

Why Fast?

While fasting Dick Gregory ran the Boston Marathon. Park Barner ran in the 52 and 1/2 mile double marathon, from London to Brighton, after a fast; two weeks later in a 36 miler he used the same technique.

An interview with Dr. Nikolayev, of Moscow, revealed his personal findings about fasting. He was asked "What do you think is the most important discovery in our century? The finding of dinosaur eggs in Mongolia? The radioactive watch? Television? Atomic energy? Hydrogen Bombs?" He responded, "In my opinion the biggest discovery in our time is the ability to make one's self younger - physically, mentally and spiritually - through rational fasting."

Upton Sinclair, a novelist, lived to be 90 years old because, in his estimation, he was given to long fasting. Here is a gleaned from his diary of a 12 day fast. "The first day I was extremely hungry... the second day I felt significantly less hungry, and then to my surprise, I no longer felt hungry. I had a headache on the first day. The third and fourth days were the same as a feeling of clarity in my brain. I took long walks and began to write. I was surprised by the clarity and activity of my brain. Everyday at noon I began to feel a little weak, but a massage and a cold shower would restore my strength. On the 7th day of my fast, I was busy every minute of the day until late in the evening. I have walked miles everyday and have felt no weakness to speak of. I shall continue to fast until I get hungry. On the 12th day I cut my fast by drinking a glass of orange juice. I felt at peace and relaxed and every nerve in my brain felt like a cat taking a nap on a warm oven. Before the fast I was frail and weak, now I am strong and healthy!"

Early Egyptians believed that the basis for preserving good health and youthfulness was to fast three days a month. The ancient Greeks fasted, Pythagoras, the mathematician, was convinced that fasting aided the mental process and he fasted 40 days at a time and urged his students to do the same.

Socrates and Plato enjoyed 10 day fasts. Plutarch said, "Instead of using medicine, better fast today." The ancient Arab physician Avicenna prescribed fasting for all ailments.

The Zens went without food every fifth day, the ancient Syrians every seventh. The Mongolians every tenth. Arab physicians in the 10th and 11th centuries prescribed three weeks fasting for a cure of small pox or syphilis. In 1769 the University of Moscow released their report on fasting in an article entitled, "Report of fasting as Prevention of the illness" in which they declared that it is best to stop eating during any illness. "It gives the stomach a rest period, enabling the patient to digest properly when he recovers and starts to eat again." In Plymouth Colony there were designated days of fasting for the early pilgrims. North American Indians held fasting in high esteem and would often fast prior to a hunt. Throughout times men have fasted to protest causes and make stands on issues. It was a 30 day fast that preceded the passing women's right to vote in Britain, as women all over the country underwent a protest by fasting.

In the 1930's Ghandi wrote about a recent fast in which there was an "indescribable peace within". In his own words, "...the fast was uninterrupted 21 day prayer... there is no prayer without fasting."

Recently in New Orleans, the Tulane School of Medicine, undertook a study of fasting and the effects on the human body. A volunteer underwent a voluntary 30 day fast, drinking only water, and some juice near the end of his fast. The doctors were expecting to observe weakening and breakdown of the body and instead they observed a revitalizing and strengthening. To demonstrate his physical condition, the volunteer, after his 30 day fast, walked from New Orleans to Baton Rouge - over 80 miles!

In the book "Fasting: The Ultimate Diet" the author, Dr. Allan Cott, who is an advocate of fasting and gives guidelines for up to a 21 day fast, outlines these benefits of fasting:

1. You lose weight quickly.
2. You feel great.
3. You look younger.
4. You like yourself more.
5. You save money.
6. You save time.

"Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

1 Cor. 9:25-27

At the mere mention of the word fast many people still react with shock and indignation. "A person would have to be out of his mind to fast! Are you serious, me fast? I don't want to die! You're killing yourself, God surely doesn't want you to harm your body! It is downright unhealthy to miss a meal, your body can't stand it! I've got to eat everyday because of the work I do...I'd pass out from weakness if I fasted!"

Yet even in the natural, people have discovered the benefits of fasting and the body's tolerance and rest it receives during fasting. Dr. C. Goodrich of Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, New York City, said, "People don't realize that the chief obstacle to fasting is overcoming the cultural and social psychological fears of going without food. These fears are ingrained. Fasting is not starving, not even in the medical sense or the natural sense.

