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**TWENTY
ONE
DAYS
OF
PRAYER
AND
FASTING**

A GUIDE TO FASTING

FOOD FOR A SPIRITUAL PURPOSE.

According to the Bible, there are three duties (not commandments) of every Christian: give, pray and fast. Biblical fasting takes a lot of discipline and strength—strength which you can only receive from God. Your private discipline will bring you rewards in Heaven, says Matthew 6.

When you give God your first through fasting, prayer and giving at the beginning of the year, you set the course for the entire year.

What is Fasting?

Throughout Scripture, fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. It stands in contrast to the hunger strike or for health reasons such as dieting. Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes.

Why Should I Fast?

Fasting must center on God. It should draw us closer to God, where we will experience a deeper relationship with Him. Like Anna in Luke 2:37, we should “worship night and day, fasting and praying.”

Fasting reveals the things that control us. We tend to cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David said, “I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting.” (Psalm 35:13) Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear—if they are within us, they will surface during fasting. At first we will rationalize that our anger, for example, is due to our hunger. We will then discover that we are angry not because of hunger, but because the spirit of anger is within us. We can rejoice in this knowledge because we know that healing is available through the power of Jesus.

Fasting helps us keep our balance in life. How easily we begin to allow non-essentials to take precedence in our lives. How quickly we crave things we do not need until we are enslaved by them. Paul wrote, “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything.” (1 Corinthians 6:12) “No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Corinthians 9:27) David wrote, “My knees give way from fasting; my body is thin and gaunt.” (Psalm 109:24) That is not asceticism; it is discipline—and discipline brings freedom.

Other reasons why we fast include:

To loose the chains of wickedness and injustice / To undo heavy burdens To break every bondage that has been holding you back / To set the oppressed free / To minister to those who need food, shelter and clothing To prepare the way for healing to take place / To follow the example set by early church leadership / Take extra time that would be used for eating and use it to minister to (worship) the Lord To exhibit a humble, contrite heart before God / To gain a powerful revelation of God / To show true repentance of our sins and the sins of our nation (2 Chronicles 7:14) / To deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23) / To present our body a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2) / To know and birth God’s will for our life / To experience a fresh encounter with God that is deeper, more intimate and powerful / To have a heightened sensitivity to the desires of God

Scripture Describes Different Types of Fasts:

The Normal Fast: This involves abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water. In the forty day fast of Jesus, we are told that "He ate nothing" and toward the end of the fast that "He was hungry" and that Satan tempted Him to eat, indicating that the abstaining was from food, but not from water. (Luke 4:2)

The Partial Fast: The Bible describes what could be considered a partial fast: that is there is a restriction of diet but not total abstinence. Although the normal fast seemed to be the custom with the prophet Daniel, there was an occasion where for three weeks he "ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over." (Daniel 10:3)

The Absolute Fast: There are several examples in Scripture of what has rightly been called an "absolute fast", or an abstaining from both food and water. It usually appears as a desperate measure to meet a dire emergency. Upon learning that execution awaited her and her people, Esther instructed Mordecai, "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16) Paul engaged in a three-day absolute fast following his encounter with the living Christ. (Acts 9:9) It must be underscored that the absolute fast is the exception and should never be engaged in unless one has a very clear command from God, and then for not more than three days.

Is Fasting a Commandment?

Nowhere in Scripture do we find Biblical laws that require regular fasting, nor do we find a direct command to fast. Romans 12:1, however, clearly states, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, (which is) your reasonable service." Presenting our bodies to the Lord is our reasonable service and it is acceptable to God. That includes fasting. We find examples of many Biblical people who fasted as a regular part of their lives: Moses the lawgiver; David, the king; Elijah, the prophet; Esther, the queen; Daniel, the seer; Anna, the prophetess; Paul, the apostle; and Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son. Jesus gives instruction on fasting in the Sermon on the Mount. He states: "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting." (Matthew 6:16) Jesus did not say, "IF you fast," neither did He say "You MUST fast." He seemed to make the assumption that people WOULD fast, and what was needed was instruction on HOW to do it properly.

HOW TO HAVE A SPIRITUAL FAST.

Purify Your Motives

The purpose of a spiritual fast is to focus upon and worship God, not to lose weight, go on a hunger strike, save money on food, etc.

