

ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH FASTING

WHAT IS FASTING?

To fast simply means to voluntarily abstain from something for a prayerfully chosen period of time to create a deeper awareness of our need for more of God. It is during this time of abstinence from food/media that you focus your time seeking the Lord in Bible study, prayer, and meditation. God uses fasting to teach you how to practice righteousness and self-control as you separate from your perceived “life support” so you can focus exclusively on the Lord Jesus, the real source of life.

TYPES OF FASTING:

- Water fast: choosing to drink only water and no alternatives
- Juice fast: drinking 100% juices and water only
- Daniel Fast: fruits and vegetables only
- Selective Fasting: giving up something you enjoy often like caffeine or sweets
- Media: sometimes you need to unplug from watching TV/movies, listening to music, or looking at social media which may be distracting you from fixing your eyes on Jesus.

These people should not fast from food: women who are pregnant or nursing, people dealing with an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia, individuals with blood sugar problems such as hyperglycemia and diabetes, people taking heavy medications that require food. If you have a specific health concern, please consult a physician before fasting.

FASTING IN THE BIBLE:

In Matthew 6:16, Jesus speaks with his disciples. He begins his sentence with the phrase, “When you fast...” Jesus expected that those who followed Him would experience the joys of fasting. Throughout Scripture and church history, many people have fasted as a way to encounter God.

Listed below are some of the reasons why people in the Bible fasted:

In times of war: Judges 20:26

Repentance: Jonah 3:5, Daniel 6:18

When facing danger: Ezra 8:21, 23

Courage & wisdom: Esther 4:3, 16; 9:31

In times of grief: 1 Sam 31:13
In times of distress: 2 Sam 1:12
Denial of the flesh: Matthew 4:2
Spiritual power: Mark 9:29
Wisdom: Acts 14:23
Set aside self for holiness: 1 Cor 7:5
Answered prayer: Acts 10:30-31
Mourning: Daniel 10:1-3
Special revelation: Exodus 34:27-28
Spiritual recuperation: 1 Kings 19:1-9

THE MAIN PURPOSE OF FASTING:

As you can see, there are many reasons why people fast, and all of them were good ones. Some wanted wisdom and power, while others were repenting of their sins. But there was one aspect of the fasting experience that each had in common: a personal encounter with the living God.

As you begin to consider reasons for your fast, you will come up with several, but there is one that will override all the other reasons: to have a powerful, life-changing encounter with the living God. Never confuse your fasting goals with the most foundational reason to fast – to meet with God. All other reasons could cause you to miss the biggest blessing of your fasting experience.

Spiritual:

Fasting is an invitation to receive God's mercy and power. It allows us to submit our flesh to God, by saying, "God, I trust You. I need You more than food." As we deny ourselves our basic need for food, our deep need for God is revealed, and we desire greater intimacy with the Father. In that place of greater intimacy, the Holy Spirit searches our heart by revealing places we have become hardened and self-sufficient, healing us from wounds and lies, and restoring our sensitivity and hunger for God—often leading us to repentance.

As we receive God's mercy, He also fills us with His power, making fasting a powerful spiritual weapon. With the renewed faith that comes from intimacy with God, we are catalyzed to see His kingdom established, compelling us to a more radical daily obedience that yields the fruits of the Spirit. When fasting, you often feel led to intercede, share the Gospel, and more extravagantly love and serve those around you.

Physical:

Fasting not only detoxes our spirit, but also our physical body. By fasting, we can break addictions to substances like caffeine and sugar and detox our bodies from artificial or chemical additives.

HOW TO FAST SUCCESSFULLY:

Set your objective and make a commitment:

- Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your fast.

Plan your fast:

- When will you begin and end your fast?
- What will you fast from? Make a commitment of what kind of fast you want to do.
- How will you schedule your time to increase your devotion in worship and prayer?
- Invite accountability into your decision to fast especially on a longer fast.

How to Prepare Spiritually:

- Take time to confess your sins, before and during your fast, knowing that He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you of all unrighteousness. Remember, fasting is a time for cleansing, spiritually and physically. (1 John 1:9)
- Seek forgiveness from those whom you have offended and forgive all who have hurt you. (Mark 11:25, Luke 11:4, 17:3-4)
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit and surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master. (Romans 12:1-2)

How to Prepare Physically:

- Resist the urge to have a final “food gorge” before you begin.
- Weaning yourself off caffeine and sugar ahead of time makes the fast easier on your body.
- Ease into your fast by eating raw fruit and vegetables for a couple days before starting a fast.
- Guard your schedule and don’t make tons of extra plans during the fast.

Practical Tips while you are Fasting:

- Create a schedule and replace your eating times with reading the bible, worship, and prayer.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Limit exercise to moderately light activity such as walking.
- If you are doing a juice and water fast, make sure and only drink 100% juice. The more acidic juices like orange juice can be hard on your stomach. Apple juice or tomato juice mixed with water is a good option.
- It is normal to experience headaches, hunger pains, irritability, etc. in the first stages of your fast.
Your body is detoxing, this is normal. The first few days are the hardest, keep going!!

- Keep track of what God is speaking to you by journaling and recording how He meets you each day of your fast.

How to Break your Fast:

- Ease back into meals. Don't overeat. Eat a small portion or small snacks throughout the day.
- Avoid fast food and heavy greasy foods.
- Fruits and Vegetables are the best foods to eat after a long fast. Light soups are also good.
- The longer the fast, the more careful you need to be when breaking the fast. A good rule of thumb is one day of a specialized diet for every 5 days of fasting.

Fasting as a Family:

My kid's fasting? That might sound absurd, but we believe this spiritual discipline is for children as well as adults. As we invite children into this practice, we are laying a foundation in their belief system and are training them to be sincere disciples of Jesus.

So how should kids fast? It's important to remember they are growing children and so fasting for kids should be done at an "introductory" level, but we want to encourage you to somehow get the whole family involved.

Here are some great practical's on how to help kids fast:

1. Invite kids to hear what God wants them to fast. Take time as a family to hear him TOGETHER and then you and your kids can work as a team to help them make a wise choice on what to fast based on what Jesus said.
2. Some easy starters: make different choices like choose cucumbers over cookies for a snack. Drink water rather than sodas. Choose salads over chips. Or Give up Sugar. Choose to cut out candy or cookies for a set time. Or Limit media. Cut the videos in the car and choose to play worship songs on the road for a week or spend some time with Jesus when they would usually play video games for 3 days. The main goal isn't to just feel empty, it's to fill ourselves up with Jesus.
3. Model it yourself. Do this as a family. Doing this together will be a win for your children. Let them see you doing it and hear what you are fasting so that each of you can help each other.
4. Shorten the Length. Depending on the age of kids starting with 22 days might not be the best option. Consider having your kids do part of the fast for 3 days or 1 day depending on what God has said for them to do and their age.

5. Center on God. Help your kids to understand that fasting isn't just "not _____" but it's centering on God in a physical way that pushes them towards pressing into Jesus.
6. Make it a win. As they fast, talk about what God is saying, talk about what is happening as they "fill" themselves up with God. Focus on what God is giving them rather than what they are sacrificing. Also, set them up to succeed. Better a 2-day success than a 5-day failure.
7. Don't sell kids short. Teaching our kids to participate in spiritual disciplines helps our kids to grow as Jesus followers. Kids too need and want to be a doer of the word and be a part of what the church is doing.

Sources: "Through Prayer and Fasting" © 2007 Miles McPherson

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