The word "fast" comes from "fasten", an old English word that means "to abstain." The body actually does not enter a period of true starvation until after 25 days of fasting! Fasting in the natural is merely abstaining from food for the purpose of causing the body to "burn off" stored food. Dr. G. Cahill of the Harvard Medical School, said, "man's survival (of long periods without food) is based upon a remarkable ability to conserve the body protein stores while utilizing fat as the primary energy-producing food." As mentioned earlier, they do it for a corruptible crown, we for an incorrupt-

ible. Fasting is not only demonstrated in history and in medicine, it is vividly portrayed in the scripture as a time of intense spiritual dedication.

History tells us that the early church would fast at the prompting of a bishop during times of general disaster. Polycarp in 110 A.D. said that he used fasting as a way of warding off temptation and lust. Early Christians fasted on Wednesday and Friday, according to history, and later on Saturdays.

There are no less than 74 references to fasting in the Old and New Testaments. It is beneficial to us to know the medical aspects of fasting, but it is the spirit. The Bible says that they that sow to the flesh shall reap of the flesh, they the spirit-of the spirit. So let us look at fasting from the biblical perspective:

I. Why Fast?

Joel 2:12 - Therefore also now saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping and with mourning.

Psalms 35:13 ...I humbled my soul with fasting...

Psalms 69:10 ...When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting... (David then in the remaining of the chapter begins to give the reason for his fast;) deliverance...help... comfort...victory!

Matthew 9:15 ...Can the children of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then they shall fast.

In every child of God are two natures - that of the flesh and that of the Spirit. Peter called them "fleshly lusts which war against the soul". Paul said, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man (the spirit): but I see another law in my members (the flesh), warring against law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members"..**Romans 7:22-23**.

Fasting primarily gives us the opportunity to deny the flesh and "sow to the spirit." It is through fasting and prayer that we can "tear down the strongholds of the enemy"... and strengthen our spiritual man. Jesus spoke of some demons that ..."come not but by prayer and fasting.." and so there are some things necessary in our walk with God "that come not but by prayer and fasting." It is through fasting that we crucify our flesh so that the spirit might live. The New Testament is filled with examples of fasting as a time of intense devotion to God. Is it not noteworthy that even Jesus began ministry with a period of prayer and fasting? It was during this time of fasting that Jesus destroyed all the wiles of the devil; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (**1 John 2:16**). If Jesus, our supreme example, chose fasting and prayer as his primary weapon to destroy the "works of the flesh," what does that tell us?

Paul bemoaned the Corinthians for walking in carnality, which he described as strife, envy, backbiting, whisperings, swelling, tumults, wrath. He then expounded to the Galatians to works of the flesh: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, seditions, heresies, envying, murders drunkenness and revellings.

He later went on to proclaim the fruit of the spirit; love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. If we never fast and spend time crucifying our flesh, I dare say that we shall begin to notice many "weeds" cropping up in our life and trying to choke out the spirit. The works of the flesh are ingrained in our human nature, and it is through denying the flesh that we also "mortify the deeds of the flesh" (read **Romans 8:13**). Again, Paul said, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." **1 Corinthians 9:27** It is only those who are truly kingdom minded that will fast to destroy the stronghold of the enemy. The lukewarm and carnal are quietly content to live with their carnality.

II. Examples of Fasting in the Scriptures

1. **Matthew 6:17** - But when thou fasteth anoint thine head, and wash thy face: that thou appear not unto men to fast, but into thy Father which is in secret.

A. It is very easy to "glorify the flesh" while fasting by merely letting people know you are fasting. The Pharisees did it so people would think they were so spiritual and would be awed at their commitment. Fasting is not competition. It is not, "...I fasted 7 days without water, mints, or juice; and you only went 3 days and drank water?" It is easy during a corporate fast to set yourself on a pedestal by going longer, working harder, or adhering strictly to water. These are good, but we don't fast to prove our endurance, or to outdo one another. We fast to deny the flesh and to promote the spirit.

A good line would be to remain as quiet as possible about your fast, or else your flesh (which is desperately struggling against your fast) may find an occasion to glory.

