

Fasting

OVERVIEW

You and I are made up of conflicted pieces. If you are a disciple of Jesus, you have God's Spirit alive in you. Your deepest, truest desires (whether it feels this way or not) are for the things of God. But we often live in ways that contradict what God says is true of us. That's the flesh.

For the authors of Scripture, freedom isn't the ability to do whatever you want. Instead, freedom is the ability to not do whatever you want. Consequently, the New Testament is consistently insisting that every disciple of Jesus grows in the art of self denial. Dying to one's self. In even more intense language: Crucify your flesh.

Throughout the history of the church, one of the primary disciplines engaged to do exactly that is the ancient art of fasting. When you choose to fast, you relinquish nourishment from food in a focused effort to instead draw nourishment from God. In doing so, one is capable of growing in disciplined restraint.

“Fasting reveals the things that control us... If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately... Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear – if they are within us, they will surface during fasting.”

-Richard Foster

Fasting then becomes a fire which drives out the vermin of the flesh—a kind of specific self- denial that aggravates the darkness within. When these shadows are exposed in fasting, we are simultaneously nurturing the determination of will necessary to put them to death, one by one. We are starving the flesh.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE

Select a time in the coming week to fast. Ordinarily, fasting is done from sunup to sundown (about 12 hours), skipping breakfast and lunch, then having a late dinner. There's no hard and fast format. You could fast shorter or longer depending on your schedule and daily routine. The point is simply to give it a shot.

During your fast, make use of your hunger. Each time you take specific notice of the fact that you'd like to eat, exploit that sensation as an occasion for prayer. Engage your imagination to "see" yourself as drawing strength from God. In that time, invite God's Spirit to reveal to you anything within that is bent away from what is true and good. Again, imagine your hunger starving away the flesh and providing nourishment for the Spirit of God within you.

Here are a few other things you might try during your fast:

1. Break a Habit – Identify a sin, habit, or pattern in your "flesh" that you want to break. Spend the day in prayer for freedom in that area.
2. Journal – Spend some time in self-reflection. Journal, take a walk, sit quietly and think. Richard Foster said, "Fasting reveals the things that control us." In light of this reality, if you find yourself feeling anxious, short tempered or jealous you might want to stop and ask God, "Why do I feel this way?" Treat yourself with compassion, as God does, but be honest.