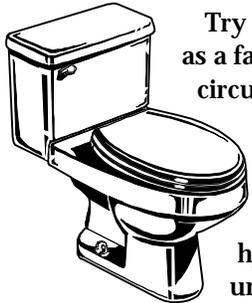


FASTING

“Be still and know that I am God!” Psalm 46:10



Try this experiment for a week at home. Agree as a family that no one is allowed under any circumstances to flush the toilets. How long do you think this would last? You probably wouldn't tolerate this for even a day! Yet it's amazing how much 'sewage' (clutter, waste, busyness, decisions, distractions, hype, greed, anger, resentment, attitudes, unconfessed sin, anything that pulls us from God) we will tolerate in our hearts and minds. In short, Brother, when was the last time you flushed out your soul before God in a quiet day of fasting and prayer?

If it has been a while, why not spend a meal, a morning, or a day fasting. Allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse your soul. Set aside some extra time to process God's truth, think through a decision, pray over a family issue, or just commune with your Father. The curse of our age is that our fast-paced life has caused us to be a superficial people.

Fasting is setting aside our pleasures to please the Lord. It is, in effect, putting an exclamation mark on the end of our prayers. It is being extra quiet and still so His voice rings more clearly in our ears. (Eccl 5:1-2). It is developing a deeper hunger for God, a desire to be satisfied in Him alone above anything or anyone else. Fasting is crying out,



“Lord God, my soul is more hungry for deep and intimate fellowship with You than my stomach is for food! Increase the sensitivity of my heart to Your Word, Your will and Your Spirit as I sit quietly before You. Help me meditate on Your Word and pour out the desires of my heart in prayer. Grant me insight into my Focus Word, clarity concerning the weighty decisions before me, power over the attitudes and habits that keep me from You and heighten my sense of fellowship with You.”

The man who fasts before the Lord is taking seriously Jesus' very last command in Acts 1:4-5 "to wait for what the Father has promised" namely, the Holy Spirit and His power and direction. Take a minute to meditate on these passages to prepare your heart.

“Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”
Psalm. 73:25-26

“Now it came about when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”
Nehemiah 1:4

“Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.” Daniel 6:18

“So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.”
Daniel 9:3

“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full...so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”
Matt 6:16, 18

And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
Acts 13:2

To illustrate our need to slow down, reflect upon this quote from one of our nation's most widely circulated periodicals. Be sure to note when it was written!

"The world is too big for us. Too much going on, too many crimes, too much violence and excitement. Try as you will, you get behind in the race. It's an incessant strain, to keep pace and still, you lose ground. Science empties its discoveries on you so fast that you stagger beneath them in hopeless bewilderment. The political world is now being seen so rapidly that you're out of breath trying to keep pace with who's in and who's out. Everything is high pressure. Human nature can't endure much more!"

(1833 Atlantic Journal)

REASONS FOR FASTING

(adapted from BYC 1969 by Gothard and *God's Chosen Fast* by Wallis)

1. Fasting is a discipline led by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 4:2; I Corinthians 9:7)
2. Fasting is a powerful tool to seek God's will in a specific matter in order to be heard on high. (Judges 20:26, Acts 14:23; Ezra 8:23)
3. Fasting is often used to make our hearts contrite before God in repentance for sin. (I Sam 7:6; II Sam 12:16, 21-23; Neh 9:1-3; Dan 9:3; Joel 1:14; 2:12,15; Jonah 3:5)
4. Fasting focuses our concern for God's work. (Neh 1:4-11)
5. Fasting is a cry to God for His protection. (II Chron 7:14; 20:3; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:13-16)
6. Fasting humbles our hearts before God. (Psalm 69:1-13; Isaiah 66:1-2; Matthew 5:4)
7. Fasting is a primary part of worship. (Luke 2:37, Acts 13:2-3)
8. Fasting grows and comforts us through times of deep sorrow. (I Samuel 31:13; II Samuel 1:12; 12:16, 21-23; Psalm 35:13; Daniel 6:18)
9. Fasting helps to guide us with great effectiveness in discerning and achieving God's purposes. (Matt 6:16-18)
10. Fasting is often used to "change God's mind" in seeking a different outcome to circumstance or problem. (Jonah 3:5, 10)
11. Fasting brings freedom to our lives and others. (Is 58:6)
12. Fasting can give us added insight, perspective and wisdom which we do not now have. (Daniel 9:2,3,21,22)

BENEFITS OF FASTING

- Frees us from the barrenness of business
- Gives greater concentration and discernment for decisions
- Increases our appetite for God
- Gives us time to think so we respond instead of react
- Draws on God's power through prayer for our lives
- Reveals a dependence upon people/things rather than God
- Helps to drive your word for the year from head to heart
- Solidifies your commitment to God.

WARNINGS!

There are two primary warnings you will want to avoid as you prepare for and carry out your season of fasting.

#1 Don't fast to achieve selfish purposes (Isaiah 58:3-5)

#2 Don't fast to impress others with your spirituality.

(Zechariah 7:5; Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:12)



IDEAS AND PRINCIPLES

Here are a few ideas that might prove helpful in guiding your fasting. Most of these principles apply whether you are fasting one meal or 2 days.

- Ø Set aside a period of time. Start small (a meal or two) to experience success. Remember, fasting and prayer are hard work. It is like beginning a physical exercise routine. Go slow and take baby steps.
- Ø Get away from your usual surroundings to a place which is quiet, comfortable and free from distraction.
- Ø Make a plan of what you will read, think through or reflect upon ahead of time.

