

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF FASTING

What is fasting?

Fasting involves abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water. We are reminded of Jesus in the desert: *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.”* (Luke 4:1-2)

There are different types of fasting. There is partial fast – this involves a restriction of diet; not total abstention. The Daniel fast is a three-week period based on Daniel 10:3. The absolute fast is abstaining from both food and water.

Fasting is, mostly, a private matter between the individual and God. Regular fasting can have a profound effect on our lives, but there is no biblical command for regular fasting in Christianity. Jesus encouraged fasting and spoke of fasting as an expectation, but not a command. Practice of early apostles described in the Didache (an ancient text) included fasting on Wednesday and Friday. John Wesley sought to revive this practice and urged early Methodists to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. He felt so strongly about this matter that he refused to ordain anyone to the Methodist ministry who did not fast on those two days

How can we experience spiritual transformation through the discipline of fasting?

Fasting must forever center on God; It must be God-initiated and God-ordained. Fasting reveals those things that control us. It can be a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things; in fasting, these things surface and allow us to turn to God

Fasting reminds us that we are sustained “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us. Food provides temporary strength; God provides eternal strength. In fasting, we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God – Fasting is feasting!

Fasting helps us keep our balance in life; it provides a rhythm that leads to spiritual transformation. Our cravings will soon enslave us. Cravings and desires can become like rivers that tend to overflow their banks – fasting helps keep them in their proper channels. Asterius, a fourth century philosopher said that fasting ensured the stomach would not make the body boil like a kettle to the hindering of the soul.

Try It This Week

We want to invite you to join us in a fast on Wednesday, April 15, during the lunch hour. You may choose to fast the entire day, but we are asking everyone to fast for one meal with us as we join together in praying for our community and our world in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During your fast, we invite you to pray with us at 12:00 PM. Go the end of your driveways or into the parking lots of your work places and pray together. If you do not know what to say when you pray, then we encourage you to pray the Lord's Prayer (printed below). Imagine what can happen if all of us join our voices in prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us, not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the power, the kingdom,
and the glory forever. Amen.