

Larry Tomczak: The Benefits of Fasting in 2024

Who doesn't like the opportunity to start over and be healthier, happier and more fruitful? As we launch into a new year, God gives all of us the chance to forget and learn from mistakes, plus make some quality decisions to do better going forward. May 2024 be your best year yet as He opens doors for you that no man can shut (see Rev. 3:8).

In Scripture, the account of Martha and Mary serves as an example of one person, busy but unfruitful, while the other prioritizes her spiritual life and is commended by Jesus (Luke 10:38-40). They're examples of the maxim, "If your output is greater than your input, then your upkeep will be your downfall."

For decades I've practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting, enabling me to stay strong in the spirit plus maintain my weight. The focus of this commentary is on the former, but an added benefit can be maintaining healthy weight if practiced regularly.

Celebrating Fasting as a Discipline

"Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Phil. 3:13b).

When I ministered weekly to 2,000 primarily young people 15 minutes from the White House in the '70s, Bible teacher Derek Prince challenged us to fast, pray and simply obey the priority of praying for governing authorities "first of all" (1 Tim. 2:1-4), and then pick up the newspaper to see our prayers answered. In childlike faith we responded, and we saw for the first time in U.S. history, a sitting president and vice president removed from office as unrighteousness was

exposed. By the way, Prince also wrote a life-changing book titled “Changing History Through Prayer and Fasting” that I highly recommend.

Fasting has a preeminent place throughout Scripture, yet most ignore or avoid it. It does bring discomfort, yet we desperately need it. The benefits far exceed the drawbacks.

‘I Hate Fasting!’

Would it surprise you to discover the individual who said this is one of the greatest advocates for fasting in America today? I’m talking here of a unique man of God I’ve known for 40 years as an old friend and fellow laborer for spiritual awakening in our nation, Lou Engle.

Years ago, I sat in a living room with senior leaders and dear friends like Lou, Che Ahn and James Goll. We all stocked our plates with delicious food and sat down to fellowship.

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When I hunkered down on the couch, Engle sat next to me. Previously, someone had whispered to me that he was in the middle of an extended fast, so I twisted my posture to avoid having the sumptuous delights in his line of vision.

Suddenly, my revivalist buddy startled me by saying, “Larry, don’t worry, I’m OK. Enjoy your dinner! I hate fasting, but, ya’ know, I love what comes from the investment.”

Fasting Is Challenging

Face it, fasting is not natural. It runs counter to our desire for comfort, pleasure and self-satisfaction. It entails discipline such as the apostle Paul described in 1 Corinthians 9:27a (NASB 1977), “I buffet my body.” He wasn’t talking here of a food buffet!

When we humble ourselves through fasting to abstain from nourishment in order to seek God and His promised blessings, we position ourselves to be recipients of the open reward Jesus promised in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:16-18). As long as we abide by His cautions to steer clear of legalism and outward show, plus stay in expectant faith, we can be confident of blessings and breakthrough.

Fasting for Christ's Followers

In Matthew 9:14-15, Jesus told some inquirers that His disciples weren't fasting while He as the bridegroom was present with them, but after He left, "then they will fast." Richard Foster in his classic work, "Celebration of Discipline," said, "This is perhaps the most important statement in the New Testament on whether Christians should fast today."

Multitudes don't fast today because of bad religious experiences (raised Catholic, I was forced to fast weekly); or they believe it's a discarded Old Testament practice associated with sin, sorrow and mourning. Manufacturers of Mrs. Paul's Fish Sticks loved the mandatory Friday fasting, but scores of us detested it and celebrated its discontinuance.

Today we have the privilege of willingly engaging in a "bridal fast," not out of legalism but a longing for greater intimacy with Him. We eagerly await the return of our bridegroom, the consummation of the age and the "new heaven and the new earth" (Rev. 21:1a).

Remember 'Planet Shaker' Bill Bright?

Before he died at 81, I had the honor with apostolic leader Bob Weiner to pray with Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright. His countenance was like that of a 30-year-old, yet without any Botox! Bill once received the Templeton Award for Religious Progress and donated the entire \$1.1 million to

promote the benefits of prayer and fasting.

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He told us, "Fasting prepares us for the deepest and richest spiritual communion possible. It clears and liberates our minds to understand what God is saying to our spirits. It conditions our bodies to carry out His perfect will. When we persevere through the initial mental and physical discomfort, we will experience a calming of the soul and cooling of the appetites. As a result, we will sense the presence of the Lord more than ever before."

Foster, whom I previously mentioned, said, "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. In fact, fasting has been in general disrepute both in and outside the church for many years. 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 100 years!"

Rediscovering 15 Rewards

As we start a new year, are you a candidate for greater intimacy with God through prayer and fasting? Do you have a lost one God needs to awaken? Is there a broken relationship needing reconciliation? Are you in need of a miracle, healing, deliverance or freedom from debts? And yes, would you like to shed some excess weight in the process?

Rediscover the value of fasting to experience long-prayed-for breakthroughs and blessings in your life! Consult a doctor if you have health problems. Use wisdom if it is a water, juice, veggie, favorite food, one-, two-, three-day or extended fast. Expect some spiritual and physical resistance. Those are mild hunger pangs. You won't die.

Get started and stay motivated by regularly reviewing these

potential benefits of fasting:

1. Renews spiritual vision.
2. Brings a holy brokenness.
3. Purifies our heart.
4. Humbles our soul.
5. Releases spiritual guidance.
6. Subdues our flesh.
7. Heightens spiritual awareness.
8. Deepens communion with God.
9. Clears our minds to hear God.
10. Brings supernatural refreshing.
11. Adds power to prayer.
12. Brings deliverance.
13. Brings greater fruitfulness.
14. Facilitates breakthroughs.
15. Cleanses the body and helps us lose weight.

Here's the Deal: For five decades I've incorporated the spiritual discipline of fasting as a regular part of my life. Start your year in strength with this time-tested tool for staying sharp and strong while shedding those extra pounds as a side benefit along the way.

Join with Jesus, the early church, Paul, Jonah, Esther, Moses, David, Elijah, Nehemiah, Daniel and countless others throughout the ages who have recognized fasting's potential for releasing the atomic power of God.

Remember, Jesus began His first recorded fast "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1a) and ended "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14b).

Happy New Year!

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