

Fasting: Feasting on God

For many of us fasting is one of those practices that seems reserved for the super saints or the truly desperate. Going without food is hardly common or pleasant, and therefore the practice of fasting seems reserved for the pages of Scripture and monasteries of ancient times. You may be asking why should I fast here in the winter of 2021 when I am neither a super saint nor desperate? That's a great question. Are you open to God answering it?

The practice of fasting is nearly as old as mankind. Though it is certainly not solely Christian, it has a rich heritage in the history of God's relationship with His people. It is taught and referred to in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus Himself said, "when you fast..." not if you fast or maybe you should fast but when. It is a clear assumption by Him that the question is not if we should fast but when and how. So why would Jesus fast and teach others to do so as well? Because fasting brings an incredible focus upon the power of our own appetites and reveals to us our own weakness. It gives us an opportunity to deny ourselves of something in order to create within ourselves more space for God.

There are several things about Christian fasting, which set it apart from all other religious, political, or self-improvement fasts.

- It is not done to impress God or to influence Him to carry out our will. That is the most common misuse of fasting within Christianity, and it is based upon a poor understanding of God. The reasoning goes something like: "If I do something really hard like giving up food for a day, then surely God will repay me with what I want." That places God and us into something of an employer/employee relationship and focuses upon our achievements instead of His grace. It also causes us to only fast when we feel like we need to get God to do something for us.
- Christian fasting is a statement to ourselves and God that we are willing to give up something good in order to choose something better, which is attention to Him.
- Christian fasting should never lead to increased pride in ourselves, but instead heighten our humility and dependency on God.
- The goal of fasting is not to simply survive without food for a time, but to emphasize and increase our hunger for God.

You still may feel a little overwhelmed by the idea of fasting. A few tips may take away a bit of the mystery.

- If doing without food is impractical due to health reasons, consider giving up something else that is inherently good or neutral for which you have a strong affinity. Coffee, soft drinks, television, social media or other entertainment are all examples of possible fasting targets. Remember, the purpose is to not just do without but to provide more time and focus for God. If fasting from television, don't just read a book instead; spend the time in prayer or studying the Bible.
- If you choose to fast from food, do not also fast from fluids. Water and fruit juices are essential to keeping your body functioning safely.
- Set a definite goal for the length of your fast. If you don't, you will be consumed with trying to decide when it will be "OK" for you to end the fast. Suddenly, you are more focused upon the food than upon God.
- When hunger pangs strike, use them as a reminder to turn toward God to focus upon Him. The first day is often the most difficult as you tell your body and mind that they will not be receiving the immediate attention you have always given them.
- Don't allow Satan to tell you that you can't do this or to heap shame upon you if you do not complete the fast. Take a chance, step out toward God but don't believe the lie that God will be disappointed in you if you try and fail.

In summary, we fast because we believe that even the good and necessary things of God are worth giving up on occasion to remind us that the giver is even greater than His gifts. In a society where we rarely do without anything, it is extremely difficult to truly sense our dependence upon God. Allow fasting to open your eyes to the power of your desires and appetites and then fall back into the loving arms of your God who wants to provide you all things as you become dependent upon Him.