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## FASTING RESOURCE

### WHAT IS FASTING?

Chances are, when you hear the word “fasting,” you think about one of the following:

1. Health fads that are designed to cleanse your body, control your diet, or help you lose weight.
2. An old-fashioned religious discipline that makes you holier through misery.

Fasting as a spiritual practice isn't about either of those things. Fasting is challenging but it doesn't have to be a painful experience. Fasting isn't about earning God's favor. It's about reminding yourself that you already have his favour, and he can sustain you in a way that nothing in the world can. It's a practical way to say no to your appetites so you're able to focus on your dependence on God.

Fasting is not about the permanent removal of harmful things in your life. It's not a replacement for rehabilitation or recovery programs if you're dealing with serious addiction. It is the temporary removal of things that are often positive (and even necessary for life) to ensure we aren't using those good things selfishly or indulgently.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is taught in the Bible. Jesus expected his followers to fast, and he said that God rewards fasting. Fasting, according to the Bible, means to voluntarily reduce or eliminate your intake of food (or other things) for a specific time and purpose.

*“When you give up eating, don't put on a sad face like*

6. Don't fast if you're pregnant, diabetic, have heart disease, or any other medical condition that adds risk to fasting from food. Remember, you're not under any obligation to fast from food. It's not a requirement for close connection to God. Instead, find a safe alternative for removing material distractions from your life so you can better focus on your heavenly Father.
7. Physical health is not the main purpose of a spiritual fast. But if you discover physical benefits during the course of your fast (e.g., reduced cravings for sugar, salt, or fat), feel free to take advantage of that discovery.
8. When you finish a fast, try to maintain your focus on God and control your sense of dependence on whatever it is you fasted from.

*the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are giving up eating. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. So, when you give up eating, comb your hair and wash your face. Then people will not know that you are giving up eating, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you.”*

MATTHEW 6:16-18 NCV

## WHY FAST?

There are many good reasons, and even health benefits, for fasting. Here are three primary reasons:

- 1. Fasting gives you more time for prayer.** You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer for what God wants to do in your life and in the church. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer.  
*“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”* ACTS 13:2-3
- 2. Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something.** It shows you that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.  
*“Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord.”* JOEL 1:14

## FOOD FASTING TIPS

1. Eat light meals before you start and when you end a fast.
2. Pay attention to your body. Hunger pangs, mild headaches (usually from caffeine withdrawal), and a sour taste in your mouth are normal in the middle stages of longer fasts.
3. If you're planning to fast three to seven days (or even longer), you can consider a juice fast. Abstain from all food and drink mainly water but sustain yourself on a glass of fruit or vegetable juice a couple of times per day.
4. Don't overdo physical activity during longer fasts. You don't have to be inactive, but anything greater than moderate activity may cause some dizziness.
5. If you choose to do a longer fast, it's wise to get clearance from a doctor first.

3. **Pair fasting with other spiritual practices.** Fasting has benefits on its own, but it can also increase your focus in other practices. Fasting is great for super-charging your prayer life and Bible reading. While fasting breaks the hold of your physical appetites, prayer reduces your desire for control (and increases your trust in God), and reading the Bible reveals God's wisdom. That's a powerful combination.
4. **Keep it between you and God.** Jesus gave his disciples this advice: *"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"* MATTHEW 6:16. You don't have to be legalistic about keeping your fasting a secret, but not letting others know will help you focus on connecting with God.
5. **Be patient.** At the beginning of any fast, your focus will probably be drawn toward how you feel and toward keeping the "rules" of the fast. That's why consistency matters.

*"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."*

JOEL 2:12 NASB

3. **Fasting releases God's supernatural power.** It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among his people. United prayer and fasting have always been used by God to deal a decisive blow to the enemy!

*"So, we fasted and prayed about these concerns. And he listened."* EZRA 8:23 MSG

*"God says, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"*

ISAIAH 58:6

## COMMON THINGS PEOPLE FAST FROM

**Food** – We need food to live, but we can also use it like a drug to soothe our pain.

**Social media** – These platforms are a great way to stay connected to people who matter to us and are far away, but they can also distract us from being present with the people who are closest to us.

**Shopping** – We need consumer goods to survive. There are also things we want because they make life fun or more pleasant, and there's nothing wrong with that. But we can also look to material things for identity and meaning in life.

**Technology** – Phones, video games, and even the Internet are great life enhancers, but they also have the power to numb us to what’s most important in life—our relationships with God and other people.

**Media** –Television, websites, radio, and periodicals keep us informed, but they can also give us a distorted view of the world around us. Taking a break from any of these things— or anything else that you depend on—is a great way to center or recenter your life on your dependence on your heavenly Father. But choosing to fast from anything can have surprising side effects. It sometimes reveals that you are controlled by things you weren’t even aware of, which sets the stage for future fasts.

## TWO CAUTIONS

1. **Remember that fasting is not “earning” an answer to prayer.** God cannot be blackmailed by human effort. God wants to answer our prayers and He answers out of grace. Fasting simply prepares us for God’s answer.
2. **Fast only if your health allows it at this time.** If you are able only to do a partial fast - do it in faith and God will honor your intentions.

## START FASTING

As you begin the spiritual practice of fasting, the first thing you’ll have to decide is from what you’ll fast. When the Bible talks about fasting, it’s always fasting from food. That’s a great place to start. Our appetite for food is universal, so food fasts are beneficial for anyone. They’re the ideal way to redefine our relationship to our core appetites and learn firsthand *“that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord”* DEUTERONOMY 8:3B. Whatever you choose, here are some things to keep in mind as you start your first fast:

1. **Start small but aim for consistency.** If you’re fasting from food for the first time, it’s probably not best to begin with a three-day fast or anything longer. Instead, do short fasts on a regular basis for a more extended period. In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster recommends beginning with a lunch-to-lunch fast, one day each week. That means you’ll eat lunch on your fasting day, skip dinner and breakfast the next day, and eat again at lunch the following day. Some people have done that for as long as two years, discovering a richer spiritual experience as they get deeper into the fast.
2. **Focus on God.** Fasting isn’t magic. It doesn’t automatically make you more spiritual. To make the most of your fast, you’ll need to use the feeling of absence left by whatever you’ve temporarily removed from your life as a prompt to focus your attention on your relationship with and dependence on God. Be present with your heavenly Father.