

The Goodness of Emptiness

Fasting -> biblical fasting is the setting aside of food for a period of time with a very specific, Jesus centered focus.

The topic of fasting is found in both the Old and New Testaments and is mentioned over fifty times.

OT

- Day of Atonement, commanded by the law (Leviticus 23:26-32), “afflicting one’s soul”.
- Lamenting over war or the possibility of war (1 Samuel 7:6).
- Often a way of expressing grief (1 Samuel 31:13).
- Preparation in asking God for safety (Ezra 8:21).
- A means to humble one’s self before God (Daniel 9:3-5).

NT - A means to grow closer to God through meditating and focusing on Him.

- Jesus fasted in a time of temptation.
- Jesus spoke to his disciples concerning fasting.
- The early church and Paul used fasting whenever there was a strong desire to know and understand God’s movement and guidance.

Those who fasted in scripture:

Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Anna, Jesus, Paul

The discipline of fasting is a journey toward holiness.

It allows for a deep dive in your relationship with God.

Matthew 6:1, 16-18 Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 16 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. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 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.

Mark 2:19-20 19 And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.”

The key to your fasting experience is motive.

There are basically two categories for motive.

1. To please man.

2. To please God.

- It can help us hear from God.
- It can reveal our hidden sin.
- It can strengthen our intimacy with Jesus.
- It can teach us to pray with the right motives.
- It can build our faith.

There is a heightened sensitivity to our being, God's presence, our failures, and God's mercy. It is an opportunity to turn the flood lights on in our soul!

Types of Fasts

Regular fast - all food and drink except for water (Matthew 4:2-3; Mark 2:18-20)

Liquid fast - all solid food, utilize juice and the like as sustenance

Partial fast - only from a particular kind of food (Daniel 10:3)

Absolute fast - no food or liquid of any kind (the body can only function three days without water (Acts 9:9)

Supernatural fast - no food or liquid of any kind for extended period of time (Deuteronomy 9:9)

Important: Don't make excuses.

Trust that God is very aware of this season of your life.

Ask Him to reveal to you what else you might put aside so that you can more fully rest and depend on His *comfort* and *sustainability*.

If you have an unhealthy relationship with food, you may need to find something else to abstain from.

The point of the fast is to combine it with a more intense, focused time of prayer that brings a greater communion with God, a greater empowerment of the Spirit, and a greater earnestness in your soul.

Fasting is a bizarre counter-cultural act in our consumerist society, yet it is also strangely accepted in the category of "wellness".

Remember: For what purpose and for whom are you fasting?

Warning:

Colossians 2:20-23 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Isaiah 58:3-9 Why have we fasted, and you see it not?

Joy of Fasting

Jeremiah 17:7-8 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. 8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.

Fasting marks the beginning of a season of serving (ministry). Matthew 4:1-2 (Jesus), Acts 13:3 (Paul & Barnabas)

Paul's experience with fasting began at his conversion (Acts 9:4-9).

After his supernatural encounter with Jesus for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank (vs.9).

Reflect on Paul's

- Ability to commune with God
- Ability to petition Jesus
- Ability to seek the Holy Spirit

All without ceasing, running the race, and seeing the prize as Christ.

Through Prayer!

Paul experiences the kind of life which engages, absorbs, enriches, and empowers. Every church established along Paul's missionary journey's began with fasting and prayer.

Fasting and prayer give us the opportunity for deeper engagement and absorption.

“Paul took it for granted that men who know God would pray; that men who lived for God would pray much, and that men could not live for God who did not pray. So Paul prayed much. He was in the habit of praying. He was used to praying, and that formed the habit of prayer. He estimated prayer so greatly that he fully knew its value, and that fastened the habit on him. Paul was in the habit of praying because he loved God, and such love in the heart always finds its expression in regular habits of prayer. He felt the need of much grace, and of more and more

grace, and grace only comes through the channels of prayer, and only abounds more and more as prayer abounds more and more.” ~ Edward M. Bounds

Examples from the early church.

Acts 13:1-3 -> Antioch

Acts 14:21-23 -> Galatia

2 Corinthians 6:4-10 -> Paul speaking to the Corinthians

Question: Are you willing to learn, experiment, and trust?

Practical Considerations

Take your time and take a progressive approach. If you have never fasted, start by skipping a meal each day or starting with one or two days.

You will experience light headedness, headaches, etc...

Saying no to your stomach is not necessarily saying yes to Jesus.

The attention of God's children in fasting is Jesus.

It allows perspective.

It allows us to see ourselves, our community, and the world through insight given to us by the Holy Spirit.

It allows us to take the pains of hunger and focus them into the fight against sin, crying out for healing in our world, pleading for the salvation of others, and longing for Jesus' return.

Great resource for practical insight into fasting.

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/personal-guide-to-fasting.html>