

Grace for Fasting- Part 4

Introduction: In our previous sessions we have looked at some of the history of fasting, if fasting is for today, why we fast, who we are fasting for and our motives for fasting. I hope everyone is as encouraged as I am. I feel recharged with a renewed perspective on fasting. I would even go as far to say that my thoughts associated with the word fast have changed.

When we hear the word “fast” it immediately brings thoughts and feelings to mind. What are those thoughts and feelings? Why do we think them? Set your mind free from the bondage that says you can’t do it. I encourage you when you are given an invitation to fast, let your heart’s cry be yes! Then ask God, “How?”

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Mt 26:41 NIV)

“Fasting seems unfamiliar and even frightening to many people, yet this attitude is strange. Fasting was regularly practiced by God’s people throughout the Bible. Fasting is also an accepted part of most other major world religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.”¹ –Derek Prince

“There are others whose misgivings concern the practical aspect. To them fasting and starving are synonymous terms, and they fear it will have harmful results. Because ‘no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it’ (Eph. 5:29), they oppose fasting almost instinctively. ‘Do be careful,’ they say. ‘You could seriously impair your health. Living such a busy life you cannot afford to get run down!’”² –Arthur Wallis

I. WHO SHOULD FAST?

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.” (Mt 6:16 NIV)

- A. Those that want to make more space in their life for God.
- B. Those who desire to deepen their prayer life.
- C. Anybody that wants to grow in thankfulness and gratitude.
- D. Anyone who wants to draw nearer to God and allow Him to be the Comforter.
- E. Someone with a specific prayer assignment.
- F. Anyone who wants to hear God.

II. TYPES OF FASTS

We have already established in the previous parts of this series that in the Bible fasting was giving up some or all food and in some cases water also.

Merriam Webster defines fast as 1) to abstain from food 2) to eat sparingly or abstain from some foods.

There are a variety of ways to engage in fasting both on an individual and corporate level. Fasts are typically done for a specific time frame.

- A. The normal fast
 - 1. No food but water to drink.

2. Jesus fasted for 40 days, and afterwards he was hungry. It does not say He was thirsty.

B. The absolute fast

1. Also known as the “Esther fast.”
2. Moses did this for 80 consecutive days with obvious supernatural intervention. (Dt 9:9,18; Ex 34:28)
3. Elijah went 40 days taking nothing with obvious supernatural intervention. (1 Ki 19:8)
4. Saul of Tarsus went three days taking nothing. (Ac 9:9)
5. Many raise concerns over the safety of an Esther fast and if a person can go three days without food or water. Terri Schiavo, whose feeding tube was removed after a long court battle in 2005, lived for 13 days.

“The absolute fast is an exceptional measure for an exceptional situation. It is something usually reserved for spiritual emergencies.”³ –Arthur Wallis

C. The partial fast

1. We often refer to this as a Daniel fast. However, we don't know exactly what he ate, nor do those doing a Daniel fast necessarily define it in the same way as one another.
2. A partial fast is abstaining from particular foods, limiting the number of meals, or limiting the kind of food intake.

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. (Da 1:8 NIV)

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. (Mt 3:4 NIV)

D. Non-food fast

1. Anytime we give up something and replace it with time with the Lord it is beneficial.
2. Food and water are essential to life, giving them up is giving up a necessity of life. In fasting food, you put yourself in a place where you are more vulnerable and weak. You are forced to lean on His strength and not your own.
3. Fasting food has both physiological and psychological impacts on our bodies.

III. BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND.

- A. The first question you have to ask yourself is do you want to make fasting work for you or are you looking for a way to make fasting not work for you? We have all been there. Someone starts talking about fasting and our brain starts churning out the reasons why we can't fast. When it comes to fasting, we are suddenly more willing to talk about what we can't do. Maybe you've gone past that and you don't even consider fasting anymore. If this is where you are, it's time to take back the powerful tool of fasting. Ask God what His thoughts are on the matter.

- B. The effects on your health may be a concern. There are actually many health benefits of fasting. Some conditions that may be benefitted by fasting include skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis, irritable bowel syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, high cholesterol, Crohn's disease, diabetes, autoimmune conditions, high blood pressure, digestive disturbances, obesity, and asthma. A Google search will turn up many more.
- C. You may be concerned if you are underweight. Research has shown that as long as an individual is healthy, they return to their normal weight in a short amount of time after they resume eating. You could also consider a meal replacement shake. All the calories—zero pleasure.
- D. We usually grant automatic exemptions for those who are pregnant, nursing, have pre-existing health conditions or an eating disorder. Believe it or not, people in this group can actually benefit from certain types of fasts. Fasting from caffeine, sugar, artificial sweeteners, and processed foods can be a great sacrifice, yet eliminates nothing essential and yields great health benefits.

IV. BATTLEFIELD OF THE EMOTIONS.

- A. In addition to all of our logical arguments, we carry a lot of emotional baggage that wants to weigh in on the matter. We are in a constant tug of war between self-indulgence and self-discipline.
- B. We are bombarded with TV commercials, magazine ads, billboards and restaurants on every corner. You will see ads for diets, gyms, and weight loss clinics along side mouthwatering images of food. Food, eating, and not eating are constant companions causing pain and shame.
 - 1. There are nearly 8,000 books on fasting on Amazon, many of them coming from the weight loss perspective. The goal of fasting isn't to lose weight. We must go back to the question, who are you fasting for?
 - 2. Fasting can be used to hide an eating disorder. If you have a history of an eating disorder tell someone, and have them keep you accountable. Eating disorders thrive in secrecy. Leaders and friends, pay attention and watch out for one another.
- C. We have been conditioned to do what makes us happy. Going without food does not tend to make us happy. We live in a society that says every desire should be fulfilled as soon as possible. We have fast food available to us on every corner. Credit cards anyone?

