

Spiritual Discipline: Fasting and Prayer

Suggestions by Ashlee Alley Crawford and Bellarmee Milosi

Discipline isn't necessarily something to which we naturally gravitate, but when we're serious about becoming disciples of Jesus, it's an essential part of the Christian life. This week we'll take a look at the spiritual discipline of fasting and consider how intentionally limiting something (food, technology, or something else) cultivates discipline that helps us pay closer attention to God's voice, individually and in a community. Life isn't found in calories, vitamins, or nutrients, though those things sustain it. Rather, life is found in submitting our lives to God, in taking on the life of Christ, and in putting one foot after another, day after day.

If you're interested in trying a fast for a day, or a few days, here are some things to consider:

- 1.) First of all, the point is not to "complete the fast," but rather to **connect with God**.
 - Not about restricting food, media, or technology, it's about opening up one's heart to God's still, steady voice that meets us in the desert.
 - Fasting is Fellowship—communion, feasting on presence of God.
 - Opportunity to encounter the strength to endure the challenges that we face through means such as prayer.
- 2.) Determine a **length of time** that is appropriate for your fast.
 - "Wesley Fast" and is from after dinner one night until mid-afternoon (or some say dinner) the following day.
 - Consider asking the Spirit guide you about how long that should last.
 - Based on the length to time, you can fast from sunset to sundown, or you can do 6 am – 6 pm (full day). You can do a partial fasting, where you fast for half a day praying and seeking the presence of God, once you're done you can open your fast.
- 3.) **Consider what you will fast:** whether you want to engage a partial fast (For food: perhaps consisting of consuming only clear liquids—chicken broth or juice or merely eating vegetables or fruit and water) or a complete fast and abstaining from all food, but not water. A fast that includes not drinking any water is not advisable. There is a fast called the Daniel fast, inspired by the way the prophet Daniel abstain from eating any meat to only feed on vegetables and fruits. While he was fasting this way, he was seeking God's presence. Do not ignore the prayer (or the connecting with God's part) of fasting (Daniel 10: 2-3)
 - Fasting from food may not be wise depending on your emotional or physical health. Ask God to give you wisdom about whether this is a practice that will lead you closer to God or if it would be an unhealthy choice right now and consider an alternate fast—technology, spending money, etc.

- If you consider a non-food fast, identify the boundaries in fasting from something else—working, technology, exercise, spending discretionary money
- 4.) **Substitute times of eating and preparing food or your alternative fast with prayer.**
John Wesley, ever the champion of fasting, reminded us of the connection between the two.
- Let us always join fervent prayer with fasting, pouring out our souls before God, confessing our sins, humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, laying open before him all our needs, all our guiltiness and helplessness. This is a time for expanding our prayers...and even our Lord fasted and prayed.*
- 5.) **Pay attention to your body.**
- Whether you're fasting from food or something else, consider your bodily response when denying yourself from something you want. This works as a clock, alarm or reminder. In other words, each time you will be hungry or feel tired and ask yourself, "Why am I not eating?" As you remember that you're fasting, let that be an invitation to pray.
 - If fasting from food: our natural reserves carry us through times when we don't receive the nutrition we need
 - Our bodies are trained to think it will eat at certain times: "pangs" will go away and you will find that you will actually have an increased focus and sense of purpose in what you are undertaking.
 - Longer time-- physical weakness may come, limit physical activity if more than a day of fasting
- 6.) **Beware what fasting unearths...you're doing it right!**
- You may identify that you're more irritable, impatient, or something else that makes you less pleasant for others. 😊 Recognize this is actually part of the spiritual power of fasting as you get a more honest response to your heart, mind, and body.
 - **This irritability is not caused** by fasting from food or your alternative. It is under the surface and **revealed** by the spiritual practice. God can work with the honest admission of how it *really* is with our soul and restore us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting for spiritual reasons is a practice to not just cultivate mindfulness at that level, but **also mindLIKEness...being open to having the mind of Christ**, like it says in 1 Cor. 2:16. Fasting is an invitation to meaningfully connect with God through a sacrificial practice.