

## Spiritual Disciplines Handout: **FASTING**

- *Spend time throughout the week reading, meditating on, and praying through these scriptures.*
- *Read the attached readings with enough time to really process through the content.*
- *Think through the questions at the very end. Maybe journal through some of the answers.*

**16** “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. **17** But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, **18** 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 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

**3** ‘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. **4** 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. **5** 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? **6** “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? **7** 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?

[Isaiah 58:3-7 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

**2** At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. **3** I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

[Daniel 10:2-3 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

**23** Paul and Barnabas appointed elders[a] for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

[Acts 14:23 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

**4** Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’

[Matthew 4:4 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

**2** where for forty days he was tempted[a] by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

[Luke 4:2 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

**12** I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

[Luke 18:12 New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

**Your God is Too Safe by Mark Buchanan: Excerpts from Ch. 18:**

If this book were a multimedia presentation, I would flash up a picture of our lives—our mindless preoccupations, our ranting over not getting our way, our insatiable need for more and more and more, our boredom and blaming. And beneath I would put the caption: “Consumption is killing us. Go fast and live.”

YOU CAN’T READ THE BIBLE VERY FAR IN ANY DIRECTION WITHOUT realizing that fasting was simply a part of the natural rhythm of life for the people of God. They expected and planned to fast as naturally as they expected and planned to eat. To them, fasting was woven into the rhythm of life, like day and night, summer and winter, sowing and reaping, waking and sleeping. There were times you ate, and there were times you fasted. Doesn’t everybody live like that? Richard Foster writes:

The list of biblical personages who fasted reads like a “Who’s Who” of Scripture: Moses the lawgiver, David the king, Elijah the prophet, Esther the queen, Daniel the seer, Anna the prophetess, Paul the apostle, Jesus Christ the incarnate Son.

He goes on to name some of the great men and women throughout history who made fasting a discipline. John Wesley, in fact, refused to ordain anyone to the Methodist ministry who did not fast twice a week. Jesus Himself, though He stood against the Pharisee’s rigid, self-promoting, judgmental practice of fasting, expects us to fast: “When you fast,” He says in Matthew 6:16. When you fast—not *if*.

Jesus began His ministry with an intense and prolonged fast: forty days without food or companionship. It was a Spirit-led experience. Mark says that the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, where He fasted. And at the end of those forty days, the devil came to tempt Him. I have always thought that the devil came to Jesus at His weakest moment, when He was gaunt, wild-eyed, ready to scavenge any moldy crust of bread, scrape any meat shreds off a lamb’s bone. Even pork looked good. The devil’s first temptation was to offer Jesus food: *Turn these stones into bread*. I always saw that as attacking Jesus at His lowest, most vulnerable point, tempting Him with the very thing He craved most.

But I’m not so sure anymore. The more I personally learn from fasting, the more I see that Jesus actually stood at His strongest when His belly was empty. The forty days without food, far from weakening Him at the moment of encounter with the devil, actually strengthened Him for it. Jesus was in peak condition, a fighter who had been training hard for forty days straight. And when He stepped into the ring, His opponent didn’t stand a chance. Jesus’ swift and unflinching rebuttal to the devil was to quote from Deuteronomy 8:3: “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” How does anyone get to know, inside out, that this indeed is so?

One thing is almost certain: It’s a truth that’s hard, maybe impossible, to learn between fistfuls and mouthfuls of food....

So now the quiz: Who understands—*really* understands—that we don’t live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God? Who not only understands, but withstands because of it, overcomes on the basis of it? The man with his belly full? Or the man with his belly empty?

Let me be blunt: If you never fast, then the whole concept of being wholly nourished and sustained by God’s Word alone will likely be only a nice, sweet, and totally irrelevant idea to you. You may pay the idea lip service, but you’ll be too busy licking sauce off your lips to do any more. And worse: If you never fast, when the day of testing and temptation comes, you may not stand.

Consumption is killing us. Go fast and live.