“As a result of the barrage of advertising we have experienced all our lives, we have become fearful of deprivation of any kind. We have become subtly convinced that the indulgence of every appetite is psychologically and physically healthy. If I forgo any pleasures, I might be diminished as a person.”⁴ –Lynne M. Baab
- D. No one likes to be punished and fasting can be mistaken for this type of discipline. While fasting is a discipline, it is not a punishment. It is a discipline of making space for God like reading your Bible and praying.
- E. We use food to satiate every emotion. Many of our memories are connected to food, good and bad. We eat when we are happy, we eat when we are sad and we eat when we have a hard day. If you have a bad day, you comfort yourself with a brownie. In fasting we remove food

as our comfort. Think about it as retraining your brain (renewing your mind), in a fast you don't eat the brownie because you "can't", instead you find yourself having a conversation with God about it. This is what He desires for us all the time. He doesn't want us to look to food for our comfort. If we use food to satiate every emotion, we neglect to both give thanks to God and to deal with our emotional garbage.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Co 1:3-4 NIV)

- F. It can be emotionally difficult to identify with those less fortunate than us. It can take us out of our comfort zone. It is sometimes difficult to see our own self-indulgence when we experience the lack of others.

V. BATTLEFIELD OF THE BODY.

A. Preparing to fast.

1. Many of the fasting symptoms we experience are actually our bodies getting rid of toxins. Taking a few steps ahead of time can help some of them. Reducing the toxins we put into our bodies, will reduce the amount of work our body has to do to get them out. Toxins are stored our fat tissue, this is where our body turns for fuel after the first few days without food.
2. Headaches are often the result of caffeine withdrawal, gradually cutting back before the fast allows your body time to adjust.
3. Timing may or may not be something you can control. When possible, choose a day that works best for you. For longer fasts you may need to take holidays, vacations, birthdays or other life events into account.

B. During the fast.

1. You will experience hunger pains or desires. Know what you're praying for so that when you have hunger pains you use them as a reminder to pray for that specific prayer target. It's not about skipping meals, it's about more time with God. It's less about what you give up than what you replace it with. Only in this can the fast fulfill it's purpose. We are not subject to our bodies desires.
2. People often experience dizziness or get light headed. Remember to stand up slowly.
3. You may need more rest especially in the first few days or week.
4. Once your body starts to burn fat stores for its energy needs, you may have other symptom. You may experience bad breath, skin blemishes and some other unpleasant side effects as your body eliminates toxins. Your skin, mouth, lungs, kidneys, liver and bowels are all participants in the elimination process.
5. Water is important in longer fasting. Sometimes we drink less because it seems to just run right thru us. Dehydration can make you feel worse by causing headaches and making you feel even more tired. Drinking water also helps with the elimination of toxins and gets you thru that stage more quickly.

C. Breaking the fast

1. Start slow. You just sent your digestive organs on vacation.
2. When you begin eating, pay attention to the signals your body is sending and give it time to respond. You want to watch for stomach pain, cramping, bloating, indigestion, nausea and any other discomfort. These are signs you're moving too quickly.
3. Start with a small amount of juice or broth every few hours. You can then add fruit. If you tolerate those well, you can try adding salad, cooked vegetables or broth based soup at the next meal. If all is going well, you can try lean meats next. Other meats, dairy and breads should be added slowly and one at a time and in small quantities.
4. Within a week of a complete fast, you will likely be able to eat just as you did before. Just remember, your stomach has shrunk and it will take a lot less to fill it so don't eat too quickly.

VI. FASTING AS A LIFESTYLE.

- A. We need to exercise self-control in all areas. A fasted lifestyle is cutting out the unnecessary.
- B. In non-food fasts, we are typically giving up something that we know is not good for us either physically or spiritually. We may need to consider if it should be a lifestyle change and not a fast.
- C. Limiting or eliminating foods, beverages and other substances that are not beneficial to your health. This might include caffeinated beverages, processed foods, sugar, artificial sweeteners, cigarettes, alcohol, etc. I want to stress processed foods because I do not believe that man has done anything to improve upon what God created. I refuse to believe that God created an inferior product that we were then able to fix or improve. We may have increased yield and created new products, but all of those come with trade offs, many of which are health related. Many of the toxins our bodies are busy eliminating are on the ingredient labels of the foods we're eating.
- D. Fasting food makes us aware of our inner need. We need God just as we need food. Fasting reminds us of that and it reboots our spiritual appetite.

¹ Prince, Derek. *Fasting: The Key to Releasing God's Power in Your Life*. Charlotte: Whitaker House, 1986. Kindle edition. 20 Feb. 2015.

² Wallis, Arthur. *God's Chosen Fast*. Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 1968. Kindle edition. 20 Feb. 2015.

³ Wallis. 20 Feb. 2015.

⁴ Baab, Lynne M. *Fasting: Spiritual Freedom Beyond Our Appetites*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006. 19-20. Print.