

The Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

(summary of "Fasting" by Jentezen Franklin)

"The discipline of fasting releases the anointing, the favor, and the blessing of God in the life of a Christian." Jentezen Franklin

Matthew 6:16-18

Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and you Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Jesus' instructions about fasting:

1. The spiritual discipline of fasting is to be a normal part of our relationship with God..."whenever you fast. In Matthew 9:15 Jesus makes it clear that He expected His disciples to fast after He was taken from them.
2. We should fast with a glad heart – don't look distressed and sad.
3. When we fast, our motive should be to fast unto the Lord not people. Just like giving generously and prayer, the only ones who should know you are fasting are those who have to know. If you call attention to your fasting, people will be impressed and, as Jesus said, their applause will be your reward.

Through-out scripture you will see calls to fasting coupled with focused prayer and intercession. When you enter into a biblical fast ask yourself, "What are the specific needs I am fasting for? When people fasted in the Bible, they fasted for a specific purpose. They may have been facing trouble, wanting direction, needing provision, desiring greater intimacy with God. Know why you are fasting and make that a point of increased prayer during the fast. Without increased times of prayer during fasting, it is easy for a biblical fast to turn into a worldly diet plan.

What Fasting is NOT:

- Dieting – even though there are health benefits
- a way to manipulate God into action
- a religious ritual – a calendar event
- to prove spiritual maturity or superiority

Why do we have such difficulty with fasting?

We don't like self-denial, we are very into self-preservation
We're more addicted to food than we think
We dislike discomfort!

Why do we fast?

1. Fasting is special time of ministry to the Lord
Acts 13:2 tells us that the prophets and teachers at the church in Antioch *ministered to the Lord and fasted.* In Zechariah 7:5 the Lord asks an interesting question, *When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me?*

2. Fasting helps us discipline the body and bring the flesh off of the throne. In 1 Corinthians 10:27 Paul states, *I discipline my body and bring it into subjection.* When we fast, we submit our bodies to God and say, "cleanse this body, and deal with the habits, attitudes and lusts of my flesh that stand between me You Lord." As we yield our hunger for food to the Lord, our hunger for God grows and our relationship with Him goes to a deeper level.

Fasting teaches us self-control and shows us what slaves we are to our flesh...it's confronting...we discover just how our flesh is a fundamental drive in our life. Fasting reveals the things that control you – things such as pride, anger, fear, food, deceit, anxiety, money, appearance, relationships, need to control, etc.

3. Fasting is good for seeking God's favor in the time of a crisis.
In Esther 4:16 we read of the fast initiated by Queen Esther. She asked the people to *"fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day.* Esther needed favor with the king when she stood before him. One biblical reason to fast is when you need God to bring blessing out of trouble.

4. Fasting brings clarity and understanding.
In Daniel 10:2-3 it says, *In those days, I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my month, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.* The result Daniel got from this 21 day fast is recorded in Daniel 10:1-11,14 *Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you...Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come."*

5. Fasting prepares us to hear the direction of the Lord, particularly at times of transition.

In Ezra 8:21 we read, *Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us an dour little ones and all our possessions."*

Fasting helps us focus in and seek God for the right way to proceed.

6. Fasting prepares people for spiritual battle and launching new initiatives.

In Judges 20, God tells the children of Israel to fight the tribe of Benjamin, because the tribe of Benjamin had become perverted and God was ready to judge them. They prayed and sought the Lord, but lost two battles and suffered the death of thousands of soldiers. Then we come to verse 26 which says: *Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.* They then go to battle and are victorious. Sometimes, something happens when we fast and pray that will not happen if you don't fast (see Matthew 17:21.)

7. Fasting strengthens your inner man and helps you take dominion.

In Matthew 4 we read that Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights. Why? He did it for authority. Adam lost dominion when he ate of the fruit of the tree God told him not to eat. Esau lost his birthright by eating. In the wilderness, the children of Israel lost the Promised Land by eating quail when God had given them His supernatural provision of manna. Fasting makes the inner man rise up! By fasting four days and nights, Jesus got back dominion and He returned in the power of the Spirit after He fasted.

8. Fasting can usher in God's healing power.

Isaiah chapter 58 to many is known as the "fasting chapter." In verses 6-9 this portion of Scripture says that *your healing shall spring forth speedily...*

9. Fasting lifts God's judgment from another's life.

Another fasting key is found in 1 Kings 21:27-29. King Ahab was extremely wicked and the prophet tells him that the dogs are going to lick up his blood because he had sinned against God. Scriptures tell us how Ahab responded. *So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house."*

God lifted the judgement against Ahab because he humbled himself in fasting. We can fast and pray for another who knows right from wrong and living disobedient to the ways of God, giving them more time for God's mercy to do a work in their life.

10. Fasting brings forth breakthrough.

Hannah was barren and scriptures tell us in 1 Samuel 1:17 that she *cried out and fasted and God heard her cry.* Hannah had a breakthrough and gave birth to Samuel.

Types of Biblical Fasts

- Privately: Some fasting is to be done privately – example, Jesus in the wilderness, Matthew 4 and in secret - Matthew 6:16-18

or

- Corporately: Some fasts are done with a group of people for a specific purpose – example, 2 Chronicles 20:3-4,13 where Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast through-out Judah and all Judah including women and children fasted, seeking direction and favor from the Lord.

- Length of Fasts
 - 1 Day Fast – Jeremiah 36:6
 - 3 Day Fast – Esther 4:16, Paul in Acts 9:9
 - 10 Day Fast – Daniel in Daniel 1:12
 - 21 Day Fast – Daniel in Daniel chapter 10:3
 - 40 Day Fast – Jesus in Matthew 4, Moses in Exodus 34:24-28, Elijah in 1 Kings 19:8

- Types of fasts
 - abstain from food and water (Esther, Paul – both 3 days)
 - abstain from all food (Jesus, Elijah, Moses, Joshua)
 - Daniel fast – only vegetables, fruit and grains (food from seed “zeroa”) and water. Daniel 1 or Daniel 10:3 no sweets, no bread, no meat or wine.

 - if physical condition prevents fasting of food, remember that fasting is to be an offering, a sacrifice of the flesh, so participate in the spirit of the fast by fasting something that is costly to you such as coffee or t.v. or another form of entertainment.

 - Remember to increase your water intake during a fast

Closing:

As you set your fasting times, remember, we don't fast to manipulate God, but rather to die to ourselves that God might increase in our lives and that we may draw closer to Him.

For additional study listen to Sermon: “Fasting for the Purpose of Pursuing God” by Pastor Farrell Lemings, October 2, 2004

(summary by Pastor Michelle Hoverson, July 2009)