

A resource by King's Community Church

Taking time to fix our eyes on Jesus

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Jesus fasted (Matthew 4:2) and said that his disciples would too (Matthew 6:16, Matthew 9:15), but what is fasting, what can we expect and how can we best go about it?

### **What is fasting?**

Fasting is a physical expression of our deep desire for more of God in our lives and the lives of others. It's a wonderful way of expressing our need of God to God. By temporarily ceasing the body's constant supply of food we are making a massive statement that something else is even more important to us.

"[When] Jesus Himself fasted it was to demonstrate His absolute dependence upon His Father." (Peter C. Moore)

John Piper writes that; "it is an internal, spiritual matter of finding more contentment in Christ than food." And as Jesus said; "Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from God."

### **Fasting is not...**

#### **A hunger strike**

It isn't to twist God's arm, to impress God or be more accepted by God. The message of Jesus is that we could not be more accepted and loved by God than we are right now. We don't go without eating to try and get God eating out of our hands. As Mahesh Chavda says, "It is not a shallow performance driven version of putting in time with God."

#### **A health kick**

Although fasting is very beneficial physically we don't do it because we've eaten too much over Christmas!

## **Done to impress others**

Jesus says, "When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces [NET 'make their faces unattractive'] to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full" (Matthew 6:16). Outside this person is saying they have a heart for God yet inside they are desperate to be approved and admired by other people. Jesus is saying if what we want is recognition & praise from people then this is what we will get, this will be our reward.

## **Does it have to be food?**

The clearest reading of the bible is that it is primarily food. Jesus was hungry after 40 days of fasting which suggests he ate nothing. In the bible we find different types of fasts but the most common is that of abstaining from food.

Some people do what has become known as a partial or Daniel fast, going without certain 'rich' or 'pleasurable' foods for a season of prayer and fasting (Although the reason Daniel went without certain foods was so he wouldn't defile himself, not for prayer. See Daniel 1 :8-16).

So can I fast from other things? What about TV; the internet or something like that?

The bible does hint at abstaining from other things to give time to pray (see 1 Corinthians 7:5). And we would never discourage giving up things like this from time to time so you can give more time to pray. Yet, having said that, the overwhelming thing people abstain from in bible is food. Why? I believe it's because food is so central to our lives that when we go without it we're reminded that God is central to our lives, that He is the one who gives us life & sustains our lives (Acts 17:28). Going without food reminds us of our need & increases our hunger for Him. As Jesus said; "Man shall not Live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

## **What if I can't go without food?**

We recognize that there will be some people who are unable to fast from food due to being pregnant or having a medical condition. If this is you, and you are thinking of fasting from food, please seek medical advice first from your GP and follow their advice.

Some may be working with equipment or machinery that if you became light headed due to lack of food could put yourself or others in danger. So please think carefully before you fast about how it could affect your ability to carry out your job safely.

So if you're unable to fast from food, please don't feel condemned or that you can't take part. In these cases we would suggest doing a partial fast or fasting from something else, like TV or social media to give time to pray.

## **What can I expect from fasting?**

### **Reward**

Jesus said; "Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." There is great benefit in fasting. Even though we don't do it to get something from God, he still gives. In many ways our greatest reward is a stronger, richer relationship with God, knowing Him better and seeing more of His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven {Matthew 6:9-15}.

### **Revealing**

God revealing Himself to us (Ephesians 1 :17-19); God giving us much needed wisdom and insight {Daniel 9:3-22}; God revealing his direction to us (Acts 13:2-3) and God revealing what is inside us. Sometimes we cover up what is inside of us with food and other things, fasting strips these things away and we may find sin being exposed in us. When this happens we go to God and find grace,

mercy and forgiveness, being thankful that God is changing us by his grace (1 John 1:5-10, Hebrews 4:14-16). Piper: "Fasting reveals the measure of foods' mastery over us - or television or computers or whatever we submit to again and again to conceal the weakness of our hunger for God."

## **Restoring**

When Nehemiah heard about the state of Jerusalem, that the walls had been broken and the gates burned, his response was to weep, pray and fast (see Nehemiah 1 :1-4). But then he set about to restore what had gone wrong, to make a difference in the world, even if it cost him his life. (Nehemiah 2 onward). In Isaiah 58 we read that God's idea of fasting is meant to result in us becoming part of the restoring process in a broken world. This can include seeking God to see people saved, set-free, healed and helped.

## **Resolve**

When we fast we may feel weak but as Paul says "then we are strong" {2Cor 12:10). We should expect to find God's strength to live the way he wants us to live and to do what God has called us to do. When Jesus fasted for 40 days and then faced serious temptation he had the strength and resolve to overcome it and then left that place in the power of the Spirit to do what he had come to do (Luke 4:1-14).

It's worth reading the story of Esther who found fresh resolve in the face of potential death, because she had first fasted. Esther 4: 16: "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." She fasted and went forward, trusting God to bring the breakthrough.

## How do I do it?

### Before

Decide how long you will fast for and what you will fast from. Start Slow, don't rush into a 40 day fast! Try one meal, then maybe one day & increase from there. Some people fast one day every week. Remember it's not about putting in time with God but putting aside food to be with God and express your hunger for him.

Decide what you will fast from: Whether it is all food and **only drink water, fasting from certain types of food or something else.** We would advise you not to pig out the night before: especially if you are going on a longer fast. Have a simple, light and healthy meal, this will help your body adjust to going without food the next day.

### During

Try to use the time you would normally eat for prayer. If you are fasting for more than one meal then allow your feeling of physical hunger to remind you of your hunger and need for God as you go about the business of the day. It is not just about putting in time to pray but seeking to have a prayerful attitude in everything you do.

Expect to have some physical effects. Sometimes people experience headaches, light headiness or a sick feeling in the stomach. Richard Foster: "In many ways the stomach is like a spoiled child, and a spoiled child does not need indulgence, but needs discipline." You may feel increased irritability, lack of concentration or a bit depressed. Don't allow this to stop you! Find grace and keep going.

If you fail, don't beat yourself up. Just like a parent delights in their child learning to walk, even when they trip and fall, so to God delights in us learning to walk with him in prayer and fasting. We fast from the place of acceptance not in order to get acceptance.

## **After**

Be encouraged. You did it. Well done. If you've been on a longer fast don't go to all you can eat Chinese buffet! Take it slowly when introducing food back into your body, maybe start with fresh fruit or salad and work up from there.

## **Some relevant bits of the Bible**

Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Samuel 31 :13; 1 Samuel 20:34; 1 Kings 21 :27-29; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 1 :4; Esther 4:15- 16; Psalms 35:13 Psalms 109:24; Isaiah 58; Jeremiah 36:6; Daniel 9:3-5; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:7; Matthew 4:1-11; Matthew 9:15; Luke 3:27; Luke 4:1-2; Acts 13:3; Acts 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:4-6

## **Some helpful books to read**

The Hidden Power of Prayer & Fasting Mahesh Chavda

God's Chosen Fast: A Spiritual and Practical Guide to Fasting

Arthur Wallis

A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer John

Piper

Celebration of discipline Richard Foster





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**Grow** in character and gifting

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