

FASTING AND PRAYER

Biblical Support and Some Practical Tips

Fasting is a spiritual discipline, usually associated with prayer, designed to be a physical expression and reminder that we are completely dependent on God. Jesus and the apostles taught and practiced the discipline of fasting. Scripture is replete with such references. For example:

MATTHEW 6:6-18

As Jesus teaches about prayer, He assumes we will fast.

MATTHEW 9:14-17

Jesus teaches that we should fast as we long for His return.

ACTS 13:2-3

In the early church, worship and fasting are directly tied to the movement of the Holy Spirit and the calling of missionaries.

It is most important to keep in mind that spiritual fasting is for the purpose of drawing closer and being conformed to God: fasting is for the purpose of godliness. Let your hunger remind you of your desire for God, your personal inadequacies, and the satisfaction that is only found in Him. Fasting is not an end unto itself; it is not proving yourself to God or others.

Donald Whitney describes three types of fasting:

- 1 A “normal fast” involves abstaining from all food, but not from water.**
- 2 A “partial fast” is a limitation of the diet but not abstention from all food.**
- 3 An “absolute fast” is the avoidance of all food and liquid, even water.**

We encourage you to talk with your medical provider before attempting any fast; please don't do something that is hazardous to your health. We also only encourage a “normal” or a “partial” fast, again, with your provider's support. Fasting, as a spiritual discipline, is not intended for weight loss.

The next page contains a few tips on fasting (incorporated from the teachings of Dr. Chuck Lawless).

- 1** Tell somebody, but not everybody. Fasting should be between you and God. You need to tell somebody (e.g., a spouse) so that, if there is a problem, someone else is aware of your efforts, but let that be enough so that pride doesn't step in.
- 2** Start slowly. Start with a meal, then perhaps two or three meals.
- 3** Plan/schedule your fast. For example, don't try to fast when food will be a public event. Also, if considering fasting from multiple meals, you may want to consider your sleep patterns as part of the schedule. For instance, a three-meal fast may begin with skipping supper such that your sleep is only affected by missing one meal.
- 4** Be sure to replace your eating time with time with God. Remember why you are fasting. Don't make it legalistic.
- 5** Be aware of potential distractions. Related to planning well, be aware that distractions could be social, emotional, or physical.
- 6** If you break the fast, start over again. Don't let a failure hinder your future efforts.
- 7** Don't overeat prior to your fast in an effort to minimize the effects. Likewise, don't overeat at your next meal in an attempt to catch up. Remind yourself of the purpose of the fast. As a related tip, you may find your stomach a little sensitive to a normal volume of food as you break a multi-meal fast. A light snack shortly before a meal may help minimize those effects.
- 8** Recognize that just as fasting demonstrates a dependency on God, so does sleeping. God doesn't need food or sleep. He doesn't need nourishment or rest because He has no needs at all. On the other hand, you do; you are completely dependent on Him.