

FASTING

DISCIPLINES
& PRACTICES

Let me introduce you to a practice that you may have never heard much about, or perhaps you have seen recently repackaged as a popular dieting strategy: fasting. I wanted to quickly make this point very clear that biblical fasting has nothing to do with helping you get into better physical shape. Spiritual shape? Sure, you could say that! But simply put, a biblical fast is abstaining from food for a certain period of time to grow closer to God.

We are given all kinds of examples of faithful people who fast in the bible for different reasons. Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Paul; and also Jesus fast in order to prepare themselves for something, to gain wisdom, to deal with personal grief or burden (or on behalf of another's), or as a demonstration of repentance, a mourning of the sinful self. Now, just having biblical examples of people doing things isn't necessarily a command. In fact, Jesus never explicitly commands his followers to fast, but he talks about it as something they will do. Like in Matthew 9, Jesus is asked why his followers weren't fasting, and he explains that it's because they are being present with him. But he says when he leaves, "[his followers] will fast." Or the most popular example of Jesus assuming his followers will fast is found in Matthew 6 where Jesus says "when you fast," not "if" you fast.

In Matthew 6 Jesus is also found giving a warning about how we are to fast. He tells those who fast to not make it obvious, keep it hidden. It's a very human flaw to try to take an intimate, humbling experience with God and wear it like a badge of honor in order to be praised for faith. But fasting has nothing to do with our strength. Some will wrongly describe fasting as "becoming the master of your body." While it may take a great deal of discipline to

abstain from food, the whole point is to relinquish control, give up your power, not to gain it. So please, examine your motive before taking part in any sort of fast. This is intended to be a demonstration that God, not food, is your sustenance.

Let's talk about a few practical elements. You will probably want to start by fasting a single meal, then work towards two with a 24 hour fast. You may even work up to three with a 36 hour fast. But, if you feel called to go beyond that, do some research and talk with someone about making sure you are prepped and ready for that.

During a fast, you ought to let any hunger pains prompt you to pray to the God who sustains you, and replace the time you would have been cooking and eating to be in prayer and scripture. In fact, the entirety of your fast should be full of things bringing you closer to God. Plan this out, a fast is not a spur of the moment practice to be taken lightly.

I close with a quote from Richard Foster. He says, "Fasting is feasting on the word of God." Don't forget that this isn't about mastering your body or losing a pound or two, it's about being in close communion with God.

Do not fast if you have any sort of medical condition that may be worsened by not eating. (If you aren't sure if you should fast because of a medical reason, talk to your doctor first.)

Instructions

Pick the length of time you would like to fast.

Plan out what day you will be doing the fast, setting a start and end time and know what you will do during your free meal times. Inform only the people that must know about your fast so that they are aware of what you are doing.

Optional: Many people find it helpful to journal their thoughts and experiences.

****Important:** A fast can reveal that something other than God is controlling you. When we get hungry our anger, pride, addiction, etc. might rear its head. Be aware of these sorts of things and bring them to God in prayer.**

Break your fast with a light, relatively healthy meal, rather than stuffing yourself.

First Time: Try out a single meal fast. Spend that mealtime in prayer with God.

Another Step: Try doing a full 24 hours by fasting from Lunch-Lunch, Dinner-Dinner, or Breakfast-Breakfast. You may feel more hungry during this time, but let that point you to God even more.

Final Step: Try a 36 hour fast, missing all three meals of the day. This will be a more difficult and humbling experience.

Bonus: If you feel God is calling you to do a longer fast (some people will fast for a few days, a week, or even longer) talk to Matthew (reach me at 812-631-2712, or by email matthew@churchanywhere.us) and do some research and extra preparation.