

Fasting

Written for EUMC by Greg Harshman

What is Fasting:

When beginning his ministry, the first thing Jesus did was to fast for forty days in the wilderness (Matt 3:16-4:11). Now imagine, if Jesus felt the need to fast, how much greater is ours to do the same?

Fasting is not simply going without food for a period of time (that is dieting or starving), but refraining from food for a spiritual purpose. It is a continual prayer before God that will stir a hunger in your spirit that goes deeper than the temporary hunger that you experience in the flesh.

Fasting is not just a physical discipline; it can become a spiritual feast. When you fast, your spirit becomes uncluttered by the things of this world and amazingly sensitive to the voice of God. It will bring you clarity, helping you to see the areas of compromise in your life, and make you more aware of any sin so you can repent.

Fasting prepares the way for God to give you fresh revelation, fresh vision and clear purpose. When you honor and worship God by presenting your body as a living sacrifice through fasting, you too will know his assignments for your life.

- Paul was fasting when God called him and shared the assignment for his life (Acts 9: 17-19)
- Peter was fasting when God called him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10)

The act of fasting can be difficult at times, and the pangs of hunger uncomfortable, but once you make the decision to fast, God sees the desire of your heart and will give you the grace to endure.

- Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Matt 4:4.
- Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Matt 6:25
- Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear, then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ISA 58:8

If you hunger for God, he will fill you.

Types of fasts

- Absolute fast: Absolute fasts are to be observed for very short periods of time only. One abstains from food and water during this type of fast. Do not try this fast without medical consultation and supervision.
- Normal fast: No food, but lots of water. Clear broth and juices okay depending upon the length of the fast.
- Partial fast: giving up certain foods for an extended period of time
- Daniel Fast: A type of partial fast, consisting of only vegetables and water (as found in the book of Daniel).

The most common lengths of fasts are one, three, seven, twenty-one and forty day fasts.

How to Begin Fasting:

Preparing for your fast

Begin praying about the idea of a fast. Is this something God is calling you to do? What might God wish to accomplish in you through a fast? Ask God these questions and listen for the answers. Pray that God will prepare your heart and mind so that you fast with the correct attitude.

God may reveal to you a specific purpose or focus for this fast. If that is the case, keep that purpose or focus in mind. You may wish to look up some of the verses found in the "Biblical Basis" section of this handout to see some of the specific ways fasting has been part of people's lives.

- Take baby steps. Do not start out with a long fast. Your body and mind will need some time to get acquainted with fasting, so begin with a one day normal or partial fast.
- Pick the day that you will begin to fast. A common time frame is from sun up to sun up. (A full 24 hours).
- Repent of any known sins; fasting will bring hidden ones to the surface.
- Do not draw attention to your fast; keep it private (Matt 6: 1-4)
- Eat smaller meals a few days before you begin your fast. Likewise, wean yourself off caffeine and sugar products. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable and ease your initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast.

The day of your fast

- Liquids, liquids, liquids! Drink at least one gallon of water per day.
- Avoid temptation - stay away from food. The sight or smell of food will probably make fasting more difficult physically, and if food is easily accessible, you may

unconsciously begin to snack. Likewise, don't zone out in front of the TV; there are so many advertisements for food these days, that you would just be unnecessarily torturing yourself.

- Make the fast an opportunity to step-up your spirituality. Set aside extra time and also use the time you would have spent eating as a time to study scripture or other inspirational writings, and meditate on their meaning.
- Express gratitude and articulate both your needs and the needs of others through your prayers. Pause to reflect and meditate on your prayer and your fast.
- Remember why you are fasting. When your stomach growls, or you feel hungry or weak, recognize it as an opportunity to remember the purpose of your fast and allow them to serve as reminders to pray or to be still before God.
- Once you make the decision to fast, God sees the desire of your heart and will give you the grace to endure.

Ending your fast

- Close your fast with prayer. If you were fasting with a specific purpose, take the opportunity again to express your purpose. Express gratitude for the opportunity to fast, and for being able to complete it!
- When you end your fast, don't binge. You have been restricting your food intake for a time. Do not eat a huge meal to break the fast. A small meal of healthy foods is your best choice. Eat lightly for the day or two following your fast to give your body a chance to readjust to digesting food.

