

# Fasting

February 21, 2010  
Matthew 6:16-18

*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. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

**For Jesus, it isn't a question of \_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_.

**Fasting \_\_\_\_\_ to draw us closer to God.**

**Fasting is a physical discipline that brings \_\_\_\_\_.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

Think about "Prepare for the Word" and **Do "In the Word" *before your group meets*** so that you have optimum time for discussion on the first and third section during your group meeting.

**Prepare for the Word** (Leaders, take about 15 minutes for this section.)

What do you do if you want to get to know someone better?

**In the Word** (This section is ***to be done before group***, to allow optimum time for discussion of Apply the Word. It does not have to be discussed unless help is needed or questions are asked.)

Read the following passages (and maybe the verses around it). What information does it give about fasting?

Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Isaiah 58:1-14; Daniel 1:12; Daniel 9:1-17; Ezra 10:6; Nehemiah 9:1-3; Esther 4:15, 16; Joel 1:12-14; Matthew 4:2, 6:15-19; John 4:13-14, 6:35, 7:37-38; Acts 9:9, 13:1-3, 14:22-24

**Apply the Word** (Leaders, This is the main part of the lesson for group discussion. Allow 30 - 45 minutes, plus at least 15 minutes for prayer.)

How did Jesus' fast show that God was His priority?

How can fasting help prepare us with our own battles with the devil and temptation?

You need food to live. How is our need for God even greater than the food we eat or the air we breathe?

What would life be like if you felt your desire for God as strongly as hunger or thirst; that going without Him in your life would be painful?

Jesus calls Himself the bread of life and the source of living water. How is this different from physical

food?

(Remember that the act of giving something up is meaningless unless you fill it up with something to bring you more in line with God's will.)

How can we receive nourishment from God when we fast?

Fasting is to bring us in-sync with God. Compare Matthew 9:10-17, Mark 2:15-22, and Luke 5:29-39. Why didn't the Disciples need to fast while Jesus was with them?

The rest of this study is a brochure on fasting written by the late Bill Bright, Campus Crusade for Christ. Read over it and discuss anything that pops out at you or you have a question about.

### **MAKING YOUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE THE BEST IT CAN BE**

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing praises to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is the most powerful of all Christian disciplines and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

Do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, actions, motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of your attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the results of a fast. Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience," as some do. Many people who have successfully completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known, but others who have honestly sought His face report no particular outward results at all. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally, and spiritually grueling, but they knew they had been called by God to fast, and they completed the fast unto Him as an act of worship. God honored that commitment.

Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way.

### **MAINTAINING NUTRITIONAL BALANCE:**

There are many types of fasts, and the option you choose depends upon your health, the desired length of your fast, and your preference:

- A Water Fast - means to abstain from all food and juices
- A Partial Fast means to eliminate certain foods or specific meals
- A "Juice" Fast - means to drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times

I know the prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be of concern to some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs, so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast.

If you are beginning a juice fast, there are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. You may find the following daily schedule helpful during your fast.

- 5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.  
Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended, diluted in 50 percent distilled water if the fruit is acid. Orange, apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, grape, peach or other fruits are good.
- 10:30 a.m. - noon  
Vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts.
- 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
Herb tea with a drop of honey. Make sure that it is not black tea or tea with a stimulant.
- 6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Broth from boiled potatoes, celery, and carrots (no salt).

I suggest that you do not drink milk because it is a pure food and therefore a violation of the fast. Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or cola. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This works both against the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to limit your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule will permit (this especially applies to extended fasts). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health, and on a juice fast. However, no one on a water fast should exercise without the supervision of a fasting specialist.

#### **HOW TO FINISH YOUR FAST IN A HEALTHY WAY:**

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller at this point, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread (except for "Melba toast"). Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils. Introduce them slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts which need to be ended with caution. Even a 3day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup - something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, and carrots - and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.