

FASTING

"Fasting reveals the things that control us...We are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the Word of God. Fasting is feasting!" — Richard J. Foster

"Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and some others have utterly disregarded it." — John Wesley

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting...But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your faces, so that it will not be obvious to men 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

SYNOPSIS:

Richard Foster defined fasting as "the voluntary denial of otherwise normal functioning for the sake of intense spiritual activity." When we intentionally place ourselves in the position of physical emptiness there is an opportunity for conversation with God about these cravings and attachments. Ultimately these cravings and attachments that arise would push us toward an awareness of our need for Jesus alone to fill and satisfy.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

When fasting becomes a regular rhythm, some of the God-given fruit includes identifying and fellowshiping with Jesus by choosing to follow His sacrificial example. More time is freed up for prayer and we specifically pray for needs in the body of Christ. We begin to seek God's strength for obedient love and service and repent of self-indulgent, addictive, or compulsive behaviors.

EXAMPLES:

As you expand your rhythm of fasting consider incorporating some of the following options. Abstain from purchasing morning coffee or daily soda. Offer the money or time to God. Select a time frame and abstained from sugar or caffeine. Begin a fast after supper. Fast until supper the next day.

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

If fasting is not a regular rhythm for you, we suggest trying the following practice for this week. Fast one meal a week. Spend your mealtime in prayer. When you feel hungry, sit with Jesus in the wilderness and feed on the bread of heaven. Talk to Jesus about what His self-denial means to you.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1 What is your current fasting rhythm? What would you like to add or take away to enhance this rhythm?

2 Creating a rhythm of fasting can illuminate what controls us and our need for God. Make a list of attachments that may be holding you back from wholehearted service to God. Talk with God about this list. Come back to it at the end of the week and see if there are any new insights gained after your practice of fasting this week.

3 What would you need to do to create a rhythm of fasting in your life?

4 What is your plan for practicing fasting this week? Be as specific as possible.

- Downstream**
A practice that comes easily or naturally to you.
- Upstream**
Practices that don't come easily; a practice that seems difficult or unnatural to you.

Would fasting be beneficial for you to pursue? Why or why not?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How does Christian fasting differ from a hunger strike and fasting for health?

What is your attitude toward fasting or self-denial?

How do you determine when to fast?

When you feel empty or restless, what do you do to try to fill the emptiness? What does this tell you about your heart?

What are the benefits of not publicizing our intention to fast? Are some of these more practical than spiritual? Are there some spiritual benefits, too?

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where: