hand would cover them everywhere they go. I ask for discernment when it comes to the future of our relationship with one another. I thank You that this weight of unforgiveness has been lifted off my life. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 4 (29/09)

PRAYER POINT: TRUSTING IN THE LORD

Read: Proverbs 3:5-8.

There are moments when life looks uncertain, when we don't get the answers we want, when we don't know which direction to go. It's tempting to lean on your own wisdom, experiences, and reasoning to make decisions that would make our lives easier and more comfortable. But often because we try to do things our way, we exchange God's plans for personal short-term solutions that give us the feeling like we have control.

However, God invites us to do something much greater, surrendering the parts we like to keep in our control and to trust Him fully.

Trusting the Lord means placing our faith not in what we see, but in who He is. He is faithful in every circumstance of our lives and is wise and loving to help us confront the doubt and situations we experience. When we lean on Him instead of ourselves, we can be sure that He'll guide us in the right direction. This isn't necessarily the easiest road, but it is the right one.

Choosing to trust in Him protects us from other paths that lead us into sin. Walking with Him affects our well-being and brings us peace that strengthens us inside and outside.

Reflection: Where am I tempted to rely on my own understanding instead of trusting God?

What would it look like for me to submit my plans to Him today?

Let us pray: Lord, teach me to trust You with all my heart. Help me to surrender my worries, my plans, and my need for control into Your hands. Help me to lean on Your wisdom instead of my own understanding. Guide me, keep me close to You and let my life bring glory to Your name. In Jesus name, Amen.

Day 5 (30/09)

PRAYER POINT: PERSEVERANCE

Life can sometimes feel like a long, heavy march.

Recently, I watched a military competition where participants carried massive packs without knowing how long the challenge would last. Many wanted to give up. But those who discovered they had more strength inside than they thought finished stronger than they imagined.

Our lives have moments like that too—pressures at work, in our families, with finances, or health. Sometimes, we can't see the end, and our faith starts to falter.

Job understood this. After losing everything, he said: **Read:** Job 1:21.

And Jesus, in Gethsemane, prayed: **Read:** Luke 22:42.

Both show us that perseverance doesn't mean pretending things are easy. It means trusting God even when it's hard.

Paul writes: **Read:** Romans 5:3–5.

So, if you feel weighed down, remember: God has not abandoned you. His Spirit is with you. Keep moving forward, even if your steps are small.

Knowing that we have the grace of our heavenly Father, that we are in Christ through faith in Jesus, and that the Holy Spirit is by our side—this gives us the strength to endure. But we must continue to seek Him in the midst of our struggles.

Let us pray: Lord, thank You that we can endure through Your strength. Help us to hold fast to hope, knowing that You are faithful to Your promises. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 6 (01/10)

PRAYER POINT: GOD'S STRENGTH IN DIFFICULT TIMES

As Christians, we are confronted with all kinds of struggles. These can be both physical and mental. Think of situations where we are under pressure, feel discouraged, or are involved in a battle. This can have to do with our finances, health, family, marriage, or friendships—you name it. Whatever the circumstances, we may know that God never lets us go. Perhaps you've just gone through a heavy storm, or you are right in the middle of one. Yet the Word of God says that we are not alone. He carries us through it.

Let us be encouraged by God's strength. In difficult moments, it is not our own strength that keeps us going, but the power of God that surpasses all. It even says the all-surpassing power of God.

As Paul wrote in: **Read:** 2 Corinthians 4:7-9.

These verses remind us that we may be broken and vulnerable like jars of clay, but that we carry a precious treasure with us: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whatever happens, God does not abandon us. We may be under pressure, in doubt, persecuted, or struck down, but we are not destroyed.

We are called to stand firm, exactly as Paul describes. Because it is precisely in our weakness that God's power becomes visible.

God has entrusted us with this treasure—His love, His gospel, His grace and forgiveness—so that we may continue to pass it on to others. When we persevere and hold on to hope in difficult times, it becomes a powerful testimony. Not because we are strong, but because God's strength becomes visible in our lives.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, help us not to focus on our circumstances or the struggles we experience in the storms of life, but on You. Grant that, especially in difficult times, we may realize that we are not alone, that You help us through. Let Your power be made visible in our weakness so that our faith may be a testimony to others.

