

Jesus' Call to Fast

Directly after Jesus teaches His disciples about prayer (Matthew 6:5-15) He speaks about fasting. It is interesting to note Jesus does not say "if you fast" but "*when you fast.*" Yet, the discipline of fasting has lain dormant in some of our lives. In Mark 2:20 He also states that the disciples would fast when the bridegroom (Jesus Himself) was taken from them. One of Christ's first recommendations about fasting is not to make a show of it (Matthew 6:16-18). He assumes that fasting is a practice for those seeking the "*unseen*" God. (Matthew 6:17). Jesus' words, "*When you*" in Matthew 6:12-17, include fasting along with giving to the poor and praying as what His followers would do. This scripture brings fasting to the forefront as part of the Christian's spiritual commitment.

New Testament Pattern

Fasting was practiced by the early church. It was not a single unusual occurrence. Indeed it was practiced regularly by the apostles and taught to their new disciples.

It is interesting to note in Acts 13:2 when new elders were ordained fasting proceeded laying on of hands prior to sending them forth. Acts 13:3 indicates that Paul and Barnabas were sent out after fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands. Scripture tells us our Lord Jesus Christ was led into His fasting experience in the desert "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Luke 4:1) and came out in "*the power of the Spirit.*" Luke 4:14.

Reasons for Fasting

Fasting exposes the tyranny of our appetite as well as our self will. It has been said that fasting dials down the flesh and dials up the spirit. There are so many things from the outside world constantly screaming for our attention that it is often difficult for us to hear God's voice.

We carry unresolved hurts and unconfessed sins, which often lead to sinful thoughts or actions. We have preconceived ideas about how God should act in situations over which we are praying. Fasting, combined with prayer, Christian meditation, and Bible study, is important in the process of changing the way we think. This transformation of our mind helps us become more in tune with God's will in the situations for which we are concerned (See Romans 12:2). It helps us to get in touch with our own spirit as well as increases a sense of God's presence.

The very heart of fasting lies in the experience of increased intimacy with our heavenly Father. We begin

to identify our spirit as a separate entity within ourselves, desiring for and asking the Lord to bring any unruly self-will into submission. Fasting reveals the subtle power that food has over us by exposing the place we allow it to occupy in our thoughts.

Practical Aspects

In Jewish culture the day starts at sundown and ends at sundown. This time period is a very practical way to observe a one-day fast. An evening meal can be eaten before sundown on the day you begin the fast and after sundown on the day you complete the fast. This is a manageable method for beginning the practice of fasting.

Some believers choose to fast one meal when they begin the discipline of fasting. Others fast from desserts or favorite foods, forego excessive shopping, watching TV, or whatever they discern occupies too great a place in their lives.

Select a time to fast when you can allow extra time in your schedule to come apart from the world and the daily demands on your time. Fasting and prayer go hand in hand. The rewards found in fasting increase in proportion to the amount of time set aside for prayer and fellowship with the Lord.

A total water-only fast works very well. Diluted fruit juices, although often recommended, tend to keep the digestive juices flowing. This increases the sensation of hunger and keeps us focused on our appetite. Gum and mints will do the same.

A one-meal or one-day fast does not require much attention to re-entry into eating. Longer periods of

fasting require **easing** back into food with **small** amounts of fruit or raw salads in order not to overload your digestive system. The key is to go very slowly in starting back to eat. After fruits, then salads, light soups and baked potatoes are good choices. Gradually reintroduce heavier foods. It should be noted that for longer periods of fasting diluted fruit juices (non-acidic) do help prevent problems with food moving through the digestive tract which sometimes arises as you come off a water-only fast.

Focus

*T*his fast is primarily for subduing the clamor of the flesh and making room for increased intimacy with the heavenly Father. This helps you turn to Him with more honesty and intensity. You will discover that the fellowship is so sweet at times that you are reluctant to break the fast. Peace and calmness come over troubling situations and faith awakens to the fact of God's control in our lives, even His sovereignty in our world.

Rewards

*O*nce, when I was overly involved emotionally with a situation, I found that I was finally able to release the circumstances to God through fasting.

As troubling situations are brought before the Lord there is an additional dimension of peace when fasting is combined with prayer. An increased sense of God's presence arises as the self will (flesh) is laid aside resulting in more room for the Spirit. Along with peace and presence comes more of a spirit of praise and gratitude. As we sit in His presence the impurities we all contain float to the surface and are revealed so they can be confessed and dealt with. Then the believer is equipped to go forth in more of the power of the Holy Spirit to minister wherever he/she is called. Which of us does not want more peace, presence, praise, purity, and power?

I encourage you to prayerfully consider how you will respond to Jesus' words "When you fast/"

**Fasting is not recommended in some physical situations such as pregnancy or diabetes. If in doubt ask your physician.*

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