

## FASTING

Voluntary abstinence from food for a set period for spiritual purposes. Can also be abstinence from other things - the prophet Daniel (in the Old Testament) went without certain types of food for three weeks *'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 10:3).

### Fasting in the Bible

- It was a regular feature of Jewish life, with Moses, David, Daniel, Esther and others all mentioned fasting at some point.
- Jesus suggests that fasting, along with giving and prayer, is a given in a disciple's life.

*'When you give...'*                      *Matthew 6:2*

*'When you pray...'*                      *Matthew 6:5*

*'When you fast...'*                      *Matthew 6:16*

- When criticised for not fasting (in contrast to John the Baptist and his disciples) he said

*'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.'* (Mark 2:19-20)

- Sure enough fasting seemed to be taken on board as a regular habit by the apostles and the early church.                      (*Acts 13:2, 14:23*)

*'The constant propaganda fed us today convinces us that if we don't have three large meals a 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.'*                      Richard Foster

### Purposes of Fasting

- 1 It should be centred on God - putting him before our most basic physical need.
- 2 It has secondary benefits in addition to the worship of God;
  - we receive from God. When the disciples brought food to Jesus at the well in Samaria - John 4 - he said that his food was to do the will of God. When we go without to do God's will we have the opportunity to be sustained and nourished by his spiritual power.
  - we become more like Jesus. Going without the things that bring comfort often reveals the things that control us. As they surface we can take them to the cross and invite Jesus to renew us, heal us and transform us into his likeness.
  - we regain balance, putting the non-essentials of our lives, that so easily take precedence, into their proper place.
- 3 It is a form of prayer. Adoration, repentance or supplication. Fasting lends expression and impetus to our prayers. The act of fasting helps us to focus and concentrate our prayer efforts, particularly when eating is replaced positively with prayer, and when hunger pangs and change of routine are a reminder.
- 4 Sacrifice releases blessing.

### Things to avoid

- Being religious or proud (Matt 6:16-18)
- Being a hypocrite (Isaiah 58:5-12)

### Tips and ideas for fasting

1. You could miss one meal and spend the time praying.
2. You could abstain from food and/or drink for 24hrs, e.g. from 5pm on one day until 5pm the next day.
3. You could abstain from food and/or drink for the day - i.e. from the time you get up until you go to bed.
4. You could fast for a number of days consecutively.
5. Sacrifice in another way - give up telly for the week, have a media fast (no telly, radio, newspapers etc) or try a Daniel fast (see below).

*The emphasis for us on this occasion is of the sacrifice to accompany prayer, rather than the focus to be on abstinence as a discipline (as in Lent for instance).*

### THE DANIEL FAST

**The concept of a Daniel fast comes from Daniel 1:8-15.**

Daniel and his three friends had been “deported” to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians had conquered Judah (2 Kings 24:13-14). They were put into the Babylonian court servant “training program.” Part of the program was learning Babylonian customs, beliefs, laws, and practices. The eating habits of the Babylonians were not in complete agreement with the Mosaic law. As a result, Daniel asked if he and his three friends could be excused from eating the meat (which was likely to have been sacrificed to Babylonian false gods and idols) and wine. They ate only vegetables, and drank only water.

So, a Daniel fast is eating only fruits and vegetables for a certain amount of time, abstaining from meat products, and avoiding processed foods (try to eat food in its “purest” form). Make your meals vegetables, salads, fruit, whole grains, and water. You can lightly saute or steam the food, or eat raw. Obviously rather than get legalistic about the whole thing decide for yourself what you want to do.

#### What you can eat:

Whole Grains: Brown Rice, Oats, Barley

Legumes

Fruits

Vegetables

Seeds, Nuts, Sprouts

Liquids: Water

Some people say you can drink 100% all-natural fruit juices, 100% all natural vegetable juices (although these are processed).

Some people use soy milk as milk replacement.

#### What you cannot eat:

Meat

White rice

Fried foods

Caffeine

Carbonated beverages

Foods containing preservatives or additives

Refined sugar & sugar substitutes

White Flour and all products using it (incl. bread, pasta)

Margarine, shortening, high fat products