... Fasting is a God-led, Spirit-driven activity. It is not just your own idea. It is not a legalistic requirement. It is not a work we perform. It is not a weight-loss technique. It is not a hunger strike. No, it is a God and Spirit work, a response to the leading and the driving of the Godhead. In fact, fasting begins with a hunger for more of God’s direction in your life. Fasting is born of an appetite for more of God’s presence, wanting God to lead, wanting the Spirit to drive. And what He often leads us and drives us into is a fast.

Deuteronomy 8 indicates that there are three main purposes behind a God-led and Spirit-driven experience of hunger. God orchestrates and engineers hunger to humble His people, to test them and to teach them. That, then, is the structure for the rest of this chapter: *A fast is a God-led or Spirit-driven hunger whose purpose is to humble us, to test us, and to teach us.*

FASTING HUMBLER US BECAUSE IT QUICKLY SHOWS US OUR LIMITS and our frailty. It shows us our utter dependency—ultimately upon God but also upon one another.

... Hunger humbles us. It opens our eyes to our own stark-naked neediness, our own daily dependence: Unless God in His mercy provides manna for this day, we're in trouble. Look at us. We start coming apart after only twelve hours of not eating. We get depressed, cranky, weary. Now tell me again about how poor people should be more like us: strong, dependable, independent. Hunger humbles us.

That's why Jesus rebukes the Pharisees' manner of fasting: "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting" (Matthew 6:16). In other words, the very thing that God intends for humility they use for self-adulation. The very thing meant to break their indulgence is used to feed it. Rather than an experience of humility, fasting has become an experience of pride. Let me say it again and say it clearly: Fasting is meant to humble us, to make us understand how small and frail and needy we really are. It should increase our sense of dependency, not become a way of lauding our spiritual superiority. It is not a demonstration of superhuman strength. It is exactly the opposite: a demonstration of very human weakness. If fasting—or any other spiritual discipline—is not producing in us genuine humility, if it only proves breeding ground for self, it's gone awry.

So it's good that we feel hungry, weary, weak when we fast. When I first began fasting on a regular basis, I tried all sorts of things to avoid the sting and the weight of it. But after a while I came to realize that the discomfort of fasting was God's primary means of humbling me. ...

I need a holy habit to prove to myself that the opposite is true—to move me from self-imposed worship to real worship, to move me from false humility to genuine humility, to move me from some self-glorifying treatment of my body to a recognition of my frailty. Fasting humbles us.

AND FASTING TESTS US TO SEE WHAT IS IN OUR HEARTS. FASTING brings to the surface that which is deep down, that which we mask from ourselves and others with large doses of corn chips and Barq's root beer. Fasting churns that stuff up from the depths. ...hunger strips away the disguise.

Hunger, like Solomon calling for the baby to be cut in two, usually forces out the real issue. It tests me and makes me face honestly what is in my heart. Part of what I'm learning to pray about during a fast are the dark things hidden inside me which fasting brings to light. There's all manner of junk down there that, apart from fasting, I had no idea existed. *Search me, O God, and know my heart ... see if there be any wicked way in me.* Fasting is one of God's surest means of searching out the wicked ways.

... God uses hunger to test what is in our hearts—what we've really given our hearts to—to see whether or not we will keep His commands. Fasting is a test of obedience. ...

FASTING TEACHES US. IT TEACHES US THAT WE DO NOT LIVE ON bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Deuteronomy 8, as it continues, makes clear that our dependency upon the Lord is jeopardized by an abundance of and indulgence in food. Gluttony is companion to amnesia:

Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land ... a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing...

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am

giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied ... then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God.... You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." (6–12, 14, 17)

It's the man with his belly full who is most likely to forget from whom all blessings flow.

Hunger makes stark and raw our humanness, our neediness and frailty. Hunger makes me understand my own poverty—my poverty of soul, poverty of spirit, poverty of ends. Blessed are those, Jesus said, who hunger for righteousness. ...

More and more people in our churches are food gluttons and biblical anorexics. Even our intake of Scripture has been reduced to a kind of fast-food drive-through, nibbling the crumbs tossed from the pulpit on Sunday. "I left that church. They just weren't feeding me."

... Physical hunger is meant to deepen in us hunger for the Word of God and motivate us to get our own food. Physical hunger also teaches us to feast on Jesus. In John 6, after Christ feeds the five thousand, He has an instant megachurch. But in what seems like a case of extreme self-sabotage, He chases all but the most committed away with a few stern words:

I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.... I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.... I am the bread of life.... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.... For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. (vv. 26–27, 32–33, 35, 54–55)

As I said, most everyone clears out at these words. Then Jesus turns to the twelve and asks, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" ... Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (vv. 67–69)

When our bellies are full, we are in danger of following Jesus for all the wrong reasons. As long as you keep the bread coming, keep serving my appetites, keep meeting my felt needs and not my real needs, I'm part of Your church, Lord. True, Christ in His deep compassion does want to feed us real bread. But He wants more for us than that: He wants to give us Himself. He has the words of eternal life. He is the Holy One of God. He is the bread of life that came down from heaven. The deepest need we have is to eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood.

Ultimately, and perhaps paradoxically, fasting also teaches us to be like God. Isaiah 58, the Bible's most extensive passage on fasting, is explicit about this. ...

THE FAST GOD CHOOSES TEACHES US TO HAVE HIS HEART FOR THE hungry, the oppressed, the naked, the homeless. It's to motivate us to do good works, God-works—what Isaiah calls repairing broken walls. When we taste a little brokenness ourselves, we have a greater sense of urgency to repair for others what is broken. Fasting is *meant* to scour our gut. It is God's intent that we would feel the pangs of hunger, the gnawing emptiness, the dizziness and weariness. That's how a third of the world *lives*. And if we never live that way even briefly, how will we learn to care for the least of these? Without hunger, our consumption will lead us deeper and deeper into acts of oblivious or intentional neglect, abuse, exploitation of those who are hungry. Fasting gives us a small *taste* of what their world is like, a taste we will never get if we do not for a time forsake the taste of food.

...Consumption is killing us. Go fast and live.

### **Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster: Excerpts from Ch. 4:**

In a culture where the landscape is dotted with shrines to the Golden Arches and an assortment of Pizza Temples, fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times. ... For example, in my research I could not find a single book published on the subject of Christian fasting from 1861 to 1954, a period of nearly one hundred years. ...

What would account for this almost total disregard of a subject so frequently mentioned in Scripture and so ardently practiced by Christians through the centuries? Two things. First, fasting has developed a bad reputation as a result of the excessive ascetic practices of the Middle Ages [where] fasting was subjected to the most rigid regulations and practiced with extreme self-mortification and flagellation. Modern culture reacts strongly to these excesses and tends to confuse fasting with mortification.

Second, the constant propaganda fed us today convinces us that if we do not have three large meals each day, with several snacks in between, we are on the verge of starvation. This, coupled with the popular belief that it is a positive virtue to satisfy every human appetite, has made fasting seem obsolete. ...

Scripture has so much to say about fasting that we would do well to look once again at this ancient Discipline.

#### **Fasting in the Bible**

Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. ... In Scripture the normal means of fasting involves abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water. In the forty-day fast of Jesus, we are told that “he ate nothing” and that toward the end of the fast “he was hungry” and Satan tempted him to eat, indicating that the abstaining was from food but not from water (Luke 4:2). From a physical standpoint, this is what is usually involved in a fast.

Sometimes what could be considered a partial fast is described; that is, there is a restriction of diet but not total abstention. Although the normal fast seemed to be the custom of the prophet Daniel, there was a three-week period in which he declares, “I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all” (Dan. 10:3). We are not told the reason for this departure from his normal practice of fasting; perhaps his governmental tasks precluded it.

There are also several examples in Scripture of what has been called an “absolute fast,” or abstaining from both food and water. It appears to be a desperate measure to meet a dire emergency. Upon learning that execution awaited herself and her people, Esther instructed Mordecai, “Go, gather all the Jews...and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do” (Esther 4:16). Paul engaged in a three-day absolute fast following his encounter with the living Christ (Acts 9:9). Since the human body cannot go without water much more than three days, both Moses and Elijah engaged in what must be considered supernatural absolute fasts of forty days (Deut. 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8). It must be underscored that the absolute fast is the exception and should never be engaged in unless one has a very clear command from God, and then for no more than three days.

In most cases fasting is a private matter between the individual and God. There are, however, occasional times of corporate or public fasts. ... (Lev. 23:27). ... (Joel 2:15). ... (2 Chron. 20:1–4). ... (Ezra 8:21–23).

The group fast can be a wonderful and powerful experience provided there is a prepared people who are of one mind in these matters. Serious problems in churches or other groups can be dealt with and relationships healed through unified group prayer and fasting. ...

Regular or weekly fasting has had such a profound effect in the lives of some that they have sought to find a biblical command for it so that it may be urged upon all Christians. The search is in vain. There simply are no biblical laws that command regular fasting. Our freedom in the gospel, however, does not mean license; it means opportunity. Since there are no laws to bind us, we are free to fast on any day. Freedom for the apostle Paul meant that he was engaged in “fastings often” (2 Cor. 11:27, KJV). We should always bear in mind the apostolic counsel, “Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” (Gal. 5:13).

## Is Fasting a Commandment?

One issue that understandably concerns many people is whether or not Scripture makes fasting obligatory upon all Christians. Numerous attempts have been made to answer this question, resulting in a variety of conclusions.

...Although many passages of Scripture deal with this subject, two stand out in importance. The first is Jesus' startling teaching about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount. Two factors bear directly on the issue at hand. His teaching on fasting is directly in the context of his teaching on giving and praying. It is as if there is an almost unconscious assumption that giving, praying, and fasting are all part of Christian devotion. We have no more reason to exclude fasting from the teaching than we do giving or praying. Second, Jesus states, "When you fast ..." (Matt. 6:16). He seems to make the assumption that people will fast, and is giving instruction on how to do it properly. Martin Luther said, "It was not Christ's intention to reject or despise fasting...it was His intention to restore proper fasting."

Having said this, however, we must realize that these words of Jesus do not constitute a command. Jesus was giving instruction on the proper exercise of a common practice of his day. He did not speak a word about whether it was a right practice or if it should be continued. So, although Jesus does not say "If you fast," neither does he say "You *must* fast." His word is, very simply, "When you fast..."

There is no way to escape the force of Jesus' words in this passage. He made it clear that he expected his disciples to fast after he was gone. Although the words are not couched in the form of a command, that is only a semantic technicality. It is clear from this passage that Christ both upheld the Discipline of fasting and anticipated that his followers would do it.

Perhaps it is best to avoid the term "command" since in the strictest sense Jesus did not command fasting. But it is obvious that he proceeded on the principle that the children of the kingdom of God would fast. For the person longing for a more intimate walk with God, these statements of Jesus are drawing words.

Where are the people today who will respond to the call of Christ? Have we become so accustomed to "cheap grace" that we instinctively shy away from more demanding calls to obedience? "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross." Why has the giving of money, for example, been unquestionably recognized as an element in Christian devotion and fasting so disputed? Certainly we have as much, if not more, evidence from the Bible for fasting as we have for giving. Perhaps in our affluent society fasting involves a far larger sacrifice than the giving of money.

## The Purpose of Fasting

It is sobering to realize that the very first statement Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive (Matt. 6:16–18). To use good things to our own ends is always the sign of false religion. How easy it is to take something like fasting and try to use it to get God to do what we want. ...

God questioned the people in Zechariah's day, "When ye fasted...did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?" (Zech. 7:5, KJV). If our fasting is not unto God, we have failed. Physical benefits, success in prayer, the enduing with power, spiritual insights—these must never replace God as the center of our fasting. ...

Once the primary purpose of fasting is firmly fixed in our hearts, we are at liberty to understand that there are also secondary purposes in fasting. More than any other Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David writes, "I humbled my soul with fasting" (Ps. 69:10). Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear—if they are within us, they will surface during fasting. At first we will rationalize that our anger is due to our hunger; then we will realize that we are angry because the spirit of anger is within us. We can rejoice in this knowledge because we know that healing is available through the power of Christ.

Fasting reminds us that we are sustained "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us. In Christ, "All things hold together" (Col. 1:17). Therefore, in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting! When the disciples brought lunch to Jesus, assuming that he would be starving, he declared, "I have food to eat of which you do not know.... My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:32, 34). This was not a clever metaphor, but a genuine reality. Jesus was, in fact, being nourished and sustained by the power of God. That is the reason for his counsel on fasting in Matthew 6. We are told not to act miserable when fasting because, in point of fact, we are not miserable. We

are feeding on God and, just like the Israelites who were sustained in the wilderness by the miraculous manna from heaven, so we are sustained by the word of God.

Fasting helps us keep our balance in life. How easily we begin to allow nonessentials to take precedence in our lives. How quickly we crave things we do not need until we are enslaved by them. Paul writes, “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be enslaved by anything” (1 Cor. 6:12). Our human cravings and desires are like rivers that tend to overflow their banks; fasting helps keep them in their proper channels. “I pommel my body and subdue it,” says Paul (1 Cor. 9:27). Likewise, David writes, “I afflicted myself with fasting” (Ps. 35:13). This is not excessive asceticism; it is discipline and discipline brings freedom. ...

### **The Practice of Fasting**

Contemporary men and women are largely ignorant of the practical aspects of fasting. Those who desire to fast need to acquaint themselves with this basic information.

As with all the Disciplines, a progression should be observed; it is wise to learn to walk well before we try to run. Begin with a partial fast of twenty-four hours’ duration; many have found lunch to lunch to be the best time. This means that you would not eat two meals. Fresh fruit juices are excellent to drink during the fast. Attempt this once a week for several weeks. In the beginning you will be fascinated with the physical aspects of your experience, but the most important thing to monitor is the inner attitude of the heart. Outwardly you will be performing the regular duties of your day, but inwardly you will be in prayer and adoration, song, and worship. ...

After two or three weeks you are prepared to attempt a normal fast of twenty-four hours. Drink only water but use healthy amounts of it. You will probably feel some hunger pangs or discomfort before the time is up. That is not real hunger; your stomach has been trained through years of conditioning to give signals of hunger at certain hours. In many ways the stomach is like a spoiled child, and a spoiled child does not need indulgence, but needs discipline. Martin Luther says “...the flesh was wont to grumble dreadfully.” You must not give in to this “grumbling.” Ignore the signals, or even tell your “spoiled child” to calm down, and in a brief time the hunger pangs will pass. If not, sip another glass of water and the stomach will be satisfied. You are to be the master of your stomach, not its slave. If family obligations permit it, devote the time you would normally use eating to meditation and prayer.

It should go without saying that you should follow Jesus’ counsel to refrain from calling attention to what you are doing. The only ones who should know you are fasting are those who have to know. If you call attention to your fasting, people will be impressed and, as Jesus said, that will be your reward. You, however, are fasting for far greater and deeper rewards. ...

After having achieved several fasts with a degree of spiritual success, move on to a thirty-six-hour fast: three meals. With that accomplished, it is time to seek the Lord as to whether he wants you to go on a longer fast. Three to seven days is a good time period and will probably have a substantial impact on the course of your life.

It is wise to know the process your body goes through in the course of a longer fast. The first three days are usually, the most difficult in terms of physical discomfort and hunger pains. The body is beginning to rid itself of the toxins that have built up over years of poor eating habits, and it is not a comfortable process. This is the reason for the coating on the tongue and bad breath. Do not be disturbed by these symptoms; rather be grateful for the increased health and well-being that will result. You may experience headaches during this time, especially if you are an avid coffee or tea drinker. Those are mild withdrawal symptoms that will pass though they may be very unpleasant for a time.

By the fourth day the hunger pains are beginning to subside though you will have feelings of weakness and occasional dizziness. The dizziness is only temporary and caused by sudden changes in position. Move more slowly and you will have no difficulty. The weakness can come to the point where the simplest task takes great effort. Rest is the best remedy. Many find this the most difficult period of the fast.