Ø **Search Your Heart** - All of us have experienced a garage or shed full of so much clutter that we can't even move. Sooner or later we are forced to invest an entire day to clean up and throw out all the unwanted stuff that makes the garage useless. It's the same way with our lives. God desires for us to keep short accounts with Him. So, before the Lord, make a list of all the accumulated and unaddressed sin in your life which keeps you from Christ. Here are a few questions that may prompt your confession:

- Do I need to forgive someone? Do I need to ask forgiveness?
- Have I hurt someone?
- Where have I been divisive?
- About whom have I slandered, gossiped or spoken negatively?
- What have I stolen as of late?
- To whom have I failed to give credit where it was due?
- Lord, where have I sinned sexually?
- Have I given a false report, lied or misled someone?
- Do I harbor hatred, anger, wrath, prejudice, jealousy or envy?
- Do I have selfish ambition or greed lurking in my soul?
- Where have I rebelled and said "NO!" to You Lord?
- How does my life match up to I Corinthians 13?

Once you have made the list of things which need to be flushed out of your life consider burning it before the Lord at the end of the day as a way to celebrate His grace, forgiveness and incredible freedom.

- Ø **Take only a few tools with you.** Take your journal, prayer notebook, Bible, hymnal, devotional book and pen. A concordance, Christian book, a CD or tape player with hymns, Scripture songs, or praise choruses might also help you to focus.
- Ø **Create Your Own Activities** We suggest a balance between prayer, reflection, meditation, relaxation and the study of God's Word.

Ø **Enlist Others To Pray For You** - Ask your spouse, SALT partner, church small group, etc to be praying for you throughout the duration of your time alone with the Lord.

Ø **Pass On Your Impressions** - Report back to those who were praying for you some of the impressions or breakthroughs you sense occurred during your fast. Husbands, at an appropriate time, share with your wives what you sense God was speaking to your heart during your extended time alone with Him.



"There's that really cocky one I was telling you about that thinks he can win the rat race without God's power and perspective!"

FASTING A MEAL

Again, if this spiritual discipline is new to you, start small and over the months increase your fast. Remember, fasting a whole day does not necessarily mean it is more spiritual than fasting a single meal. It's the time alone in silence before the Lord that is the key, not the absence of calories! If you fast a meal or two, here are a few suggestions as to how you might invest the time.

Ø Always begin with a primary purpose for your time before the Father. It might be that you have a relationship that needs repairing, priorities which need realignment, a decision that needs discernment, a faith testing worry that needs God's perspective, a habit which needs to be broken, or a temptation for which you need additional strength to resist. It could simply be that you enjoy just being alone with the King of the universe and wish to catch up on your SALT

study or go deeper on a certain topic in Scripture. Whatever the concern, make sure your focus is clear from the outset so that your heart and mind stays centered.

- Ø Start the time in praise and adoration in order to both focus on the Lord and declare that you are more hungry for Him than you are for food, TV, recreation, etc.
- Ø Read passages from Scripture and perhaps a chapter of a related book that will help you focus on a certain issue, concern or problem.
- Ø Take much time to reflect and think deeply. In other words, don't be in a hurry to finish the chapter you are reading. Rather, stop after a few verses. Chew on a word, phrase or thought asking, *"Lord, is there something here You are trying to tell me, teach me or think about?"*
- Ø Always keep your SALT journal near by so that you can write down the insights, questions or applications you gleaned from your time with the Lord.
- Ø Again, we encourage you to ask a friend or family member to pray for you during your time of fasting.

SAMPLE FLOW OF A 24 HOUR FAST

(This example assumes skipping 3 meals. Again, if fasting is not a regular habit of yours, start by fasting 1 meal and then 2 meals and work up to a 24 hour fast.)

Purpose: Allow God to plant my Focus Word deep into my life.

Plan for the day before

- 6:30 pm Take a prayer walk while the family eats dinner. Ask them to pray as I take a day to listen to God.
- 8:00 pm Put kids to bed and pray with them about your fast.
- 9:00 pm Pray with my wife for my day of fasting on Saturday. Go over with her my plan. Ask her for other areas she wants me to focus on.
- 10:00 pm Get a good night's sleep.

Plan for the day of your fast

- 7:00 am Take a prayer walk with my Contractor at Harbison
- 8:00 am Drive to friend's quiet lake house on Lake Murray.
- 8:30 am Using the ACTS format, spend some unhurried time communing with God. Bring hymnal to praise Him.
- 9:30 am Work on my Focus Word study for a few hours, perhaps completing several days of my journal.
- 11:30 am Read a chapter out of a book relating to my Focus Word.
- 12:30 pm Have some fun time...kayak on lake?
- 1:30 pm Short nap
- 2:00 pm List all of the positive effects in my life if my Focus Word completely characterized me!
- 2:30 pm Memorize and meditate on 3 key Focus Word verses
- 3:00 pm Pray in the Biblical principles related to my Focus Word, asking God to work these into my life.
- 3:30 pm Write down some summary thoughts on the day to share with my spouse
- 4:00 pm Drive home and pick up baby sitter on way.
- 5:30 Hot date with beautiful bride at Chili's restaurant. Share with her on a spiritual level