

Why You Need This Oft-Misunderstood Weapon of Warfare in Your Spiritual Arsenal

Throughout the Old Testament, we see that whenever God's people needed a supernatural intervention or returned to God after having walked away from Him, they fasted.

Even the nation of Nineveh, in the book of Jonah, fasted—including the animals—when they repented before God.

Fasting was a spiritual cleansing of sorts, which is interesting considering the fact that research shows that fasting, even intermittently, cleanses the body and helps our organs repair and renew.

Could it be that God designed this physical process to mirror a spiritual process as well?

I believe so, because we often see, in many ways, how God has chosen to use this physical realm to mirror the spiritual realm.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus takes it for granted that fasting is a normal part of the Christian walk. He said in Matthew 6:16a, "Moreover, when you fast ..."

He did not say, "Moreover, *if* you fast ..."

Fasting is as much of a Christian discipline as reading the Bible and prayer. It is a powerful weapon that, if left out of our arsenal, leaves us only partially armed for warfare.

But there is another powerful reason Christians should regularly engage in the discipline of Christian fasting.

The Power of Christian Fasting

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast him out?"

Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. And nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:19-21).

There is a certain phenomenon that takes occurs supernaturally when we choose to ignore our physical hunger in order to feed an even greater spiritual hunger to see God's hand move in ways we can't imagine.

To be sure, fasting in and of itself has no power.

It is God who has the power.

But God has divinely chosen to partner with us in this way when we choose to deny our body a physical craving in order to seek His face in an even greater measure.

And when we do, God chooses to work through us in an even greater measure.

There is something about denying our flesh in this specific way that enables us to hear His voice with greater clarity and pray prayers of faith with greater authority.

How to Begin Fasting

1. Start small.

For people like me, who tend to want to go from zero to 60 in one leap, the tendency would be to commit today to a week-long fast.

Don't do that.

Not only is the expectation too great, but it will likely discourage you from wanting to try fasting again in the future.

Set a reasonable goal for yourself and slowly increase your fasting time over a period of months until you are able to do an extended fast.

More on types of fasts below.

2. Be wise.

While short fasts, or intermittent fasts, are generally healthy for most people (because most people intermittently fast without even knowing they do it), longer fasts should be preceded with a medical checkup to make sure that your body is able to handle a longer or extended fast.

Also, if you are on certain kinds of medications, longer and extended fasts may not be possible.

Types of Fasts

Intermittent fasts

Intermittent fasting is something that has grown in popularity in recent years as a health regimen. I always say, God knew what our body needed all along to function healthily.

An intermittent fast is a short-term fast that can last anywhere from 12-24 hours.

It can be as simple as skipping dinner and eating breakfast the next day or eating only one meal a day.

This is the best kind of fast to begin with while slowly extend your fasting window.

Long-term fasts

A long-term fast is a fast that lasts between 24 hours and three days.

Typically, day 2 is the hardest day in a long-term fast, and this fast can be easily done as a water-only fast. During a long-term fast, you may consider taking a bit of pink Himalayan sea salt under your tongue for electrolyte balance.

Use your feelings of hunger as a signal to pray.

Extended Fasts

An extended fast should not be embarked upon without a medical clearance from your doctor.

An extended fast lasts from four days onward.

At about Day Four, your body has gone into a state of ketosis (which should not be confused with ketoacidosis, which is life-threatening for diabetics. Ketosis is *not* life-threatening and is a very natural and healthy state of the body).

Ketosis occurs when your body begins to use its own fat stores for energy.

During an extended fast, consider taking electrolytes and even drinking a clear bone broth.

What to Do While Fasting

Because a fast is a spiritual discipline, we should give extra time to prayer and seeking God's face. Consider waking earlier than your usual time, or use your evenings for devotion.

During your prayer time, intentionally listen for God's voice speaking to you.

You may want to take this time to journal what God is speaking

to you in prayer and through His Word.

Also, this is a good time to study certain passages of Scripture or do a word study on spiritual warfare or whatever the specific need is that you are praying for.

A Word of Caution

1. Do not advertise your fast. Jesus said:

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces so they may appear to men to be fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you will not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

While there are corporate fasts, in which groups of believers or congregations fast corporately for a collective need, Jesus was addressing individual fasting.

Don't use your fast to draw attention or to show how spiritual you are.

2. Reject the temptation of pride.

While it is true that many Christians do not engage in the discipline of fasting, those who do practice this discipline should be careful that they do not become filled with pride.

In Isaiah 58, we see God rebuking His people for this very thing.

They carefully and intentionally kept to this discipline of fasting, and yet their fast meant nothing to God at all because it wasn't done in a right and humble spirit.

Fasting doesn't speak to our spiritual maturity, it is a humbling partnership with God; so we should approach it with

humble reverence that an Almighty God has chosen to partner with us—a sinful people—to do His work!

3. Do not fall into a martyr-like attitude.

What do I mean by this?

What I mean is, do not fall into the trap of believing that God will answer your prayers because you have sufficiently tortured yourself.

Self-torture isn't a way to please God nor is a motivating factor in gaining answers to prayer.

Fasting isn't a way to prove to God just how serious we are about a certain need. We don't fast to "get to God," we fast so that we cultivate in our own selves a greater hunger for Him and His power in our lives.

Fasting isn't for God, it's for us.

4. True biblical fasting involves food.

I am one of those who cleverly circumvented a food fast by fasting TV, social media and all kinds of other things so that I wouldn't have to go without food.

Let's be honest, being hungry isn't a comfortable state!

But unless you have a real medical condition that prevents you from fasting, there is no reason why you shouldn't begin practicing the discipline of fasting.

Even many with medical conditions that prevent a long-term or extended fasting can skip a meal or even two.

A true biblical fast involves food.

It requires feeling uncomfortable and hungry.

It requires us to put to death our physical cravings, which

will lie to us and tell us something bad will happen if we don't feed them, so that we can dedicate ourselves to the Word and prayer in even greater measure.

Just as unmarried people choose to ignore their biological urges for sex and abstain until marriage, so we choose—for a season—to ignore our physical craving for food and abstain for whatever period of time we feel led to.

5. Biblical fasting and health fasting are not the same.

I have chosen to engage in both kinds of fasting, and health fasting has enabled me to biblically fast for longer periods of time.

But they are not the same.

I began intermittent fasting for health reasons in 2017. Up to that point, I was unable to fast any longer than one meal because it would cause adrenal crashes.

When I began the ketogenic diet, I began to naturally fast for longer periods of time without even realizing it.

However, these health fasts should be kept separate from biblical fasting. While they may, in some areas, intersect; while fasting as a Christian discipline, you should avoid the temptation to weigh yourself.

Keep your heart and spirit focused on the purpose for your fast!

A Final Word

Fasting is hard.

Let's face it! Being hungry isn't fun, and in our culture, where food is so prevalent and advertising so ubiquitous, the demand to feed its cravings is hard to ignore.

If you are a beginner in this Christian discipline of fasting, consider confiding in one or two close friends and asking them to hold you accountable to your fast.

Give them the permission to check in with you daily, or even multiple times a day, to keep you on target. {eo}

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