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:16-18

Getting Started

Prayerfully decide what type of fast you are going to do. There are many different ways to effectively fast and seek the Lord. Examples range from fasting occasional meals, fasting a day or more each week, a "Daniel fast" (see below) of no pleasant bread or meat, all the way to the most famous type of forty day fast with water only. You can also fast regular pleasures and use the time to pray, such as television. The type of fast you participate in should be decided in prayer, as well as considering your physical condition and whether or not you have ever fasted before. If you are in poor health or have concerns about your physical ability to fast, please consult a physician before beginning your first fast. There are different types of fasts so you will want to choose what works best for you. Your doctor can provide advice on how you can participate in the fast in a way that is healthy for you.

Also, as you prepare, have a clear goal in mind. Be specific. Why are you fasting? Do you need direction? Healing? Restoration of marriage or family issues? Are you facing financial difficulties? Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Pray daily and read your Bible. Prepare yourself spiritually. Confess your sins to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of weakness. Forgive all who have offended you and ask forgiveness from those you may have offended. (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4) Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ and reject the worldly desires that try to hinder you. (Romans 12:1-2).

Be aware of what to expect as you fast. When you fast, your body detoxifies eliminating toxins from your system. This can cause mild discomfort such as headaches and irritability during withdrawal from caffeine and sugars. And naturally, you will have hunger pangs. Limit your activity and exercise moderately. Take time to rest. Fasting brings about miraculous results. You are following Jesus' example when you fast. Spend time listening to praise and worship. Pray as often as you can throughout the day. Get away from the normal distractions as much as possible and keep your heart and mind set on seeking God's face.

Bill Bright has written several books calling America to fast and pray. The following notes are abstracts from the book, *The Transforming Power of Fasting and Prayer* (1997, New Life Publications).

The first three days are the most difficult regarding hunger pangs. Your body is shifting from using the food in the stomach (which lasts three days) to consuming stored fats. If you have not fasted before, consider beginning with a one-day fast and gradually increase to a ten-day fast. After a ten-day fast, the body has cleansed itself from many toxins. This process also will make you aware of what to expect and calm many fears of fasting.

We strongly warn against attempting a forty-day, water-only fast apart from medical supervision. Water-only fasts that last for more than several days need to be taken with complete rest and under medical supervision because of the extreme danger of over-detoxification, breakdown of vital body tissues, and loss of electrolytes.

With a juice fast, most of us can continue fairly normal work patterns. The nutrients we need will be supplied by a variety of juices from fruits and vegetables. The amount of juices you need each day will depend on your daily exertions, size and metabolism. Christian nutritionist Pamela Smith recommends drinking “Twelve ounces of juice at your meal times and six ounces every two hours between meals, along with up to two or three quarts of water spread evenly throughout the day. Drink lukewarm or cool water throughout the day and exercise moderately.” It is normal to feel colder than usual, to experience bad breath and heightened body odor, light headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, or aches and pains. A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast is part of the body’s pattern of throwing off toxins. After the first two weeks of a fast, many of these symptoms subside. Continuing aches in certain areas of the body usually means elimination of fatty tissue is going on in that area, which is not harmful. However, any extensive pain should be examined immediately. You should stop fasting if you are experiencing severe pain or swelling. Headaches or stomachaches may be a result of salt, sugar or caffeine withdrawal.

Begin with a Partial Fast

It is wise to learn to walk well before we try to run. Many people find that beginning with a twenty-four hour fast from lunch to lunch works well. This would mean that you would not eat two meals. Fresh fruit juices are excellent to consume during this time. You may be fascinated with the physical aspects, but the most important thing to monitor is the inner attitude of worship. Outwardly you will be performing the regular duties of your day, but inwardly you will be in prayer and adoration, song and ministry to the Lord. Break your fast with a light meal of fresh fruits and vegetables and a good deal of inner rejoicing.

