

FASTING IS DESIGNED TO INTENSIFY OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD BY WEAKENING OUR DEPENDENCE ON FOOD AND OTHER THINGS.

THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

Fasting reveals and heals our dependence on food (and other things) to fill the discomfort caused by low self-esteem, unfulfilling work, unloving relationships, uncontrollable circumstances, etc. It removes the false peace derived from the pleasure of eating. Richard Foster, in His Classic Celebration of Discipline, says, "More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David writes, "I humbled my soul with fasting" (Psalm 69: 10). Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear- if they are within us, they will surface during fasting."

Fasting teaches us we can go without getting what we want and survive.

Fasting can free us from having to have what we want. Therefore, fasting can teach moderation or self-control, not only in relation to food, but in other areas as well. It teaches contentment (1 Timothy 6:6).

Fasting expresses and deepens our hunger for God.

Richard Foster says, "Fasting reminds us that we are sustained "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God: (Matt. 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us. In Christ, "All things hold together" (Col. 1: 17). Therefore, in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God and on Christ Himself. Fasting is feasting." Fasting for other reasons, such as a "spiritual disguise" for losing weight, is an aberration to Biblical fasting. Fasting to even appear spiritual to others is more akin to the Pharisees than Jesus' instructions. Fasting must always, first and foremost, center on God. It must be about Him.

Step 1: Clarify the Purpose of Your Fast

Why are you fasting? (For the purpose of the 21 Days, see above.) Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically. Fasting is God-led and God-initiated. That means that He fuels a desire to fast and pray. He loves it when we fast.

Step 2: Specify the Nature of Your Fast

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast. (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14, 15) For Him it was a matter of when believers would fast, not if they would do it.

Before you fast, decide the following up front:

- How long you will fast - one meal, one day, one week, several weeks, certain days (Beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts)
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake - discussed in the Types of Fasts section below.
- What physical or social activities you will restrict
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word

Step 3: Prepare Your Heart, Mind, and Body for Your Fast

Fasting is not a spur-of-the-moment thing. It is planned and we must prepare. The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Un-confessed sin can hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.
- Do not rush into your fast. Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods. Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast. Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer.
- Prepare your heart and mind remembering that God is your Father and He loves you and is for you.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you. (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3,4) Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ. (Romans 12:1,2) Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others (Psalm 48:9, 10; 103:1-8, 11-13).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. (Hebrews 11:6)
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit. (Galatians 5:16, 17)
- Finally, and of deep importance, Jesus instructs us in Matthew to not let others know about your fasting. The strict details of your fast should not be something you constantly talk about to others. It should remain between you and God.