

Why fast?

Fasting is a normal Spiritual Discipline. It involves giving something up and making time to pray. The normal thing is food — so that instead of a mealtime, we make time to pray.

Ever since God called people to be his own fasting has been a normal part of their Spiritual life. In the Old Testament, Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel and Nehemiah all fasted. Sometimes the nation of Israel would fast together. The religious people of Jesus' day fasted twice weekly. Jesus fasted and expected that his followers would, so he taught his followers about it and made the assumption "When you fast" (Matt. 6:16).

The Early Church fasted (Acts. 13:1-3; 14: 23) and Epiphanius records normal Christians fasting twice weekly in the Fourth Century. More recently, the Reformers (Martin Luther, John Calvin) and the Revivalists (John Wesley, Jonathon Edwards) all fasted. Many Christians today experience God's blessing through the discipline of fasting. Paul Yonggi Cho, the leader of the largest church in the world in S. Korea says: "*We have seen that fasting and prayer causes us to become more sensitive to the Lord bringing more power into our lives to combat Satan*".

So fasting is not for fanatics on the periphery but is part of the mainstream 'normal Christian life'

However, fasting doesn't fit very well into the comfort culture that we live in. We are bombarded with adverts of sensual shampoo, soothing saunas, soft sofas and sunny holidays. In this pleasure seeking society that does whatever 'feels good' fasting seems a strange thing to do....

So Why should we fast?

There are many different Biblical reasons that all join together to make fasting a very exciting and powerful activity to get involved in....

(i) Fasting expresses mourning and repentance

David fasted after committing adultery (2 Sam 12: 16). Israel fasted when they realised how much they had failed God's laws (Nehemiah 9:1-3). So fasting is a good way of expressing sorrow to God and making a definite and determined break with specific sins.

(ii) Fasting is a way of seeking guidance

It was in the place of worship and fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke to the Church at Antioch and guided them (Acts 13:2-3). Paul and Barnabbas learnt the importance of this and so prayed and fasted before appointing new leaders (Acts 14: 23).

Fasting is an excellent way of seeking God's direction in crucial decisions - before changing jobs, getting married, making significant Church decisions. So expect God to speak to you through His Word and by his Spirit as you spend time with him praying and fasting.

(iii) Fasting expresses passion in prayer

Fasting is ultimately about PRIORITIES.... What really matters to us? It expresses a hunger for God and his Kingdom that's greater than our hunger for physical food. The discomfort involved (empty stomach, possible headaches, missing the social time of meals) is a positive statement of intentions and Jesus promises that "*Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you*" (Matt. 6:18)-the reward of his intimate presence and of answered prayer.

Fasting combined with prayer is therefore a powerful weapon... In Judges ch.20 it was only when the Israelites combined prayer with fasting that God gave them victory over their enemies (v.26-28). In 2 Chronicles 20, when Judah came under attack, Jehoshaphat called a fast (v.3) and as they prayed and worshipped, the Lord gave them victory.

Jesus "*returned in the power of the Spirit*" after fasting (Lk.4:14) and he saw prayer and fasting as vital if we want to overcome Satan (Matt.17:21)
As we express our passion to know God and to make God known through regular fasting God blesses us with his presence and power for ministry

(iv) Fasting develops self-control

Fasting frees us from being controlled by our physical desires and appetites and instead allows us to control them. This kind of self-control is a fruit of the Spirit and should be the aim of all Christians (see 1 Corinthians 6:12; 9:27). Fasting as a discipline can break the power of greed (for food, sex, money, possessions) and allows Christ to reign in our bodies.

So how should we fast?

Fasting is before God... it is for our Father in heaven that we fast so we must not let others know just to gain spiritual brownie points (Matt. 6:16-18). If we do, that is all we'll get... but we are hungry for more than that!

Fasting can be spontaneous and a discipline... it can be in response to a particular situation we face but Jesus also expects that it will be a regular discipline of ours (Matt. 6:16; Mk. 2:20). As with most disciplines, it never feels like a good idea just before doing it. So as well as fasting on special occasions, it is good to make a regular time to fast (weekly, monthly)... otherwise it probably won't happen!

Start small... try fasting just one meal and praying for half an hour instead. Then you can build up to two meals or the whole day. Choose a day that is not too busy, but not too relaxed either.

Be imaginative... food is the normal thing to fast. There are no dangers in doing this and it can be good for the body so long as you drink plenty of water. However, medical reasons do occasionally make it unwise (e.g. pregnant, diabetic) so fasting a T.V program may be a good alternative.

Lets do it together... fasting in pairs, as a small group or as a Church is a great encouragement as it is not just 'me' but we are in it together. In fact, corporate fasting seems to be the most common way in the Bible.

Still not sure? Have a look at Joel 2: 12-32—what blessings does God promise if his people fast and pray? As a Church, we have a big vision - 3 main centres of 1000+ in Helston, Penzance and Truro. Fasting shows God just how serious we are about this! The promise for us is...

“Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. The Lord will reply ‘I am sending you... enough to satisfy you fully!’”
(Joel 2:19)