



SEEKING THE LORD

THROUGH 40 DAYS OF

PRAYER AND FASTING

What is the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting?

A. Fasting is primarily abstaining from food for an amount of time for the purpose of seeking God. It is a practice found in the Old Testament at times of desperation for God (Esther 4:1-17, 2 Samuel 15:12-23), devotion to God (Daniel 1:8, Isaiah 58, Jeremiah 36:1-9, Jonah 3), or for discerning the ways of God (Exodus 34:28).

B. Now while fasting is not specifically commanded in the New seems to be expected. Jesus taught on fasting (Matthew 6:16-18). It may be that we are not instructed on when or how long fast so that we would not be tempted to make fasting a legalistic requirement for everyone to practice the same way. The Pharisees fasted religiously and wore their fasting as a badge of honor (Matthew 6:16). We learn that the church fasted to discern God's direction for the spread of the Gospel (Acts 13:1-3, 14:23). Our Lord fasted (Matthew 4:1-2). The Apostle Paul expected some in the church to be fasting at specific times (1 Corinthians 7:5).

C. There will be a day when we will not fast; that day is when we are in the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, come Lord Jesus. But until that day, Jesus said His disciples would fast, "Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?'" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Matthew 9:14-15).



D. It is significant to note that the Lord Jesus spent forty days fasting before His public ministry began and before He chose the twelve disciples. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into that fast and ministered to by the Holy Spirit during that time (Matthew 4, Luke 2). No one should enter a fast that is not Spirit led. Fasting is not for the purpose of forcing God's hand, an offering of penance, or any other personal motive. Fasting is for the purpose of leading the follower of Christ to a greater depth of submission, discernment, and devotion. Fasting is a beneficial Spiritual Discipline.

What should you expect when you fast?

A. Expect Spiritual warfare. I put this first because it is the fiercest opposition you will face when seeking God in prayer and fasting. The enemy is only too happy to leave us to our mediocre Christian life. He will not, however, tolerate the serious Christian, and prayer is serious business. Expect to be tempted in the strangest ways but take heart that we have help in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:1-14).

B. Expect to feel hungry. You know this, but did you know your body is conditioned to feel hungry even when it isn't. I sometimes say when I am hungry that, "man, I am starving." The reality is that our body is not starving until it begins to consume itself after a long period without any food. The starvation processes take place somewhere between thirty and forty days for the average healthy adult. The first days will be the most difficult.

C. Expect your energy to be lower. Now again you know this, but be sure to adjust your schedule. You may not be someone that takes naps, but a short nap may be just the help you need to stay sharp during a fast. Be sure to schedule time in for rest. Limit your physical activity as much as possible during your fast.

D. Expect to be tempted to be irritable. Because you are “hangry” you will be tempted to act in the flesh during your fast. Ironical, you are fasting to submit to the Holy Spirit, but will be tempted to act in the flesh. Do not use your fasting to excuse fleshly reactions (Matthew 6:17). Instead allow fasting to flesh out the works against the Spirit (Galatians 5:16ff).

E. Expect your fasting to affect other people. No doubt during your fast you will be around people celebrating with food at birthday parties and the like. Plan your answers in advance. There is no sin in letting people know you are fasting if you are doing it to keep them from being offended or to be grandiose.

F. Expect people to misunderstand your reasons for fasting. We live in a day when most people live for themselves. I am not being cynical here, just truthful. Be ready to humbly explain your fasting is not for approval before God, but because you are accepted in Him (Ephesians 1:3-6), you desire a greater intimacy. Expect to share the Gospel during your time of fasting. Many people equate religious activity with penance or the like. They assume we participate in spiritual disciplines to win God to our side. What an opportunity to explain the good news of Jesus to them.



G. Expect a clearer discernment of God’s leadership. On one occasion while fasting (this time under the Spirit’s direction) a friend came to my mind during prayer. I was so moved in prayer that I decided to drive to their work place. They were there to my surprise to have a Bible Study, but the person to give the lesson forgot and did not show up. My friend could not believe that I “just happened” to walk in while they were waiting for someone to deliver the Word of God. That day two people in attendance indicated they wanted to follow Christ. I will never forget that day. I wonder if I would have been so attuned to God had I not been fasting and praying.

What should we expect corporately when we fast?

A. We discussed a few benefits of fasting and spiritual growth for both private and public worship earlier. Many of the experiences we have individually will be the experiences of the community of faith as we fast together. The enemy will not be idle, people on the outside will misunderstand, and some inside will have false expectation of results that are man-centered and not God-centered. Be careful.

B. Expect a deeper sense of the need to seek God in the community of Faith. Each Sunday we have an opportunity to respond to God’s Word to us after it is preached. Expect to see more responses by God’s people to His call for obedience. It can and should be very natural to seek the Lord in prayer, repentance, thanksgiving, praise, and petition during the response (invitation) time before we conclude every worship service.

C. Expect a greater hunger for God and His Word in your Bible Study Group. Private worship extends to our public gatherings (Acts 2:42ff). Secret agendas are abandoned and the fellowship and unity of the body supersede personal preferences.

D. Expect greater generosity. The closer we are to God and His will, the more we desire to be part of His plan. This includes our generosity. Isaiah proclaimed the reasons to fast and the reasons not to fast (Isaiah 58). One reason to fast is to assist those in need, those who are hungry, or those in need of our help (Isaiah 58:7-8). The more our hearts are knit with Christ’s, the more we will be broken over a lost multitude in our communities and the world and the more we will sacrifice to finance the work of the Kingdom.