

Prayer Tool: How to Fast

What?

Fasting is the practice of giving up something we normally consume to focus on God. This prayer tool will show its significance in spiritual warfare.

Why?

“Fasting is universal temperance, prayer is universal communication with God; the former defends from the outside, whereas the latter from within directs a fiery weapon against the enemies. The demons can sense a faster and man of prayer from a distance, and they run far away from him so as avoid a painful blow.” St Theophan the Recluse

Bible reference:

“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.” Matthew 6:17-18

A quick introduction to Fasting

The Biblical principle of fasting is a process of forgoing something (primarily food) in order that we might turn our gaze on to God in a more intense and focused way.

Fasting is referred to numerous times in both the Old and New Testament as a practice of God’s people. Jesus talks about it in the Sermon on the Mount alongside prayer and giving, and in doing so we could argue He endorses it as a prerequisite for the disciple: “When you fast...” (Matthew 6:16) presumes fasting will be a familiar practice in the life of the Jesus-follower, just as prayer and giving is.

While fasting implies abstaining from food, it more importantly means a feasting on God - an utter dependence upon the presence of God beyond the sustenance of food. In doing so we prove the words Jesus quoted during His own fast: “...man does not live by bread alone but by every word that precedes from the mouth of God...”

Prayer and fasting is the weapon we must pick up if we are to overcome the assignments of the enemy against our lives and be free to progress into deeper realms of the Spirit.

Corporate fasting

While fasting is often a private matter between an individual and God, the Bible also refers to a number of corporate fasts.

These corporate fasts were often in times when the children of Israel were in a desperate situation. Realising their need to repent of sins on behalf of the nation¹, they cried out to God in fasting and prayer for a breakthrough.

We also see this practice at certain key 'breakthrough moments' in the New Testament. Jesus told the disciples when confronting certain demonic activity that, 'this sort only comes out through prayer and fasting'.

In Acts 13, at a critical juncture in the life of the church regarding its launch into Gentile territory, we read of the apostles and prophets fasting and praying to God, seeking wisdom for what would become the explosion of the gospel breaking through the missional frontier.

There is a dimension to fasting which draws us into the spiritual realm and the front-edge of spiritual warfare. Significant shifts and major breakthroughs can come as a result of fasting and prayer and it has proven to be a primary tool, for thousands of years, in the advancement of the Kingdom.

Ironically, when we are weak in body, we are sometimes strongest in spirit, spiritually heightened and alert, and therefore primed for a breakthrough. Jesus Himself seems to have endured most of the satanic attacks against His life during His forty days of fasting in the wilderness. This should inspire and educate us in our Christian journey and maturing process – the Son of God, knowing He was about to face the temptations and torments of the enemy, utilised the weapon of fasting, and in so doing overcame the devil and his angels.

Only after this did Jesus' ministry fully begin. Maybe some of the breakthroughs we want to see in our own lives or the lives of our families, churches and cities will only come after a season of fasting and prayer.

¹ See Identificational Repentance Prayer Tool.

Do it: How to Fast ²

The tips below are for a fast of food, but ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you could fast. You might want to try the following instead:

- Social media
- Alcohol
- Talking
- Entertainment or sport
- Screens and devices

'Walk before you can run:' a 'slow and steady' approach to progression in this discipline is particularly important. It might be an idea to start with a partial fast, like missing one meal a day for a week, or trying a 'Daniel fast' which involves giving up all delicacies and concentrating on vegetables.

Build it up gradually: move on in your fasting, trying one 24 hour period once a week for a few weeks. After success in this fasting, move onto a longer fast – try 3 days, or build a more consistent rhythm of the first 2 days of every month. It may be good to tie in with the church's calendar at Lent and aim for a longer, more intentional fast.

Plan: as you prepare to fast, try and plan your diary intentionally. It is good to try and not get too busy when you are fasting so that you can give some set time to prayer. Try not to fill up the time you would have been fasting with work and meetings, rather keep it free to intentionally seek God. You may also want to check that your medical conditions comply with you fasting. If you need to, check it out with your GP.

Monitor: try to pay attention to the attitude of your heart. What is God revealing? What needs to change?

Keep going: when you start, you will begin to feel hunger pangs or discomfort: it's not real hunger - try to resist and allow the pains to trigger you instead to offer up prayers to God.

Soon the pangs will pass. Initially the body might suffer discomfort – this is due to the body ridding itself from toxins that have built up over the years because of bad eating habits. Don't be disturbed, rather thank God for the increased health and wellbeing as a result.

² Some of the following has been inspired by chapter on fasting in Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline

Keep worshipping: while outwardly you may be getting on with what you have to do, inwardly be in singing and adoration in your heart to the Lord.

Wisdom: be aware of the weakness in your body and try not to do anything too strenuous that would put you and/or others at risk. Break your fast with a light meal, rather than heavily overeating.

Books on Fasting

- Celebration of Discipline - Richard Foster
- Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting - Derek Prince