Progress to a Twenty-Four Hour Normal Fast

Use only water, but use healthy amounts of it. You will probably feel some hunger pangs or discomfort before the time is up. That is not real hunger; your stomach has been trained through years of conditioning to give signals of hunger at certain hours. In many ways your stomach is like a spoiled child, and spoiled children do not need indulgence, they need discipline! Tell your “spoiled child” to calm down and in a brief time the hunger pangs will pass. You are to be the master of your stomach, not its slave. Fasting can have a powerful impact on your spiritual life. Consider a regular discipline of fasting one day a week for six months. Regular or weekly fasting had such a profound effect in the lives of early church leaders that sought to find a Biblical command for it. John Wesley refused to ordain anyone who did not fast every Wednesday and Friday.

The Daniel Fast

This fast (Daniel 10:2-3) focuses on the restriction of diet rather than complete abstinence. On this diet one does not eat pleasant food. Generally foods should consist of:

Breakfast cereals / Plain breads / Green salads / Vegetables / Cheese / Fresh fruit twice a day between meals and/or fresh vegetables, celery, carrots, etc. / NO sweets, NO red meats, NO caffeine / Drink plenty of water and eight ounces of pure fruit juice and eight ounces of milk each day

When you break the Daniel fast, do so slowly and ease back into a normal eating routine.

Please give God 10% of your time (2 hours and 40 minutes each day) in spiritual activity such as prayer, Bible reading, praise, meditating, and preparing yourself for ministry in family devotion, attending church services, and prayer meetings, etc. Also, you should have very restricted TV, movies and other pleasures during fasting.

The results of the Daniel Fast include:

- Revelation: Daniel's fast revealed spiritual insight, angelic visitation, and the power of God manifested in his midst.
- Breakthrough: As Christians, we desire to give God the first fruits of ourselves in seeking Him through fasting and prayer. We, too, like Daniel, are in need of the move of God in our lives individually and as a church to breakthrough spiritual darkness.
- Expectancy: In seeking God, as Daniel, along with giving up "pleasant bread or the bread of desire" restricting our diets and pleasures for a period of time increases our desire for the reality of God's power. We begin to desire God's will for revival and harvest. This also releases victory over the attacks of the enemy spiritually, physically, and financially. As we fast and pray we expect the Lord to move in our behalf personally, for our families, loved ones, church, and our nation.

Prayer coupled with fasting accomplishes much! (Daniel 10:2, 11, 12; Acts 13:2-3; Acts 14:21-23)

Prayer Points

Prayer for Our Nation

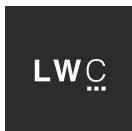
Thanksgiving for how God has blessed America / Repentance and forgiveness for the sins of our nation / Our President and governmental leaders / Peace in the Middle East / Protection for all our soldiers / Wise and godly candidates in all elections / Judges and courts to render godly judgments / Healthcare Reform Act and other policies under this administration / Stop to abortion. Stop to same sex marriage / Elected officials who are filled with the Holy Spirit and bold to vote against issues that are against God's will / Financial restoration of the country. Legislation that opens the door for the gospel to be shared in public forums including our schools / A return to the basics that this country was founded on. Protection of our country from within as well as from outside / That the government remains "hands off" of our churches and does not stifle the ability of pastors and others to speak truth about the government to the people / Revival of what is most precious to Him in our land

Prayer for Our City

That the Miami Valley returns to innovation and creativity, being a region that attracts all types of growth oriented businesses / For new jobs, new technologies, new industries to emerge in our region. / That our leaders—mayors, city councils, and business leaders—join together with one mission in mind to make the region attractive to businesses and focused on the core foundations of values / That Jesus is revealed in the Miami Valley and that people's hearts are open to the truth and salvation / That all forces of darkness in the region are exposed and that they are brought to an end / That the youth in the region are encouraged in creativity and ideas that lead this next generation to growth and innovation / For Christian business leaders to be catalysts for change in the business community and mentors for the next generation of leaders

Prayer for Our Church

Pray for our Pastors, staff, elders, trustees, small group leaders / More than enough prosperity to do the work of the Lord / Vision and direction for the church to meet the needs of this critical point in time / That LWC would be passionate about Jesus / In love with people / A place where the hurting find relief and where the lost find Jesus / Filled with the Holy Spirit / Vessels of power used by the Lord. Passionate soul winners / bold and fearless in sharing Jesus with others / In unity. Healed and whole / Financially blessed-debt free / Set free from anything that holds them back from being all that God called them to be.



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