
Fasting

Fasting is the practice of abstaining from food, or both food and drink, for a specified period of time. While fasting is often practiced for physical reasons, the practice of fasting as a discipline is primarily for spiritual reasons. There will possibly be physical benefits, but this is not the motivation in pursuing the discipline.

Fasting is a discipline that teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It helps us to see our longing for and preoccupation with food. It can help you to see how food can be used to cover up or anesthetize feelings. It will show you how powerful your body is in seeking to fulfill its desires. Many profound and insightful lessons come out of fasting.

Fasting has a unique way of turning our eyes on God. Dallas Willard says, "Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food."¹ This is why fasting can be very significant when combined with intense or extended periods of prayer.

Fasting is one of the best ways to practice the self-denial that Jesus expected of his followers – "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" (Matthew 16:24).

- Whenever we practice spiritual disciplines, it may be helpful to consider the interrelationship between them when practiced in combination. For example, solitude and fasting get at the same need. Some combinations may be too much to handle. It might be good to combine fasting with celebration. For if we cannot celebrate, we should not fast. If we cannot celebrate, our fasting might be too painful. So as you attempt to practice disciplines, think about how you might practice them in relationship to each other.
- Spend some time reading Isaiah 58. In a journal write down some characteristics of true fasting that you learn from this passage.
- You might begin to explore fasting by skipping a meal and dedicating the time and money saved to God in some way.
- A typical fast may last 24 hours without food. Many people like to use juice and water. It is often convenient to fast after breakfast until breakfast the next day.
- If you have some experience in fasting, you might consider trying a fast for several days or more. The purpose should not be the length of time, but what you desire God to do in your life during the time.
- If you have any physical or medical issues, be sure to consult your doctor before fasting. It is usually helpful to do some reading and research as well about the potential effects fasting will have on your body. A good rule of thumb is to start small and increase the amount of time with experience. Also, listen for God's prompting regarding if and when to fast.
- In addition to food, you might want to expand this discipline into other areas of life. Some examples of other kinds of fasts might be television, shopping, computer, etc. Spend some time thinking through anything in your life that you might have become too dependent on. This is fair game for the discipline of fasting.

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 166.