

What is fasting? What do you think about when you hear someone is fasting?

-mentioned more times in the Bible than Baptism, yet we hear so little about it.

“The denial of a normal function for the sake of spiritual activity.”

-Typically a fast from food, but could be from anything: facebook, TV, a certain kind of food, activity, relationship, etc.

-This is why it is often paired with another discipline- silence/solitude

I. Types of Food and other Fasts

Normal Fast- abstaining from all food but not water (or other liquids)

Jesus in Matthew 4:2

Partial Fast- abstaining from certain types of food

Daniel in Daniel 1:12

Absolute Fast- abstaining from all food and drink

Ezra in Ezra 10:6, Israelites in Esther 4:16

Supernatural Fast- abstaining from food and drink for an abnormal amount of time

Moses in Deut. 9:9 → 40 days with no food or drink

Private Fast- keeping your fast a secret, not to be noticed by others

Matt. 6:16-18

Corporate Fast- a group fasting in the same way for a common purpose

Israelites in Esther 4:16, church elders in Acts 13:2

Regular Fast- on the day of atonement

Occasional Fast- as need arises, respond with prayer and fasting

-the most common for Christians today would be the normal, private, corporate, and occasional fasts

II. Biblical Fasting

-Fasting is Commanded the same way prayer is (expected and exemplified) – Matt. 6:16-17

-Not to show off our spirituality

- Should be done privately if it is a private fast (duh!)
- It should be done for a purpose, otherwise it is just extreme dieting

How does this relate to silence and solitude?

Silence is often a time of fasting from those things which distract us
Technology, noise, work, family, etc.

Many private fasts throughout scripture were undertaken along with a period of isolation

Elijah, Moses, Christ

"Silence and solitude can help us come to grips with the realities of our sin, death, judgment, etc., themes that are frequently drowned out of our consciousness by sounds of everyday life."

We are surrounded with noise, all the time-

Are we comfortable with our own thoughts? Do we always need to have something on?

On the train in Chicago almost everyone was glued to a device or had headphones in.

Do we ever just stop, intentionally take a break from all the distractions, in order to focus on the Lord?

Much of these principles are specific to fasting, but they carry over into the discipline of silence as well if we "fast" from the things that bring distraction and noise into our lives.

PURPOSES FOR FASTING- SHARPENING OUR FOCUS ON GOD

1. To Strengthen Prayer

-Fasting doesn't change God's will, it helps in our prayers to know God's desires for us

Ezra 8:23, Nehemiah 1:4

-You'll notice that in one way or another, all the other Biblical purposes for fasting relate to prayer

2. To Seek God's Guidance

Before numerous battles in the OT (Judges 20), Acts 14:23 to appoint elders

3. To Express Grief

Death of Saul (2 Sam. 1:11-12), Job

-This is a sign that we are serious about our grief, like when a loved one dies, and helps us refocus on what is really important, i.e. God.

-This can also occur over our sadness for our own sin and can be a sign of repentance

4. To Seek Deliverance or Protection

Ezra 8:21-23 & Esther 4:16

-This time of fasting gave the people a greater focus on God for their intense prayers for deliverance

-We can use this same precedent for asking God for deliverance from our trials - Psalm 109:24

5. To Express Repentance and the Return to God

Joel 2:12

6. To Humble Oneself Before God

1 Kings 21:27-29 → an outward sign of an inward reality, like Baptism. This symbolizes that we are truly serious about our faith

7. To Express Concern for the Work of God

-To aid in praying about a place or people who have experienced tragedy, someone with an illness, a wayward friend, witnessing opportunities, growth in a ministry, etc.

Nehemiah 1:3-4

8. To Minister to the Needs of Others

-This can help us focus on helping others, and their physical needs

9. To Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God

Jesus fasted in Mt. 4 during his time of temptation to prepare himself for God's work

-If we know we will be entering a situation where we will be tempted, fasting can help us prepare for the battle

10. To Express Love and Worship to God

-Anna in Luke 2:37 → this form of self-denial can also be worship before God as we focus on him instead of our worldly and physical needs

Things to Remember

-Prayer and fasting go hand in hand. Fasting helps us focus our prayers and to pray without ceasing as we are reminded of being dependent on God for all things.

-Fasting must always have a purpose, no matter what you fast from

-The Israelites and Pharisees fasted all the time, but if the purpose is to gain favor with God or impress Him or others, it is worthless, and you're just making yourself hungry for nothing.

How do we do this?

Identify the things you need to fast from in order to focus on God

-No Food reminds us of God's provision

-No tech enables us to see what God is doing around us

-Take "Minute/Hour Retreats"

-Plan for it regularly

-Find a special location devoted to this discipline

Will you fast? Why? When? How?