

Praying and Fasting (excerpted from How to Develop Your Prayer Life by Leighann McCoy)

What is a fast and why should I do it?

“It’s Time to Fast” by Jack Hayford:

“The Bible makes clear that there are certain means by which Christ’s people partner with God’s almightiness through the acceptance and application of certain principles—“Kingdom Keys.” The Scriptures teach, by both precept and example, a number of means by which believers may enter into the exercise of spiritual dominion through simple obedience to disciplines shown there. Prayer, joined with fasting, is a proven means of advancing spiritual objectives. By fasting, we know that we earn nothing. However, by fasting, we do believe that we learn something; we learn a simple, dynamic pathway to spiritual conquest. We do not claim to know exactly why fasting with prayer is so powerful, but the Bible makes clear that it is effective and important, and that Jesus directed it as a part of His Church’s life.”

So why don’t we fast today?

Most Christians are not taught about fasting. Many Christians do not fast because they are addicted to food. And perhaps others don’t do it because they suffer from “spiritual laziness.”

What is a fast?

Biblically fasting is abstaining from food, either entirely or partially. We can certainly also benefit from fasting from other things such as television, sports, recreation, etc but in the Bible fasting dealt with food. (from p. 115 Giving Ourselves to Prayer)

Four different types of fasts:

1. The Liquid Fast: water and/or juices only. Some people have utilized this fast for up to 40 days.
2. The Absolute Fast: no liquid and no foods. “Our bodies need water and cannot go beyond 72 hours without it.”
3. The Partial Fast: Eliminating certain foods or certain meals would be a partial fast. This type of fast can continue indefinitely.
4. The Daniel Fast: When taken captive in Babylon, Daniel and his friends refused to eat the rich food fed to them by the king, and ate fruit, vegetables and water instead. Some people participate in a Daniel fast and abstain from meat, bread and sweets for certain amounts of time.

What are the benefits of fasting?

1. Humility before God: when you fast, you realize how dependent you are on food—and in comparison how little you depend on God. Fasting humbles you before the Lord. And God honors humility. See Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6 and I Peter 5:5.
2. Joy and Gladness before God: Read Zechariah 8:18-19. I heard that the pilgrims most likely fasted in observance of Thanksgiving rather than feasting. The feast they had was a celebration but most likely not their “Thanksgiving ceremony.” Many times God was honored by fasting (He was also honored by feasting). One writer said, “I have had people approach me during a seminar and confess depression. They typically want to know what they should do. I often recommend fasting. They often get this look on their face that says, “You are an idiot. I am depressed and you want me to go without food?” God has a way of injecting more joy and gladness into our lives through fasting. How God does this is not significant. The fact that He does it is significant.” (p. 117 Giving Ourselves to Prayer)
3. We will be rewarded by God: Jesus promised us this in Matthew 6:18. God wants to reward us spiritual. The spiritual rewards of fasting are a more intimate relationship with Him; overcoming addictions to food; stronger spiritual resolve; and breakthroughs in our lives or even the lives of others.
4. We will have heightened sensitivity to God: In Acts 13:2-3, the early church prayed and fasted, and God rewarded them by giving them specific direction to send Barnabas and Paul out to be missionaries. Many times fasting is joined with prayer to receive discernment in following God’s plans.

What should I do when I fast?

1. Set aside special time of prayer, praise and intercession during the day—perhaps use the time you would spend eating.
2. Seek out others who might pray with you during your fast.
3. Ask God to show you how you should fast, then do it in the way He directs.
4. Spend more time in God’s Word. Record verses that seem to speak specifically to you.
5. Always drink plenty of water when you fast.
6. Find a way to fast that is not detrimental to your health.

What might ruin my fast?

1. Fasting to “get something” from God.
2. Fasting to increase your “religiosity.”
3. Fasting without participating in increased time spent in prayer and Bible reading.
4. Fasting to impress others.

A Personal Word about Fasting: Tom and I have practiced fasting all our married lives. When I was dating Tom he'd been invited to preach a revival at his home church, First Baptist Church in Dickson, TN. Tom was honored to have the opportunity and he took his call seriously. He fasted every Monday for 3 months leading up to that week of Revival. His discipline of fasting impressed me and I joined him in it.

Since then he and I have fasted together and alone. Sometimes we've felt led by God to call the entire church to a fast. In 2002 we encouraged church members to participate in some form of a "fast" for 100 Days. God followed that corporate fast up with a week of Revival that literally shifted the course of our church.

As I'm preparing this material God has called me to a fast again. This one is a bit different than others I've observed. During my quiet time I was consumed with praying for one of my children when God clearly invited me to partner my prayers with a fast. For several years I'd toyed with the idea of fasting from sweets (I have an addiction to sweets) and had even tried to do so in order to teach certain conferences or be better prepared for retreats. But each time I'd tried to complete the "sweets fast" I failed. But this time I knew the fast was not my own idea but God's. So I started right away.

It's not important how long I've been fasting—and I will confess that I have had a bite or two of sweets once or twice. But what is important is what God is showing me in this fast. While I'm praying very specifically for one of my children and am committed to continue the fast until God fulfills His Word in their life—the interesting result of the fast is what God is showing me about me! Right off He opened my eyes to understand how I was standing in the way of my own prayers by the way I was handling the situation. A few weeks after that He renewed my conviction that the Bible is HIS WORD—and that when He gives us HIS WORD, He's going to keep it.

Not only that, but HUGE, and I mean HUGE breakthroughs have come in our home—in mine and Tom's marriage, in the lives of all three of our children and in the specific situation I'm praying and fasting through.

And miracle of all miracles, God's giving me the power to continue the fast.

"The Living God clearly says that there are fasts that He wills—that He intends to be observed with spiritual understanding. Such fasts will become feasts of obedience, rather than ascetically observed, mournful seasons of bitter self-denial." Jack Hayford

"What does one experience through fasting? A bountiful harvest of practical and visible results. Fasting is not a mystical, ascetic exercise in piety. It is a normal and powerful participation point in seeing the release of God's purposes and benevolent intent toward mankind." Jack Hayford

(Most of this information came from "The Role of Fasting as an Accompaniment to Prayer" by Dean C. Trune in Giving Ourselves to Prayer, and "It's Time to Fast!" a ministry pamphlet from Jack W. Hayford Ministries.)