
Anchored

Fasting

A new year brings the opportunity for new beginnings.

As we begin this Anchored series, we are hoping that the spiritual disciplines and practices that are taught will encourage and challenge you to make your relationship with God a priority in 2020.

FASTING

1. What is Fasting?

- + *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* describes fasting as “the self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer.”
- + The purpose of fasting is to give up something that normally has our attention to give attention to God.
- + Matthew 4:4 – “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”
- + Fasting causes a physical awareness of emptiness to remind us to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy.

2. Fasting is Spiritual Food

- + It seems contradictory but fasting actually feeds us.
- + We sacrifice something good – food – for something that is greater – Jesus.
- + We need food to live, but we need Jesus for life.
- + Jesus called himself the “bread of life.” (John 6:35)
- + John 6:25-35

- + Fasting is a way for us to remember that life, abundant life, is only found in relationship with Jesus.
- + Unlike the manna in the wilderness and the fish and the loaves, Jesus completely satisfies our inner being.

3. Fasting Empowers Us for Ministry

- + Matthew 4:1-4
- + Fasting prepared Jesus for His public ministry and empowered Him to overcome the temptation of Satan.
- + Jesus hungered for the Father.
- + “We hunger for the things that we feed on.”
- + Jesus used the Word of God, not His own strength, to defeat those temptations and remain victorious over sin. He demonstrated for us that fasting can strengthen us spiritually when we use it to draw closer to God.
- + Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”
- + Fasting leads us away from the things of the world that do not sustain us and leads us to the One Whose very words give us life.

Scripture does not command Christians to fast. It is not something that God requires or demands of Christians. At the same time, the Bible presents fasting as something that is good, profitable and expected. The Book of Acts records believers fasting before they made important decisions (Acts 13:4; 14:23). Fasting and prayer are often linked together (Luke 2:37; 5:33).

Too often, the focus of fasting is on the lack of food. Instead, the purpose of fasting should be to take your eyes off the things of this world, and instead focus on God. Fasting is a way to demonstrate to God, and to yourself, that you are serious about your relationship with Him. Fasting helps you to gain a new perspective and a renewed reliance upon God.

Although fasting in Scripture is almost always a fasting from food, there are other ways to fast. Anything you can temporarily give up in order to better focus on God can be considered a fast (1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

Practical Reminders for Fasting:

- + Fasting should be limited to a set time, especially when the fasting is from food. Extended periods of time without eating are harmful to the body. For longer fasts you should consult your doctor ahead of time.
- + Fasting should not be considered a “dieting method” either. Do not fast to lose weight, but rather to gain deeper fellowship with God. Make sure you’re fasting for the right reasons.
- + If you’ve never fasted before, you can try fasting from one meal or for one day to begin with. Increase the duration at your discretion.
- + If you fast for more than a week, you will need to gradually break your fast. Don’t eat a huge first meal. Start with boiled vegetables like broccoli or zucchini and then gradually add more varieties of food. Avoid high sugar and fat foods initially.
- + Be sure to stay well hydrated while you are fasting. Drink lots of water. Drinking juice can also help your body stay healthy during a fast.
- + Try to keep your fast private between you and God. Schedule your times of fasting in between dinner parties or holidays. For example, it is not wise to fast on Christmas Day when the family has traveled long distances to fellowship together!
- + Consider your schedule and obligations. If you are planning an extended fast, it is better to fast on days when you don't have high-energy obligations, like speaking to a large crowd or participating in an exercise class.
- + Plan fasts on days where you can spend quality time praying and being with your Saviour.

By taking our eyes off the things of this world, we can focus better on Christ. Fasting is not a way to get God to do what we want. Fasting changes us, not God. God said, "When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you" (Jeremiah 29:13-14).

When a man or woman is willing to set aside the legitimate appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, they are demonstrating that they mean business, that they are seeking God with all their heart. Fasting is an expression of wholeheartedness.

Reflection Questions:

1. When you feel empty or restless, what do you do to try to fill the emptiness? What does this tell you about your heart?
2. What is your attitude toward fasting or self-denial?
3. In what ways do you currently deny yourself?
4. When has self-denial brought you something good?
5. What has the experience of fasting been like for you?
6. Where do you operate from an entitlement mentality? How can you wean yourself from this way of life?