

A Call to Fast and Focus

Biblical fasting is like a coin. It has two sides: fasting and focusing. It stops something in your life and starts another. Don't miss this when you fast. When fasting is reduced to just giving something up, it loses its power. Leading up to Easter, we want to call you to a season of fasting (and focusing). You may be wondering, "why?" This guide speaks to that. You may also be wondering, "how?" This guide speaks to that, too. Use it to help you fast and focus.

Why fasting?

- 1) In the Bible and throughout most of church history, fasting has been an essential practice of followers of Jesus. The great heroes of faith in the Old Testament fasted. The first story we read about Jesus' adult life is of Him fasting for forty days and forty nights.¹ Many of the New Testament's central characters continued this practice, as have Christians since then for thousands of years. It was not until very recently that fasting fell out of favor.
- 2) Jesus calls us to fast. In the Sermon on the Mount He says, "*WHEN* you fast," not "*IF* you fast."² Why? Because Jesus expected His followers to fast.
- 3) Fasting is a beneficial practice. At its root, fasting is about more than simply giving up certain things; it's about hungering for God. A hunger that's often curbed by our endless feeding on the things of this world. This act of self-denial may not seem significant, but it exposes hunger which may control us more than we realize, and it creates space for time with God.

Putting it Into Practice:

- During the days leading up to Easter (Monday, March 21st to Saturday, April 16th), choose something to fast (abstain) from.
 - If you're fasting from food, take baby steps. If you've never fasted before, consider starting with just one meal a week. Another option is a weekly

¹ Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13

² Matthew 5:16

12-hour or 24-hour fast. Of course, you're free to fast for a longer period of time, but know, a longer fast is not more pleasing to God than a shorter fast.

- Feel free to fast from things other than food. It's not uncommon for Christians to refrain for a period of time from things like television, social media, sweets, shopping for non-essentials, or sleep. If you choose to fast from sleep, you are not expected to give up sleep for the entire period. Those who practice this type of fast typically choose 1 or 2 days a week to wake up an hour or two earlier (or stay up an hour or two later) and devote that time to Bible study and prayer.
- As you fast, let your hunger or lack turn your thoughts and heart to God. When you experience desire for the thing you've temporarily given up, let that longing be a cue to refocus on God.

Why Focusing?

- 1) Fasting is incomplete without focusing. Maybe you've tried fasting before and it didn't "work." You gave up food or some other thing for a set period of time and nothing happened. That's because fasting only "works" when it's the means to another end. It's a tool for focusing your pursuit of God. So, for example, if you give up a certain meal, but when not eating, you watch TV instead of praying, that's not fasting, that's dieting. One-sided fasting is spiritually pointless. Keep this in mind as you fast, and don't neglect taking time to focus on God.

Putting it Into Practice:

- Use the time you would normally be eating (or doing whatever it is you're fasting from) to prayerfully examine your day. Use the following 4-step strategy to help you do this.
 - **Reflect** on the details of the day. Pay special attention to the moments that provoked strong emotions or unexpected behaviors. Be honest with yourself and God about where you're at. Are you angry? Anxious? Tired? Something else?

- **Rejoice** in the good things of the day. Thank God for the day's obvious blessings but also for the smaller, often unnoticed signs of His kindness: a good meal, an encouraging conversation, etc. Remember that God was with you in every moment of the day, even moments when you weren't conscious of His presence.
- **Repent** of ways in which you've sinned in thought, word, or deed. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal specific sins to you and lead you into following Jesus wholeheartedly.
- **Reset:** Having identified the good and bad in your day by rejoicing and repenting, ask the Lord to help you rest in His grace and reset for a fresh start tomorrow.