

THE JOY OF FASTING

Fasting is one of many disciplines in the Christian faith. Fasting is often like a key on a piano not tuned. When we are not fasting or not practicing another discipline in our Christian experience, the sound just isn't right.

Matthew 6:16-18 gives us insight to the practice of fasting. This text says Jesus assumed we would fast. He never gave a command to fast but understood fasting to be a normal practice for His followers. We are to look and act normal when fasting. Fasting should be genuine and sincere. Fasting should also be done in private. Finally, Jesus says God will bless you when you fast.

WHAT IS A FAST?

Fasting in the Bible refers to abstaining from food for spiritual reasons. You are indicating to God you are serious about praying for a specific issue in your life. It is not a hunger strike which has the purpose to gain political power or attract attention for a good cause. Fasting is not dieting which stresses abstinence from food but for physical not spiritual reasons. Fasting must center on God with a focus to worship Him. Luke 2:37 states that Anna, "did not leave the temple complex, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers."

There are basically three types of fasts. A **Normal Fast** is abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water. A **Partial Fast** is abstaining from certain types of foods. Daniel did not eat the "king's food." He had only water and vegetables. Some may drink fruit and vegetable juices. An **Absolute Fast** is abstaining from water and food for one to three days. A person can go about forty days without food but only three days without water (Esther 4:16).

WHEN SHOULD I FAST?

- A. To glorify God – Isaiah 58:5,8
- B. Need for repentance – 1 Kings 21:27-29
- C. To discern God's will – Acts 13:1-3
- D. For God's protection – Ezra 8:21-23 This would include protection for travel, children, finances, marriage, and work.
- E. Facing incredible challenges – Esther, 1 Kings 21
- F. When we or others are in spiritual bondage – Isaiah 58:6, "Isn't the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke."

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS?

- A. Ritualistic
- B. False fast
- C. Hypocrisy
- D. Selfish
- E. Satanic attack – Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

HOW SHOULD I FAST?

A progression should be observed in fasting. Don't stock up before a fast. Eat lighter meals. Start with a Partial Fast for twenty-four hours. Lunch to lunch is best. Drink fruit or vegetable juices along with water. Outwardly you will perform the regular duties of your day, but inwardly you will be in prayer and worship. If possible, devote the time you would normally eat to prayer and the study of God's Word. Refrain from calling attention to yourself. Break your fast with a light meal of fresh fruits and vegetables. Rejoice! Then try a Normal Fast of twenty-four hours after two to three weeks of a Partial Fast. Drink only water. Hunger pains or discomfort will develop. This is not real hunger. Your stomach has been trained through the years of condition to give signals of hunger at certain hours. Try a Normal Fast of thirty-six hours to forty days as God leads.

Warning! There are some people who for medical reasons should not fast. Ask your doctor before you start a fast. You can still participate in a fast by fasting from other items such as digital devices, television, or other things that may occupy your time.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- A. Physically
 1. Detoxifies the body
 2. Lowers blood pressure
 3. Gives the digestive system a rest
 4. Save time
 5. Save money
 6. Feel better
 7. Lose weight

- B. Spiritually
 1. Spiritual detoxification – Fasting reveals the things that control us. We cover up what is inside of us with food and other good things. When these securities are removed and our attention is focused on God, the junk in our life will surface.
 2. Discover God's will
 3. Helps keep a balance in life - We allow non-essentials to take precedence in our lives.
 4. Helps us cope with crisis
 5. Power over evil (Matthew 7:14-21)

Fasting is one of the most rewarding experiences of your Christian life. Fasting allows you to focus intensely in your prayer life and position you to experience spiritual transformation by the power of God's Spirit. You will be richly blessed, and God will be glorified.

Primary Resource – Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster