

Why Fast?

QUICK! What do people who fast look like? What kinds of people come to your mind? Do they appear a bit strange? Are they John the Baptist types? Legalists? Health nuts?

Does Jesus come to your mind when you think of fasting and “fasters”? Jesus both practiced and taught fasting. And yet, fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all the spiritual disciplines.

One reason fasting is feared is that many believe it turns us into something we don’t want to become and causes things to happen that we don’t want to happen. We fear that fasting will make us hollow-eyed fanatics or odd for God. We’re afraid that it will make us suffer dreadfully and give us a generally negative experience. For some Christians, fasting for spiritual purposes is as unthinkable as shaving their heads or walking barefoot across a fire pit.

Christians in a gluttonous, denial-less, self-indulgent society may struggle to accept and to begin the practice of fasting. Few disciplines go so radically against the flesh and the mainstream of culture as this one. But we cannot overlook its biblical significance. Of course, some people, for medical reasons, cannot fast. But more of us dare not overlook fasting’s benefits in the disciplined pursuit of a Christ-like life.

Suggested Ways to Fast

- Fast from food.
- Fast from food for just the daylight hours.
- Fast from something else, especially for nursing/pregnant mothers, or those with health issues.
- Children: We encourage parents to discuss “fasting” with their children and determine how they could participate, such as: fasting from a special treat, dessert, movie, or activity.

Fasting for a Purpose

THERE'S MORE TO A BIBLICAL FAST than abstaining from food. Without a spiritual purpose for your fast, it's just a weight-loss fast... without purpose, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered experience. (Notice that none of the purposes is to earn God's favor. We can't use fasting as a way to impress God and earn His acceptance.)

Before the Fast

1. Prepare yourself spiritually and mentally for the fast. Questions like these may be helpful:

- What type of fast do I sense I should undertake? A water-only fast or juice/broth fast?
- How long will I fast? One day? All three days? Daylight hours?
- Are my motives right? Is there any hidden desire to impress others or to accomplish "spiritual feats"? Am I trying to manipulate God with my fasting? [Colossians 2:20-23]
- What are my spiritual objectives for the fast? For God's glory to be displayed through:
 - More intimacy with God [Matthew 6:16-18; Matthew 9:15]
 - Victory over a specific sin [Psalm 73:25-26]
 - Intercession for another (for his or her salvation, healing, repentance, freedom) [Daniel 9]
 - God's guidance in a particular matter
 - Revival in the Church
 - Spiritual awakening among unbelievers in a specific nation, unreached people group, city, or neighborhood [Acts 13:1-4]
 - God's will to be done and His kingdom to come regarding a certain issue in society (abortion, pornography, poverty, etc.) [Ezra 8:21]
 - Provide for the needy [Isaiah 58]

2. Plan ahead to allow ample time for prayer during your fast.

Remember that a fast without prayer is only a diet!

As we are fasting, or even if we choose not to fast, we want to devote special time to prayer and reflect upon Scripture.

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

- *Matthew 6:16-18*

"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

- *Psalms 73:25-26*

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods."

- *Ezra 8:21*