



DIRECTING OUR *Desires*

Richard Foster describes Fasting “as the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.” In other words, fasting is a choice to forgo engaging in an activity that is an integral part of your life for the purpose of making space for a spiritual activity. To put it more succinctly, to fast is to make space by taking away. Fasting makes room to direct our desire towards God.

Through fasting, we train our whole being to desire God. What do you desire? Desire is a strong driving force or feeling of wanting something or wishing for something to happen. It propels us toward our goals, dreams, and the myriad things we yearn for. Desire is chemically fed by dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and oxytocin, the feel good chemicals produced in our brains when we experience pleasure. Desire can shape the trajectory of our careers and the habits that sustain us and the habits we cannot break. We live in a world that often encourages us to pursue our desires without restraint, seeking pleasure, profit, satisfaction, comfort, and entertainment

By fasting, Jesus was not merely abstaining from food or comfort or temporary pleasure; he was actively creating space for God to become the central focus of his desires. By fasting, Jesus made space for the identity shaping words “this is my son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased” to take hold of him, for God’s love to embed in him, to be written on his heart without any distraction or competition, for his relationship with God to become the focus of his desires.

QUESTIONS TO *Consider*

When you are deciding how to practice fasting I encourage you to reflect on the following questions with God.

What is my deepest longing, and how do my desires shape my actions and decisions?
How can I use fasting as an opportunity to direct my desires towards God?

Whether I am consider a food fast or fasting from entertainment, media, overactivity, spending, etc, are my expectations for my fast realistic? Should I gradually transition into the practice? What preparations are necessary before commencing the fast? How can others provide support during this time? What other activities or habits could help support my fast?

Are there any conversations that I sense God is inviting me into during my time of fasting?

What expectations do I have for my time of fasting? Can I trust that God is using this space even if I do not feel that my expectations are being met or anything is being accomplished in this moment?

RECOMMENDATIONS

If you are choosing to fast from food, consider the following...

- Be mindful of the needs of your body. Do you have any medical concerns? Consider discussing your desire to fast with your doctor.
- Be willing to ease into your fast by skipping one or two meals before practicing a 24 hour fast. You could also choose to fast during the daylight hours and break your fast at night.
- Minimize your use of caffeine before you begin your fast to prevent withdrawal symptoms.
- Feel free to use juices to help you during your practice.
- Break your fast by eating foods that spark joy as an act of celebration for this time with God.

Be gentle and compassionate with yourself. God is not focused on your flawless adherence to the fast. Instead, God values your eagerness to draw close and nurture your relationship by creating time to be in together.

Be intentional about how you will spend time with God while you are fasting. It is important that you have a plan or idea for how you will make space for God before you face the temptation to break your fast.

What will you remind yourself of when you fail to perfectly adhere to your fast?

How DO WE FAST

Below you will find two passages that highlight how the practice of fasting can be misused when our heart's intentions are not direct our desires towards God but to appear righteous for our own gain.

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” *Matthew 6:16 -18*

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

For day after day they seek me out;

they seem eager to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that does what is right

and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions

and seem eager for God to come near them.

‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,

‘and you have not seen it?’

Why have we humbled ourselves,

and you have not noticed?’

“Yet on the day of your fasting,

you do as you please

and exploit all your workers.

Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,

and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today

and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,

only a day for people to humble themselves?

Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?

Is that what you call a fast,

a day acceptable to the Lord?

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke,

to set the oppressed free

and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter -

when you see the naked, to clothe them,

and not to turn away

from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn,

and your healing will quickly appear;

then your righteousness will go before you,

and the glory of the Lord

will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

Isaiah 58:1-9

What strikes you about how to engage in the practice of fasting from these passages?

MY *Fasting* INTENTION

What am I fasting from? Why?

When am I engaging in this practice?

Day: Daily / Bi-Weekly / Weekly / Other _____

Time: 24 Hour / Dawn to Dusk /

From _____ to _____

Are there any exceptions to my fast?

How will I spend more time with God while fasting?

How can others support me during my fast? Who do I need to tell?