

“Making More Space in Our Lives for God”

If a river of desire in your life has overflowed its banks and gotten out of control, how can you bring those desires back into their proper place, once again? If you are dry and empty, how can you be refreshed and renewed? If extra, unnecessary things have become attached to your life, how can you get rid of them? ANSWER: by making more space for God in your life through a season of prayer and fasting. “*Fasting*” is a spiritual practice that Christian believers can use to multiply the effectiveness of our prayers. In its purest form, fasting is abstaining from food, and using the time that you would be eating to pray to God, instead. There are certainly other things that we can abstain from, as well, since not everyone can fast from food (i.e. certain medical conditions). So perhaps some people will participate in a season of prayer and fasting by giving up video games, or abstain from watching television, or abstain from participating in social media, etc. – and use that time, instead, to pray to God.

In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus said, “*Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*”¹⁷ *But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,*¹⁸ *so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*” This passage shows us that Jesus assumed that His followers would fast. When we are fasting, He expects us to go out of our way to not draw attention to ourselves, and to conceal the fact that we are fasting.

Fasting is not easy, but it is worth it. We don’t like the idea of going without food, but there are some things that will never happen apart from prayer and fasting (see Matthew 17:21). There’s great power, blessing and benefit by remembering that “*...man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*” (Matthew 4:4) Fasting reminds us that there are some things we must say “no” to in life. Fasting helps to put the things that really matter back into proper perspective. Fasting helps to restore us back into sweet communion and fellowship with God. There’s no greater way to humble ourselves before the Lord and demonstrate our dependence upon God – than through prayer and fasting.

Fasting helps us to rid ourselves of all the extra (unnecessary, unbeneficial) things that we have allowed to attach themselves to our lives and souls. St. Augustine once said that God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them. We need seasons to rid ourselves of such appendages, so that space can be filled with God’s presence, instead. To give up anything that comes between ourselves and God is the basic understanding of self-denial, which is at the heart of fasting and prayer. Fasting is a form of interior “spring cleaning.” Fasting refreshes and restores us through the cleansing that takes place. Periodic fasting removes the impurities and parasites that have become attached to the lives of even well-meaning Christians. Even though we need food to survive, we need to always remember that food does not sustain us, God sustains us. So, when we fast and pray, we are not so much abstaining from food as we are

feasting on the Word and presence of God. In that sense, fasting is feasting! Don't be grouchy or miserable when you fast – instead, enjoy every moment of such a season of seeking God.

The Scriptures teach and show us that fasting should be practiced to receive communication and clear direction from God. It's a great way to draw closer to God, and to demonstrate the depth of our godly sorrow and repentance as we confess our sins. Fasting is a potent way to gain victory over temptation, and to become more powerful in the Spirit. It's a good thing to do when we need to seek help in a crisis. When the diagnosis is bad, when our nation is at a crisis point, when our family is facing troubles and difficulties – these are times for fasting and prayer. When we have great problems or urgent needs, we should fast and pray and seek God for the solution. Even if we still have to go through a difficult circumstance, the more we fast and pray through the process, the more we will receive the power and presence of God to strengthen us and give us faith for the journey.

Fasting teaches us to say “no” to the flesh, and “yes” to the Spirit of God. When the flesh cries out for food during a fast (or from whatever else you may be abstaining from), turn immediately to prayer. As you begin to feast in God's presence your purest appetites are fulfilled, and the appetites of the sinful nature will pale in stark comparison. Fasting is a very tangible way to teach our minds and bodies that we do not have to gratify the urges of the flesh. Fasting is one of the best ways to kill (starve) the flesh and strengthen (revive) the spirit. Fasting is one of the most effective means to overcome the stronghold of sin in our lives. I pray that God will stir our hearts to draw closer to Him by using the effective spiritual tool of fasting and prayer.

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Which one are you feeding – your flesh or your spirit? What are some things you can do that will starve your sinful nature? What are some things you can do to revive your spirit?
2. Look up the “Daniel Fast” online (which features a restricted food list). Is that something you might be drawn to follow during our church's 21-day season of prayer and fasting?
3. Do you feel like the Lord may want you to abstain from all food (and only drink liquids) on certain days during this fast? Do you feel like the Lord may be speaking to you to fast a certain meal every day during this adventure? Is there something else God may be speaking to your heart about to abstain from?
4. What miracles do you need to believe God for during this season of prayer and fasting?