



practicing the way

fasting

Starve The Flesh

Overview

Fasting is one of the most abused and least used of all the spiritual disciplines. Yet for millennia, it has been a core practice for apprenticeship to Jesus. All the great heroes of the Old Testament fasted. The first story we read about Jesus' adult life is of him fasting for forty days and nights, like Moses and Elijah before him. The central characters of the New Testament continued this practice, as did the early church, which fasted twice a week - every Wednesday and Friday - for over a millennium. It's not until quite recently that fasting fell out of favor.

And that comes as no surprise. We live in a culture not only of food, but of excess and luxury and addiction to what psychologists call "the pleasure principle." Yet for so many of us, the desires of our body have come to hold power over us. In the battle with our "flesh," we have become its slave, not its master.

Fasting is an ancient Christian discipline to break the power of the flesh in our life – our desires, sins, and cravings – and to feed on the Holy Spirit.

Like all the spiritual disciplines, it's really easy to lose sight of the "why" behind fasting. So, this series will focus less on tips and techniques, and more on the right motivation. There are three major motivations for fasting in biblical theology, and we will spend the next two weeks working through them. This week, we focus on the flesh and the Spirit.

Practice

Here's the Practice for this coming week:

- Set aside a day to fast.
- Pick a time to start and end the fast. Our recommendation is that you start your fast after a supper one night and go till supper the following night. Another option is the "regular" fast, which goes from sunup to sundown, about twelve hours – so you would skip breakfast and lunch and then eat a late supper. You can make your fast longer by skipping more meals (perhaps fasting for a full twenty-four hours), or shorter by breaking your fast at noon or 3pm. Again, it's your call.
- As you fast on the day you decide, each time you feel a hunger pain or think about food or take a lunch break (with no lunch!), use it as a prompt for prayer. Turn your heart to God and ask him to starve your flesh and feed your Spirit. Use your imagination to "see" yourself drawing strength from God himself.
- If you want a "value added" experience, here are four other things you can do:

1. **Break a Habit** – Identify a specify sin or habit or pattern in your “flesh” that you want to break. Spend the day in prayer for freedom in that area.

2. **Journal** – Take a little time for self-reflection. Get your journal out or go for a walk and think about what this Practice is revealing about you. Richard Foster said, “Fasting reveals the things that control us.” If you just feel “hangry” all day, or if you can’t make it more than a few hours, ask yourself, “Why do I feel this way?” Treat yourself compassionately, as God does, yet honestly as well. Remember: the point isn’t a guilt trip but freedom.

3. **Read Scripture** – “Feed” on the word of God, like Jesus did in the wilderness.

4. Come together in Community each week to talk about your experience, pray together, and, if practical, fast together.

- Again, we recommend you begin your fast by skipping your regular meal and spend the time you are usually eating by praying. But that’s up to you!

Closing Questions

1. How do you all feel about this new Practice?
2. What’s an area of your life you would love to get more freedom in?
3. Do you fast on a regular basis?
4. Do you have any encouraging stories of fasting and the role it’s played in your apprenticeship to Jesus?

Prayer

If you’re not eating, you should have a lot more time to pray. Take as long as you want. Perhaps start by reading a Psalm and then spend some time asking Jesus to turn your affections to him. Ask him to reveal the areas in your flesh that need to be starved and begin praying into those.