



## Week 3. Fasting

- **When you consider the word fasting, what thoughts and feelings come to mind, both positive and negative? \*\***
- **Read Mark 1:9-15**

This passage marks the entry of Jesus into the wilderness to undergo severe testing, including fasting.

- **Why do you think fasting for a period of time might be helpful for Spiritual growth?**
- **What should our motivation for fasting be?**
- **How might fasting enhance our spiritual lives?**

John Wesley - 'Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all scripture & reason; and others have utterly disregarded it.' \*

- **Do you agree with the quote above?**
- **Contrary to Foster & Baab; Bianchi considers any 'other form of fasting [apart from food] as inferior, because they are associated with other symbolic values.' (eg. materialism, consumerism) Do you agree?**
- **What can you think of that may be helpful to abstain from doing / practising if not from eating?**

'When I fast, the purpose is to notice the false, non-life-giving things that I'm attached to. And to purposely attempt to attach to the ways of God.' \*\*

- **Why might it be necessary to prepare to fast rather than just start one straight away?**

John Chrysostom : 'Fasting is useless & dangerous for those who are not familiar with its peculiarities & conditions' \*\*\*

- **Pray about the patterns of how you use your time. Ask God to show you the practices and habits of your life that you could cease from for a season in order to pray more. \*\***

## Paths to Spiritual Growth

'Fasting, an ancient practice, encourages us to grow in true freedom. Fasting offers the opportunity to step back from our culture and cross the doorway into God's presence. Fasting ushers us into a reflective place where we can listen to God and pray wholeheartedly for things that really matter.'\*\*

'Food is necessary to life, but we have made it more necessary than God. How often have we neglected to remember God's presence when we would never consider neglecting to eat? Fasting brings us face to face with how we put the material world ahead of its spiritual Source.'

MARJORIE THOMPSON, SOUL FEAST\*\*

**See Overleaf, a potted history of Fasting & helpful guidelines from Richard Foster & Lynne Baab on the practicalities of fasting**

### Resources

All quotes are referenced by asteriks.

\* **Richard Foster: Celebration of Discipline : Hodder : 2008 : Chapter 4**

\*\* **Lynne Baab : Fasting: Spiritual Freedom Beyond Our Appetites : IVP : 2006**

Excellent little book available on Kindle that is straightforward and thorough providing lots of personal stories about fasting, practicalities & helpful information.

\*\*\* **Enzio Bianchi : Words of Spirituality : SPCK : 2012 : p.80ff**

\*\*\*\* **Lexham Bible Dictionary (via Logos)**



## A Potted History

'The Old Testament mentions general and individual fasts undertaken for a variety of purposes, including mourning, repentance, and seeking divine deliverance.

Fasting was a means of asking God to have pity and relent from inflicting punishment on the person or people praying.

In the New Testament, fasting occurs primarily in the Gospels, where it is a regular practice of John, his disciples, and the Pharisees. Jesus fasts for 40 days during His temptation in the wilderness.

The Gospels record Jesus fasting, perhaps to express reliance on God in times of temptation or spiritual warfare.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:16–18), Jesus criticises those who fast hypocritically in order to attract attention. He tells people to give alms, pray, and fast in ways that are visible only to God. They should not mar their faces or look gloomy; instead, they should wash their faces and put oil on their heads so that only God knows they are fasting.

The earliest Christian fasts seem to have been voluntary and were undertaken for a variety of reasons, such as self-discipline and reinforcement while praying.

A number of Christian authors comment on fasting, indicating that it was widely practiced by the church before the middle of the third century.'

Lexham Bible Dictionary via Logos

'Fasting developed a bad reputation as a result of excessive practices during the Middle Ages. Since when there has been a decline in inward Spirituality & tendency to focus of outward practices.

Modern culture tends to identify Fasting with mortification. And current propaganda that we need three large meals a day coupled with our dieting culture has further undermined its practice.'

### **The Practicalities of Fasting - helpful hints.**

Progression - partial fasting to begin with. 2 meals instead of 3, once a week for several weeks

Monitor inner spiritual life - [perhaps keep a journal].

After 2-3 weeks attempt a normal fast (without food) over 24 hours, drinking water.

Move on to 36 hours then 3-6 days

The body will begin to rid itself of toxins that have built up and hunger pangs will subside.

Day 4-5 is commonly the most difficult - rest from physical exertion

By days 6-7 - more alert and stronger

By days 9-10 - the physical rewards will out-way any minor discomforts

Anywhere between 21-40 days depending on the individual - hunger pangs will return.

Extended fasts means a slow reintroduction of light foods.

Richard Foster : Celebration of Discipline

#### **People who shouldn't engage in juice, water or complete fasts:**

- Women who are pregnant or nursing
- Anyone who has an eating disorder or has had one in the past
- Children under twelve (teens should be supervised if fasting from all food)
- Diabetics and people with kidney disease
- The frail elderly
- People who must take medication with food
- People with a cold, the flu or some other temporary illness.

People with a medical condition should check with their doctor before engaging in a fast from all food. People who have dieted a lot or engaged in compulsive eating should fast from food carefully, beginning with brief partial fasts, to see if this is a helpful or harmful spiritual discipline for them.

Lynne Baab : Fasting: Spiritual Freedom Beyond Our Appetites