2. **Exodus 34:28** - Moses fasted 40 days and nights, drinking no water or eating no bread, when God gave him the 10 commandments.

3. The children of Israel, in **I Samuel 7:6**, fasted 40 days and nights.

4. Elijah, in **I Kings 19:8**, fasted 40 days and nights.

5. **Ezra 10:6**, Ezra fasted as a mourning for those that had been carried away.

6. **Daniel 10:3**, Daniel fasted 3 weeks.

7. **Acts 9:9**, Paul fasted 3 days and nights after meeting the Lord on the Damascus road.

8. **Acts 13:2**, The leaders at the church of Antioch fasted, and the Holy Ghost spoke to them to separate Saul and Barnabas. And in verse 3 it speaks of their having fasted and prayed.

9. **Acts 14:23**, Reveals Paul's "method" of ordaining elders, and also reveals another interesting phrase... "and (when they had) prayed with fasting..."

B. Fasting without prayer reaps only the medical benefits spoke of earlier. It's only truly fasting (in the scriptural sense) when it is accompanied with prayer.

Prayer is our most powerful weapon against the enemy, and it is intensified while fasting. It is possible to complete a fast, and to never spend much time in prayer. It is estimated that the average housewife spends up to 6 and 1/4 hours a day in the securing, preparing, eating and disposing of food. Fasting "frees" up time for us to pursue the spirit. During an extended fast, I recommend coming to the church every night you possibly can, with your family, and spending as much time as possible in prayer.

III. Guidelines for Fasting

1. Allow yourself time to "peak". Your first two or three days will be a struggle, but I can assure you from personal experience and the testimony of others, after the 3rd day hunger subsides, energy increases. After the 3rd day of your fast you will have broken the "social" need for food and you will actually begin to feel very good.

2. Drink only water as a general rule. To deviate from this does not mean you are not fasting. There are scriptural references where fasting was abstaining from certain foods or drinking only certain liquids.

3. If you can not, for medical reasons, fast; then you should strive during this time to increase your prayer life. Dedicate certain hours every day to pray and read the Bible. You may also consider going on a strict diet of only certain foods. The Hebrew boys in Daniel stuck to a strict "diet" of "pulse" and "water" (pulse was a type of porridge made of beans or herbs.)

Don't feel condemned about whatever degree of fasting you are able to pursue. Better a partial fast than no fast at all as long as you see the true purpose of the fast and seek to crucify the flesh and seek the spirit through prayer and re-dedication.

4. Schedule times of prayer, Bible reading and study. It would be very good to make a list of things you need to accomplish during the fast - the areas of your life that you need victory in or persons you can intercede for - and bring that list into your prayer time.

5. Read spiritually stimulating material. Leonard Ravenhill has some tremendous books on prayer. I recommend you purchase a copy of the book "God's Chosen Fast," which you can get from your local book stores. It will give you inspiration to complete your fast, as well as some guidelines from a Christian perspective.

6. It would be good to make a diary of your fast to encourage you on future fasts. Write down your feelings, how hungry you are, how you are feeling spiritually, how your prayer has been.
7. Don't "flirt" with food - you could lose. Stay away from it as much as possible during the first 3 days.
8. Use mouth spray - not gum or mints - to prevent bad breath. They have sugar in them and this will increase your desire for food (even sugar-free types are not advised).
9. Get plenty of rest. You may tire easily the first few days.
10. Contrary to popular belief, you can work and fast. Activity actually tends to suppress hunger. There are men in our church who have finished 7 day fasts while holding strenuous jobs. Light exercise and walking will do much to invigorate you.
11. Drink at least 6 glasses of water a day. Your body has an automatic tendency to reduce the amount of water it releases if it does not receive an adequate supply of fresh water. Often times headaches and hunger are relieved by drinking water. In fact, drinking warm water can relieve cramping and nausea. If necessary flavor the water with honey or lemon.
12. You may get colder more easily while fasting, so dress warmly.
13. Fasting has a tendency to lower the blood pressure. After fasting for a few days, avoid rising quickly as it may cause you to feel faint.

Last of all, and probably most important, you are not fasting to prove you can "make it." You are fasting to give yourself time to pursue the spirit. Do what you can do and let it be an experience you can build on. Anything you can do to increase the spirit in your life is a step in the direction of victory.

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