

## **I. A Brief Introduction to Fasting**

[16] And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, “ this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

[1] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. [2] And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Matthew 3:16-4:2

Jesus does everything on purpose. Healing the sick, passing by others, getting away from crowds of people so he can pray, standing up and preaching to thousands, scolding the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, letting an adulterer go free — everything he does is on purpose. It is not happenstance that immediately after his baptism, before he is tempted by the Devil and starts his earthly ministry, Jesus fasts for forty days and forty nights. Here we see the power in fasting, of which even Jesus needs to avail himself. It is through fasting that Jesus 1) gains deeper intimacy with God the Father and Holy Spirit, 2) is prepared to take on spiritual warfare with the Devil, 3) disciplines himself, submitting his flesh to the Spirit, and 4) clarified his vision for the work the Father has given him. For all these reasons, Jesus fasts on purpose.

If fasting is so important to Jesus, God in human form, then we ought to practice fasting as well. Although Christians have practiced fasting since the time of Jesus’ ministry, today it is a relatively forgotten discipline. Some believe it is an especially pious ritual, reserved for only the super-Christian. Others feel they might starve on any less than three meals per day. Whatever the reason for its widespread neglect, we would be wise to practice the spiritual discipline of fasting regularly because it is a crucial element of a powerful spiritual life.

So what is fasting? Richard Foster defines fasting as “the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.”<sup>1</sup> While most examples in the Bible are of abstention from food, one may fast from any regular activity that provides comfort. For example, one might fast from a familiar glass of wine at dinner each night. Or perhaps you feel unable to function without one or more cups of coffee in the morning. In that case, the familiar—maybe you would even say “necessary”—can be sacrificed for a time.

But why fast? What’s the point? No matter what “normal function” one fasts from, it should be done for the sake of intently centering one’s self on God. The ultimate goal is not some “answer” to a conundrum or a “blessing” per se; the goal is to draw nearer to God. God himself is the goal. However, there are secondary benefits of fasting. Fasting often reveals what controls us. It is easy to cover up those things inside of us in the normalcy of daily life. When one fasts, all manner of vices rise to the surface: anger, jealousy, fear, bitterness. Though we may immediately blame those on lack of food (being “hangry”), it is not the circumstances that have created those vices; instead they have revealed them. Once these evils rise to the surface, we turn to Christ, meditating on our forgiveness and justification before the father, and putting these things to death by the power of the Spirit. It is in this turning that we find our true sustenance: “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). We turn to the word for nourishment and healing. As Foster says, “in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting!” Finally, fasting focuses us on prayer. The pangs of hunger as we fast remind us to cry out to God, from whence comes our help. It is on him that we meditate, and in him we find our greater joy and solace in time of lack.

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<sup>1</sup> Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline: e Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978), 47-61.

At Sojourn Church, we want more of God. We want the power of the Holy Spirit to be the hallmark of our lives. For this reason, we are calling our community to fast from January 30th-Feb 3rd and partake in a time of corporate prayer on Tuesday, January 31st from 6:30-8pm at our church. We believe that if we deprive ourselves of those things that give us comfort and oftentimes distract us from God, he will meet us in new and intimate ways. Will you join us in seeking his face and desiring more of him?

## **II. Methods of Fasting**

There are 3 kinds of fasts as a church. Seek the Lord in prayer, as you decide which fast you will join with the church in:

The first is a total food fast. This fast is assuredly one to which you must sense a strong call from the Lord, and should only be attempted by those who have fasted regularly for long periods of time. Please consult with a doctor beforehand and talk it over with your parish elder before beginning, so that someone can monitor your progress and check in with you periodically. It is best to work in fruit juices and smoothies during such a fast, and drinking 7-10 glasses (8oz) of water per day is essential. You should not attempt this fast if you are under the age of 18, have a serious medical condition, or take medicine regularly. When you decide to end the fast, be sure to transition your body well by eating fruits and vegetables only at first.

The second is to fast one meal per day. In this fast, pick a meal to skip during which time you can seek the Lord in prayer and Scripture meditation. Again, the purpose of fasting is not to starve oneself of food but to feast on the Lord.

The third is the Daniel Fast. Here is an excerpt from the [Daniel Fast website](http://www.daniel-fast.com): (www.daniel-fast.com)

*The Daniel Fast is a method of fasting used by hundreds of thousands of Christians throughout the world. The fast is based on the fasting*

*experiences of the prophet Daniel along with standard Jewish fasting principles.*

*The Daniel Fast is a partial fast, meaning that some foods are eaten and other are restricted. The fast is typically followed for 21 consecutive days and is like a vegan eating plan with more restrictions and the only beverage on the fast is water.*

Here is a [food list from the creator of the Daniel Fast](http://www.daniel-fast.com/portfolio/foodlist/). (www.daniel-fast.com/portfolio/foodlist/) This fast is much better suited for those who are unable to perform the total food fast above, but still want to alter their consumption for this fasting period to draw near to the Lord.

***WARNING: Women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or on their period should not attempt any fast until consulting with their doctor. We suggest that, instead of fasting from food, you fast from things such as coffee, social media, video games, or other consistent gratifications or unnecessary uses of your time. <sup>2</sup>***

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<sup>2</sup> We took this information from a document written by Renovation Church.