



Spiritual Disciplines Toolbox

06 Fasting

“And when you fast...”
— Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:16

What are Spiritual Disciplines?

At some point we all get stale, stuck, or start searching for more. Most often all we need is the right tool to break through in our relationship with God. Spiritual disciplines are the biblical tools Christians have been using for centuries to draw closer to God. We use the disciplines because we need help, not because we are so holy. Experiment with the tools to find out what helps you connect with God the best.

What is Fasting all about?

Fasting conjures up pictures of Gandhi or Jesus... but rarely of us. But Jesus expected his followers to fast (Matt. 6:6-18). Perhaps we avoid fasting because we misunderstand it. Fasting is choosing to skip a normal activity to encounter God for a specific purpose. Fasting is having less of something so you can have more of God.

The most common fast is to go without food but drink water (see Luke 4:2). Other fasts include abstaining from certain foods (Dan. 1:12) or from all food and water (Acts 9:9). But you can also fast from shopping, desserts, chocolate, entertainment, gadgets, comforts, video games, or the internet (anything that is not sin, that you usually engage in).

Fasting has to have a purpose. It is driven by a need for others or ourselves. In the Bible, people fasted for guidance (Acts 14:23), to express grief (Judg. 20:26), to seek deliverance or protection (2 Chron. 20:3-4), to express repentance and return to God (Joel 2:12), to intensify prayer (Ezra 8:23), to overcome temptation (Matt. 4:1-11), and to express love and worship to God (Luke 2:37).

Fasts can last for any length of time (from minutes to months). The key is to stop doing an activity so you can use that time to encounter God for a specific purpose.

Where do I start?

Delay Fast. Instead of saying “No” to something, say “Not yet.” This fast involves putting off doing something to give your attention to God first. For example, instead of turning on the TV right after dinner, pray for a couple minutes about a family need—then watch TV. When you reach for your phone to distract yourself, direct your attention to God instead. After you’ve prayed, pick up the phone if you want. You might find you enjoy being with God more!

What other ways can I use this tool?

Traditional Fast. Stop eating food for a set amount of time (but still drink water). Pick a reason to fast (for guidance, grief, or desire for more of God). Pick a time you will fast (it could be for one meal, a day, or a couple days). Fill that time with connecting with God through Bible reading, prayer, or worship. Note: Please don’t fast from food if your doctor does not recommend it or your health does not permit it; choose to fast from something else instead.

Social Media Fast. Checking social media has become more common than almost any other daily activity. It fractures our attention, draws us out of the moment, and constantly sets our thoughts on the surface of the lives of others. Use that habit to trigger something better. Every time you go to check social media pray for a specific need instead.

Fast for a Cause. Fast from buying coffee, lunch out, or groceries for one meal and save the money to donate toward a worthy cause. Use the time you would have spent eating in prayer for the organization, person, or problem. Do this over several weeks and then give the donation. Note: This is great to do as a family or small group.

“The weakness of our hunger for God is not because He is unsavory,
but because we keep ourselves stuffed with other things.”

— John Piper