

Fasting -May

When you hear the term fasting, what kind of thoughts come to mind? Positive? Negative? For many people it is likely thoughts of "It's not for me" or "Miss a meal or two... no big deal." Neither of these really should be connected to fasting. Fasting is meant to be connected to joy and freedom.

The basic definition of Christian fasting is "saying no to otherwise normal activities for the sake of spiritual focus". Traditionally fasting is associated with food, but it can be a time of denial of anything that allows us to avoid God. Exercise, reading, TV, other forms of entertainment and media, shopping, even conversations with others. It is not that any of these things are bad, but they can get in the way of our loving God and loving others. Fasting is the exercise of doing without one or more of these things in our lives for a time to re-evaluate our priorities.

So what kind of thoughts come to your mind being asked to give something up? Panic? A desire to get in a good dose of what you are going to give up? Even the process of thinking about what to fast from can cause our true priorities to surface. Meditation and prayer are powerful disciplines to combine with fasting.

Fasting is one of two disciplines that has the greatest capacity to build freedom into our lives from what enslaves our emotions, attitudes and decisions, the other being confession. When rightly used, fasting can break habits of bondage even decades old. Jesus fasted before His encounter with Satan, and was strong, not weak, to face the temptations Satan brought to Him. We too can find great strength to face adversity through fasting.

One further thought about fasting. Hospitality should always supersede fasting. If you are offered something that 'breaks' your fast, accept the gift and enjoy the relationship. Don't make fasting a 'point of honour' or spirituality. That can lead to pride, fasting should always lead to humility.

Below are various activities to consider.

****Special note**** If you are considering fasting from food and have a medical condition of any kind, please consult with a physician before trying anything.

For Anyone:

- The early church often fasted (from food) on Wednesdays and Fridays. Consider picking two consistent, and separate days of the week to fast. Here are some options of how to potentially fast using food.
 - No solid food
 - Bread and water fast
 - No sugar or coffee\tea
 - Eat smaller portions at meal times & no seconds
 - Eat only when you are hungry and stop when you are full
- If you are tempted to eat when you are bored, lonely, or feeling another negative emotion, examine the emotion and its source and take it to God in prayer, including praying for those who have little or no food available to them.

- Keep a journal on your fast days. Write down your attitudes and emotions that rise to the surface when you are not using what you are fasting from to keep them pressed down. Focus your prayer time on those issues.
- For those who are task oriented, spend 15 minutes a day resting from any physical or mental activity, just sitting or lying down, trusting God that everything that needs to be done will be done.
- Other ideas of things to fast from: (the more you believe you couldn't do this, the more you just might need to)
 - Needing to be right/correcting others
 - Media (video games, TV, Facebook/social media, newspaper)
 - Believing you are in control or from the need to be in control
 - From saying yes to every request for your time, skills or resources
 - Shopping as a recreational activity or other recreational activities that you require to feel good about yourself
 - Unhealthy eating patterns or foods (eating out, junk food, etc...)

For Families:

- Identify areas that are distractions from your relationship together as a family and/or your relationship as a family with God. Create one or two days a week for the next two months where you fast from those things
- Get out one suitcase and think about what you as a family would put into it if you had to flee for some reason (fire, chemical leak, war). Talk as a family about what it would be like to lose everything else. Then talk about what you would still have.
- Consider making a sacrifice financially as a family in some area to adopt a child through an aid organization. If you already do, get your family involved in writing letters, raising money to further support that child and their family or learn as much as possible about their country, community and life.

Fasting
April 6th 2014

For Further Reflection and Application:

10 Biblical purposes for fasting:

1. To strengthen prayer
(Ezra 8:23; Neh. 1:4)
2. To seek God's guidance
(Judges 20:20-28; Acts 14:23)
3. To express grief
(1 Sam. 31:13)
4. To seek deliverance or protection
(Ezra 8: 21-23; Esther)
5. To express repentance/return to God
(Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8)
6. To humble oneself before God
(1 Kings 21: 27-29; Psalm 35:13)
7. To express concern for the work of God
(Neh. 1:3-4; Dan. 9:3)
8. To minister to the needs of others
(Is. 58:6-7)
9. To overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God (Matt. 4:1-11)
10. To express love and worship in God
(Luke 2:37)

What will you say 'no' to in your life to give yourself greater capacity to say 'yes' to more of God and His life in you?

Scripture Memory:
Isaiah 58:6-7