By the sixth or seventh day you will begin to feel stronger and more alert. Hunger pains will continue to diminish until by the ninth or tenth day they are only a minor irritation. The body will have eliminated the bulk of toxins and you will feel good. Your sense of concentration will be sharpened and you will feel as if you could continue fasting indefinitely. Physically this is the most enjoyable part of the fast.



Anywhere between twenty-one and forty days or longer, depending on the individual, hunger pains will return. This is the first stage of starvation and the pains signal that the body has used up its reserves and is beginning to draw on the living tissue. The fast should be broken at this time. ... It should be obvious to all that there are some people who for physical reasons should not fast: diabetics, expectant mothers, heart patients, and others. If you have any question about your fitness to fast, seek medical advice. ....

Although the physical aspects of fasting intrigue us, we must never forget that the major work of scriptural fasting is in the realm of the spirit. What goes on spiritually is much more important than what is happening bodily. You will be engaging in spiritual warfare that will necessitate using all the weapons of Ephesians 6. ...

Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen in any other way. It is a means of God's grace and blessing that should not be neglected any longer. ...

#### **Freedom of Simplicity by Richard Foster: Excerpts from Ch. 8:**

Fasting helps to give us balance. It makes us more keenly sensitive to the whole of life, so that we do not become obsessed with our consumer mentality. It is something of an inner alarm to help us hold our priorities straight, to give us a sense of spiritual sensitivity.

Fasting reveals the things that control us.... The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of otherwise normal function for the sake of intentional spiritual activity... We also need to have times when we fast from the media. It is amazing to me that many people are incapable of going through an entire day concentrating on one thing. Their train of thought is constantly broken by this demand or that interruption. . . . Some people are so enslaved to television that if it were taken away they would go through withdrawal. Obviously, there is a time for the various media, but there is also time to be without them.

#### **The Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard: Excerpts from Ch. 9:**

In fasting, we abstain in some significant way from food and possibly from drink as well. This discipline teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It will certainly prove humiliating to us, as it reveals to us how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating. It may also bring to mind how we are using food pleasure to assuage the discomforts caused in our bodies by faithless and unwise living and attitudes...

Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food. Through it, we learn by experience that God's word to us is a life substance, that it is not food ("bread") alone that gives life, but also the words that proceed from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). We learn that we too have meat to eat that the world does not know about (John 4:32, 34). Fasting unto our Lord is therefore feasting—feasting on him and on doing his will...

Hence, when Jesus directs us not to appear distressed and sad when we fast (Matt. 6:16–18), he is not telling us to mislead those around us. He is instead explaining how we will feel—we really will not be sad. We are discovering that life is so much more than meat (Luke 12:33). Our belly is not our god, as it is for others (Phil. 3:19; Rom. 16:18); rather, it is his joyful servant and ours (1 Cor. 6:13).

Actually fasting is one of the more important ways of practicing that self-denial required of *everyone* who would follow Christ (Matt. 16:24). In fasting, we learn how to suffer happily as we feast on God. And it is a good lesson, because in our lives we *will* suffer, no matter what else happens to us. ...

Persons well used to fasting as a systematic practice will have a clear and constant sense of their resources in God. And that will help them endure deprivations of *all* kinds, even to the point of coping with them easily and cheerfully. ... Fasting teaches temperance or self-control and therefore teaches moderation and restraint with regard to *all* our fundamental drives. Since food has the pervasive place it does in our lives, the effects of fasting will be diffused throughout our personality. In the midst of all our needs and wants, we experience the contentment of the child that has been weaned from its mother's breast (Ps. 131:2). And "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6).

Fasting, though, is a hard discipline to practice without its consuming all our attention. Yet when we use it as a part of prayer or service, we cannot allow it to do so. When a person chooses fasting as a spiritual discipline, he or she must, then, practice it well enough and often enough to become experienced in it, because only the person who is well habituated to systematic fasting as a discipline can use it effectively as a part of direct service to God, as in special times of prayer or other service.



Questions: <b>FASTING</b>
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1. What sections of the reading stand out most to you? Why?
2. What experiences have you had with fasting in the past?
3. How do you think God wants you/us to incorporate fasting into your regular everyday life?
4. Come prepared to discuss at group "What is God saying? & "How are you going to respond?"