

The Practice of Fasting.

In *Matthew 6* Jesus says we should not fast like the Pharisees - trying to appear godly & spiritual - to look good in front of others. Jesus says they have already had their reward - men's praise rather than God's. In *Isaiah* we are told the people also got it wrong - it was just a religious exercise without the practical aspects of caring for the poor etc. So how do we do it?

1. Make sure our focus is on God. When I fast I spend time calling out to God & humbling myself - cry out to him about a particular situation acknowledging my powerlessness to change the situation. If I'm facing a situation that is desperate, then I fast specially & call out to God.
2. I try to do it without others knowing - it is between me and God. So I use the extra time to pray.

There are different kinds of fast:

- a. Esther fast - this is no food or water for a couple of days. The more urgent the situation, the more >extreme= the fast needs to be. In Esther=s time the whole Jewish race was about to be destroyed - that called for an >extreme= fast.
- b. Full fast - Jesus used this fast & it is very powerful. Some people can go for 40 days, but many people don=t have enough body fat & can perhaps only manage 20 days. During this kind of fast usually only water is drunk. There is the likelihood of caffeine withdrawal (for all you addicts!), so try coming off tea & coffee a couple of days before the fast starts. You may experience headaches as you withdraw.
- c. Partial fast – this is the best place to start & get the body used to it. Eg give up meat, chocolate, coffee etc. Some call this a Daniel fast - he gave up meat because it was offered in sacrifice to idols.
- d. Wesley fast - John Wesley used to fast on Tuesday and Friday most weeks, but would only miss breakfast & lunch. This kind of fast can be used for very long periods, even years. This is a good one to put in as part of our regular spiritual routine.
- e. Day time fast - this is a variation on the above, where only an evening meal is taken. This can also be used over longer periods & enables us to keep working without feeling weak or our quality of work suffering.
- f. Fruit & Vegetable fast - drink fruit juice, vegetable soup etc, but avoid other foods. This will give you some strength & avoid the severe hunger pains of a long fast.
- g. Fast from sleep - 2 Corinthians 6:5 & 11:27. All night prayer, like when Paul & Silas were in prison.
- h. Other fasts - the possibilities are limitless. We can fast from TV, Newspaper, sex (clearly only relevant for those who are married - 1 Corinthians 7:5), caffeine, alcohol, chocolate.... and instead use the time to seek God.

3. Start off missing 2 meals = 24 hours without food. Do it regularly - once a week. After that, it can be built up to 3 meals = 36 hours. If God gives you grace you can fast up to between 21-40 days with no food, after that the body begins to break down & die. If God tells you to do a long fast, **please do it with medical supervision.**
4. The body reacts to not having food & will try to say you are about to die after only a few hours. In fact the body has enough reserves to go for 21 -40 days. So we have to train our bodies. Food is one of the main props we have.
 - a. Whenever you feel hungry, have a drink. Hunger pains usually go after 3 days. Hunger pains then return when the body begins to break down. (For me they never go away!)
 - b. You may feel weak after a couple of days, & also a little giddy. We all react differently.
 - c. It is very beneficial for the body when we fast - all sorts of toxins are cleared out. While this is happening we may get a slight head ache or bad breath. (Don't use chewing gum to freshen your breath when fasting as it increases the release of acid in the stomach.)
 - d. Break your fast with a light meal. Don't go to a restaurant where you eat as much as you like for set price! If breaking a long fast have fruit & vegetables for 2 days with only fruit juice to drink.
5. Another thing that happens is that as the body loses the security of food, barriers come down & character issues begin to surface. I used to wonder why I was getting so grumpy & short tempered when I fasted! So another benefit of fasting is we grow in character.
6. Some find that when they fast it is easier to pray, they feel closer to God & get visions. I often react the opposite way - I just feel hungry, cold & weak; prayer is even harder. Afterwards I reap the reward of being closer to God. Mahesh Chavdah says that fasting is like the rocket launcher for prayer & so if you are finding it hard to pray, try fasting.
7. Last thing - Corporate fasts - everyone doing it together - *Joel 2:15*. This can be everyone at same time or taking it in turns, each person choosing a day - result is church can fast for several weeks, but each person only does 1 or 2 days.
8. So, as the sports coaches tell us - no pain, no gain! This gain is eternal.

Please Note:

1. If you are pregnant, on medication or have any long term illness, please do not undertake any kind of food or drink fast without the agreement of your doctor. Other kinds of fast are available to you.
2. If you use any of the fasts which abstain from food for more than a couple of days, it could impair your ability to drive or operate machinery.
3. If you experience dizziness or any other unexpected symptoms please stop the fast until you have been able to consult a doctor.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me, other staff member, your Key Group Pastor etc.

Andrew

Recommended reading:
Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster. Published by Hodder.