I also want to pray for all our brothers and sisters worldwide who are being persecuted for their faith in You, Jesus Christ. Be with them in their suffering and let them experience Your nearness. Let their struggle not be in vain, but bear fruit to the glory of Your Name.

Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, as it is written in Hebrews 12:1, so that all honor and glory may be given to You, Lord Jesus. Not by our strength, but by Your strength and the all-surpassing power of God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 7 (02/10)

PRAYER POINT: NEXT SEASON

With today being the last full day of the fast, let's look forward and pray about what does God want to do in our lives in the next season. What is He up to, lean into God and hear from him.

Throughout church history it has been spoken, implied or accepted that all believers can hear from God for themselves. Each one in different degrees. But during a time of prayer and fasting which is meant to draw us closer to the Lord is a great time to practice this.

A few things we can pray for is that our hearts can align with His, that He will put a conviction or passion on our hearts. That if we don't know already, "Lord what is my next step?" "What do you want me to do." Etc.

It's also a great time to note down, what are the kingdom dreams and visions that you have. Then to pray over them asking the Lord to give direction over them.

The Lord has given each one of us a ministry and giftings to be able to accomplish this. But the most important thing is that we can identify what that ministry is and seek to fulfil it. **Read:** 2 Timothy 4:5.

Paul also says earlier on in his letter to timothy that we should stand strong and live out this gifting and ministry. **Read:** 2 Timothy 1:6–7.

So, today, let's pray to hear from the Lord for ourselves and others in the church. But also, that we can live out our calling and ministry and take steps towards doing so.

Let us pray: God, we thank You for the Holy Spirit, for the gifts you've given us and the calling for our lives. Help us to hear from You more clearly so we can know where to go. Show us the steps we can take and give us courage to go in obedience. We just want to follow Your plan and not ours, In Jesus name, Amen.

Day 8 (03/10)

PRAYER POINT: REFLECTION

Read: Colossians 3:1–17.

As we come to the end of the fast. It's easy to jump back to normal. To restore old habits and routines and forget what's happened. These are the moments when we break old habits and traditions to reflect if they were healthy and to go forward as like with the day of atonement seeking to do better the coming year. Although these things most likely don't affect our salvation, they limit our impact and freedom in Christ. Past of fasting is this purification and removal of the old self. The things which are as scripture might even say 'provisions of the flesh'.

For example, imagine before the fasting you watched Tv or streaming service every night. Try to maintain more of what you did instead, maybe a prayer walk, or bible reading or add a life group into the week as a healthy replacement. These are the ways to crucify the flesh. To put on the new man. We have already done a lot of the hard work of taking off the old self. Now it's the discipline and consistency needed in conjunction with the Holy spirit to put on the new man Christ died to enable us to be.

As we read in Colossians, part of the new man is this community. Spending time with other believers. It's about

building in these God centric habits. Giving more space for him to speak and move in our lives. It's building each other up. If possible, share with someone things you got from the fast this week and what God said to you, and the next steps you feel you can make in your walk of faith.

Let us pray: Father thank you for your grace for this past week. Thank you for sustaining me and guiding me and refining me. I pray that the things which came up during the fast would not go to waste. That I can take steps forward to continue to grow into the person you've called me to be.

TO CLOSE

Thank you for following this fast! I hope you were able to benefit from it! I hope that you will find your next time of prayer and fasting even more beneficial too.

There's no "right" length, as fasting is never once commanded by Jesus or required by the New Testament writers. But many have found that a one-time or infrequent longer fast (of a week or 21 days) can be a before/after moment in one's spiritual journey. The key is to only do this if you sense the Spirit's invitation. Do not practice this out of idealism, spiritual heroism, or a misplaced desire for weight loss or a spiritual high.

These practises aren't always easy but they are a great way to take us deeper in our faith and in relationship with God. You may find in the future God calls you to fast for specific or personal reasons that he puts on your heart. As his people we know that fasting is just part of the journey. And to close I Pray for you that as Paul wrote in 1 Thess 5: 23-24.

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Don't forget there's a church table coming up! It's a great way to connect and talk about what God said and to grow in unity with others! We hope to see you there.

If you have any feedback or thoughts please do feel free to reach out to one of the pastors and deacons to talk about it and you can also contact us at info@lighthouseantwerpen.be.

Blessings from the Lighthouse Team.