What to expect

- A headache is common with a fast as your body begins to get rid of toxins. It is NOT a sign that you need to eat! Drinking more water will help. If the headache is unbearable to you, drinking a small amount of pure juice may help.

Ideas for more in-depth practice of Fasting:

Repeat a one day fast three or four times through out the following months. When you feel you are ready, try a three day fast. Your first three-day fast will be a bit more difficult in terms of physical discomfort and hunger pains than a one day fast. Your body will begin to rid itself of the toxins that have built up over years of poor eating habits, and it is not a comfortable process.

Begin the year with a seven-day fast, then fast three days each successive month, at the end of the year you will have fasted forty days.

In addition to the bounty of spiritual gifts fasting provides, there are quite a few health benefits as well. Tests have proven that the average American consumes four pounds of chemical preservatives, coloring, stabilizers, flavorings and other preservatives a year. . Periodic fasts are necessary to flush out these poisons.

Fasting can lower blood pressure and cholesterol, slow the aging process and improve sensory perception. It can also help you break an addiction to junk food.

When you feel you are ready, move on to fasts of a longer duration than three days.

What to expect with longer fasts

- Your body will begin purging toxins. This has several side effects including headaches. Headaches will usually go away around the 3rd day of a fast.
- If you notice a coating on your tongue the first few days into a fast, do not be alarmed, it is just a sign that the fast is working and your body is eliminating the toxins.
- Another sign of fasting working is that your urine will be darker. When fasting, your body flushes out up to ten times the amount of toxins it normally would, which will result in the darker color.

History:

As I researched Fasting, I wondered how something so frequently referenced in scripture and ardently practiced by Christians through out the centuries had come to be almost disregarded in modern times. Richard Foster remarked that in his research on spiritual disciplines, he could not find a single book that had been published on the topic of Christian fasting between 1861 and 1954.

Foster observes that during the middle ages fasting developed a bad reputation. More of a stress was put upon asceticism (a life characterized by abstinence from all worldly pleasures) than the spiritual. As a result, fasting was subjected to rigid regulations and self-mortification (voluntary self-punishment in order to atone for some wrongdoing).

A few others theories, as offered by Eugène-Melchior, the Vicomte de Vogüé and Raymond Régamey, are below:

- The weakness of the flesh requires constant diligence for the maintaining of practices that require discipline. “Christian fasting has disappeared, because pastors and faithful have not reinvented it together in each generation.”
- By making the practice of fasting legalistic, it was seen as something you should do as a penalty for sin rather than to improve your relationship with God.
- The development of naturalism has affected people so that they see fasting as a mystical element from an ancient worldview.

As sad as this may sound, there is cause to rejoice...there appears to be a growing popular interest in the discipline of fasting among Christians in the past few decades and many have reawakened to the possibilities of fasting after long years of relative neglect.

Biblical Basis:

Fasting In The Old Testament

- The “Day of Atonement” was the only fast that was commanded by the Law (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7).
- Fasted in times of war or threat of war (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6).
- Fasted when loved ones were sick (2 Samuel 12:16-23).
- Fasted when loved ones died (1 Samuel 31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:12).
- Fasted when seeking God’s pardon (Deut. 9:15-18; 1 Kings 21:17-29; Jonah 9:4-10).
- Fasted when facing danger (Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:3, 4:16).
- Fasted to commemorate certain calamities (Jeremiah 52:12-13; 2 Kings 25:23-25; Jeremiah 41; 2 Kings 25:1, 3-4).

Fasting In The New Testament

- Jesus fasted forty days (Matthew 4:1-9; Luke 4:1-2).
- Jesus taught about fasting in his sermon on the mount (Matthew 6:16-18).
- Jesus was questioned about it by John’s disciples (Matthew 9:14-17).
- Jesus taught of a combined power of prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:14-21).
- The church at Antioch fasted (Acts 13:1-3).
- The churches of Galatia fasted (Acts 14:21-23).
- The apostles fasted (1 Corinthians 6:1-10).
- Paul often fasted (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).
- It was noted that married couples might find a need to fast (1 Corinthians 7:5).