

Spiritual Disciplines Series: Fasting  
Think Fast! WRCoB 8.2.20

There was a guy who needed to lose weight  
So he went to his doctor for a consultation.

The doctor advised him to consider fasting.

She said, "I want you to eat normally for 2 days  
Then I want you to skip a day.

Repeat this procedure for 2 weeks  
And come back to see me.  
Hopefully, you'll lose 5 pounds or so by then."

He returned after two weeks  
And shocked the doctor by losing 60 lbs.

"Why, that's amazing!" the doctor said  
"Did you follow my instructions explicitly?"

"Absolutely," he said, "But I tell you,  
By the end of each 3rd day I thought I'd drop dead."

"From hunger, you mean?" asked the doctor.

"No, from all that crazy skipping!"

. . . skip a day . . . .

I know, it's a dad joke, right?

Today, we continue our sermon series  
On the spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual disciplines aren't just for religious fanatics.

We all can benefit from practicing them.

The disciplines draw us closer to God  
And gives strength for daily living!

The last two weeks we looked at the disciplines  
Of meditation and prayer.

Today we look at the discipline of fasting.

There's one type of food you can eat in a fast. FAST FOOD.

To be truthful, fasting is not a Biblical diet plan!

It certainly will cause one to lose weight  
But that's not its primary goal.

Fasting's primary goal is to develop a hunger for God.

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It doesn't take long for someone new to the USA  
To get the impression  
Americans are slaves to their stomachs.

According to the Richmond Magazine  
The Richmond metro area  
Has over 700 restaurants. We love to eat out!

Look at all the food signs that vie for our attention  
When going for the weekend out-to-eat ritual.



And make no mistake we church folk like our food too.

I mean, seriously, when's the last time  
You've heard of an American church  
Gathering for prayer and fasting after services  
Rather than the traditional potluck?

The routines around food and feeding drives our lives.

You might argue we need a little self-indulgence.

And we do . . . no denying  
But we also need a little self-denial in our Christian walk.

Yes, Jesus enjoyed eating.

But I think he enjoyed the fellowship around the table  
As much as he enjoyed the food.

So many of his teachings happened during mealtimes.

Jesus also knew he didn't live on bread alone  
And spent time in solitude, prayer, and fasting.

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People in the Bible fasted.

Both the prophets Moses and Elijah  
Fasted marathon fasts of forty days.

Nehemiah prayed and fasted  
For the iniquities of the people of Israel.

**Nehemiah 1:4 NRSV When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.**

The prophet Daniel fasted  
Abstaining from both food and water.

Daniel also included in his discipline partial fasts.

**Daniel 10:3 NIV I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.**

Rick Warren published a book entitled

*The Daniel Plan*

Based on this verse from the Book of Daniel.

If I'm not mistaken

This book IS a Biblical diet plan.

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Esther, when confronted with a dire situation

Sought the prayerful assistance of a corporate fast.

**Esther 4:16 NLT “Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.”**

By the time we get to the New Testament era

Fasting was a regular discipline for the Jews.

The Pharisees held weekly fasts

On Mondays and Thursdays.

This just so happened to coincide with market days.

No coincidence here!

In today's Scripture Lesson

Jesus calls them out for their behavior.

He calls them hypocrites for making such a big scene

Parading around in the market place

Showing off their pious discipline of fasting..

Jesus tells his listeners

The only ones that need to know that you're fasting  
Is God and you.

Well, except maybe your spouse who has worked all day  
Preparing a nice meal  
Only to hear you are not eating!

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So what's the point?

Why should we fast?

If it is not to lose weight, why bother?

God created food for us to eat and to enjoy  
Why deny ourselves the pleasure of eating?

It is about our hunger for God.

John Piper says, *The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie.*

Wesley Duewel, missionary to India, *Fasting in the biblical sense is choosing not to partake of food because your spiritual hunger is so deep, your determination in intercession so intense, or your spiritual warfare so demanding that you have temporarily set aside even fleshly needs to give yourself to prayer and meditation.*

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As with the other two spiritual disciplines

The whole purpose of fasting is to experience God!

John Wesley, *First let it be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven . . . .*

Fasting converts hunger for food into hunger for God.

John Piper, *“Do you have a hunger for God? [If not] it is not because we have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because we have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Our soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. If we are full of what the world offers, then perhaps a fast might express, or even increase, our soul's appetite for God.”*

What Piper is saying is that it is hard to hunger for God  
When you fill to overflowing the things of this world!

Getting hungry reminds us of our dependence on God.

We remember that God is our provider.

Fasting turns a deep desire for physical food  
Into a deep desire for spiritual food.

Jesus reminds us of this in his Sermon on the Mount;

**5:6 ESV Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

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There are different kinds of fasting.

- **Partial fasts** — Described in the book of Daniel, where for three weeks he abstained only from “delicacies” like meat and wine (Daniel 10:3).
- **Complete fasts** — Water-only fast. These can be intermittent fasts including short periods and extending fasts for days at a time.
- **Absolute fasts** — These are total fasts — no food or water. Paul went on an absolute fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus (Acts 9:9). Moses and Elijah did absolute fasts of forty days (Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8). During Ramadhan for roughly 30 days, Muslims fast daily from daybreak to sundown abstaining both food and water. An absolute fast is in consultation with your primary caregiver. Our bodies cannot go without water for more than three days.

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I suggest beginning with a 24 hour fast.

Begin either right after lunch to the following lunch

Or right after the evening meal to the next evening meal.

You give up two meals.

Once you've experienced this try a 36 hour fast.

Begin following an evening meal

And continue throughout the next day

Ending your fast at breakfast the following day.

Most people find the 24 or 36 hour fast challenging enough

And spiritually rewarding.



But if someone is challenged spiritually  
Consider fasts of longer durations.

As you fast and begin to feel hunger pains  
Which aren't really hunger pains until about day 20

Instead of looking in the fridge  
At all the food you could be enjoying  
Look into your heart for God.

And when it is time to prepare and sit down for a meal  
Instead find a quiet spot to sit down and pray.

It is interesting how much time  
Food preparation and eating take up in a day!

Convert those times to times of prayer.

You'll be surprised at how penetrating your prayers can be!

Again, John Piper, *"That's what I think fasting is at heart. It's an intensification of prayer. It's a physical explanation point at the end of the sentence, "We hunger for you to come in power."*

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Fasting may not be for everyone.

Health issues prevent some from fasting.

But fasting is not limited to just food  
We can fast from all kinds of things.

The late minister/medical doctor Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

*Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose.*

We can fast from TV or from social media.

We can fast from reading, listening, or watching the news.

Fasting from these things could do a world of good.

But personally, with our dependency on food

Giving up a meal or two or three

Is not going to hurt us

And in fact, it is a discipline worth doing.

And so, may we hunger and thirst for the things of God.

May we place our trust in our Lord and Savior

And let us “Hold Fast” to what is good.