



FASTING

What is fasting?

Christian fasting is the choice to go without food (though not water) or some other life-defining activity for a specific period of time to point us to God. Fasting is God-centered. It is ultimately for His glory and to grow our hunger and dependence on Him.

The practice of regular fasting should be a normal rhythm of the Christian life. Fasting was instructed by Jesus (Mt. 6:16-17, 9:15) and exercised by the early Church (Acts 13:2).

Why fast?

By abstaining from food or a life-defining activity, we deny ourselves and depend more on God. It causes us to focus our thoughts and time to worshipping God, spending time with Him in prayer, listening to His teaching, and reading the Word of God.

The act of fasting centers our hearts on God, growing our desire and love for Him. When we fast, we intentionally spend time focusing on God and a particular issue, need, concern, or desire that we want to bring before Him.

Christian fasting is not a punishment for sin, an easement of guilt, or a way to lose weight. It is about intentionally spending time with God, allowing Him to define our lives.

How do I get started?

1. Start small. Choose a meal from which to abstain. Perhaps choose 2-3 days in which you eat dinner one day, then skip breakfast and lunch the next. Be wise. Work your way to consecutive days. Drink plenty of water or even fruit juices. If you have any medical condition that requires attention, check with your doctor before any lengthy fasts.
2. Intentionally plan your time. During mealtimes or the time in which you would normally be engaged in the activity from which you are abstaining, focus on spending time reading the Bible, meditating on God's character, and praying.
3. If for medical or other reasons, it is not possible to fast from food, fast from something else. Choose from that which dominates your time, thought, or emotions: TV, social media, hobbies, a relationship, etc.
4. Follow the discomfort of your hunger to the throne of grace. When your stomach begins to growl or your mind yearns to check social media, etc., hear that as a signal to turn your thoughts to Christ, His Word, and His cause in the world. Allow that to drive you to prayer.
5. Consider how this might affect others, like family members, work colleagues, etc. It is a beautiful opportunity to teach your children about the importance of seriously pursuing God. Allow your fasting to be an opportunity for a Gospel conversation.
 - a. Jesus taught to fast in secret (Mt. 6:16-18). We are not to fast that others may know we are fasting or to boast in our fasting. We are to fast in worship of God. So, only tell those who need to know, those your fasting might affect.

6. Don't get discouraged if you "fail" the fast. Like a muscle, you keep working at it until it has fully developed. If you do "cheat", simply jump back in and continue.

How do we fast as a family?

1. Don't sell kids short. While the practice and understanding of biblical fasting will be best suited for older kids, teaching and allowing kids to participate in age-appropriate ways will lay foundations for deeper and more meaningful experiences in the future.
2. Teach fasting. Explain to your kids what fasting is. Help them understand that God is our provider of every good and perfect gift. Be intentional about the meaning behind your fasting and share that with them. If you are fasting over a specific prayer or desire, find ways to explain that to your kids.
3. Model fasting. Kids learn more from what they see than what they simply hear. When teaching the discipline of fasting, know that you can't lead kids to do something that you're not willing to do yourself. Model fasting and invite your kids to join you for a shorter time. Invite them to pray with you and read the Bible together. Start small and build on success.
4. Here are some ideas for fasting as a family:
 - a. Make different choices. For a period of time, choose healthy foods for snacking. Instead of cookies, choose carrots. Instead of soda, choose water. Instead of fast food, choose nutritious meals.

- b. Abstain from sweets. Lead kids to not eat sugar-based foods (candy, cake, pastries) for a designated time.
- c. A digital fast. As a family, decide to fast from technology. This could be as simple as not using the iPad or phone in the SUV to complete abstinence for a week or month.