

WORKSHEET: CHAPTER 14

HOLY AND UNHOLY FEAR DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

To *fast* means to be focused on spiritual matters through the discipline of denying the body for a short period of time. The intention is to heighten our awareness of God, our dependence on God, focusing our attention and our ears on His voice as we seek Him in a new and intentional way.

A *fast* is often practiced when seeking God for direction, desiring to deepen one's intimacy with God, devoting oneself to intentional prayer and / or directing praise and adulation to a worthy God. When attempting to practice the discipline of fasting, you will be required to endure some physical discomfort. It is going to cost you something to fast and pray. Richard Foster acknowledges the fear aspect of fasting when he wrote, "You will probably feel some hunger pains 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 your stomach is like a spoiled child, and spoiled children do not need indulgence, they need discipline."

The apostle Paul walks us back through our fears into the heart of self-denial as a pleasing sacrifice to Jesus, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." 1 Corinthians 9:24 - 27 A fast is one way of communicating with Jesus and to Him that you are willing to put aside even your physical needs and focus, in order to enter into a deeper and more intimate relationship with Him.

Prayer and fasting humble us. It acknowledges God in a deeper way as we spend time focused on Him - His character, His wisdom, His provision, His comfort. It helps us keep our balance in life. Sustained time alone with God, choosing to ignore all else (including the next meal) and just "be" with Him changes our perspective, encourages our heart and feeds our soul in a way that living day-to-day can not.

For our purposes, we will be engaging in a partial fast. As we've said all along, we must crawl to stand, stand to walk, walk to run. As you engage in this partial fast and find it to be helpful and encouraging beyond what you had imagined, we encourage you to do more study about fasting and to choose whether or not you will engage in a full fast (usually 24 hours) or a 3, 7 or 30 day fast. Should you choose anything other than a partial fast, you will need to consult your physician and make certain that there are no medical reasons for you to be unable to fast. If you can not do even a partial fast due to medical limitations, still take the time to meditate on the Scriptures and pray.

WHAT A PARTIAL FAST LOOKS LIKE:

- A partial fast involves setting aside some time when you will accomplish this fast. A fast is not a missed meal because you are busy at work. It is a set time when you choose to not eat food in order that you may focus your attention on prayer, adoration, worship and song. Outwardly, it may appear to everyone that you are going about your business. Inwardly, you are communing with God, inviting Him into the inner chamber of your soul.
- A fast by definition means that you do not eat anything for the duration of the fast. Set a time so that you can consecrate it to God. During this time, water and fruit juices are appropriate and will be helpful, especially for the first several times you are choosing to practice this discipline.
- During the fast, you will spend increased time in prayer, meditation and worship. As you empty your body of food, empty your heart and mind of the busyness of life and ask God to fill you.

- A fast is private, between you and the Lord. Ideally, no one should know that you are fasting.
- You will experience some discomfort, especially during the early portion of the fast. Your body is not experiencing true hunger, only conditioning. Your stomach is on a schedule, breaking it for a time will not kill you, but at first your stomach will refuse to believe that. During the early rumblings of your stomach, if the disquiet bothers you, drink water or fruit juice and that should help.
- If you fast for a day or longer, you will find the first day or two to be the most difficult as your body rids itself of toxins. The physical discomfort and hunger pains usually subside after the first three days.
- Don't stock up before a fast as that swells your stomach and makes the fast more uncomfortable, especially a one or three day fast after a big meal.
- At the end of the fast, eat a small and healthy meal, especially if you have fasted for a long period of time. Fresh fruits and vegetables are best after a long fast.

As with prayer and meditation, fasting is about expectation, meeting God at a deeper level as you step out and away from the pull of the daily walk and work. Times of fasting, though practiced through denial, are about fullness - communing with your Creator. Sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His voice, filling your soul for the spiritual battles and finding order in the chaos of your daily life. As you engage in fasting, you will begin to discover a growing desire to spend more and more of that kind of sustained time with God. As with all of the disciplines, I encourage you to journal your experience so that you can capture and recall those moments of sweetness and joy as you slip back into your daily life.

PRACTICE THE DISCIPLINE OF FASTING:

Spend the next fast meditating on one of four passages of Scripture that highlight a particular type of fast. Commit to meditate on a particular passage as you observe a partial fast (6 to 12 hours, or over the course of one to two meals). During this fast, focus your attention on the heart of the passage and on the type of fast you have chosen to observe. For example, if it is a fast of supplication, meditate on Nehemiah 1 during the duration of your fast and let your prayers emulate that of Nehemiah - worship, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.

During this period, continue to follow the **ACTS** method in your prayers:

A - ADORATION, God you are _____

C - CONFESS AND REPENT OF YOUR SINS

T - THANKSGIVING, God thank you for _____

S - SUPPLICATIONS, continue to lift up your individual in fervent prayer

CHOOSE A TYPE OF FAST:

FAST TO WORSHIP GOD – PSALM 66

FAST OF SUPPLICATION – NEHEMIAH 1

FAST TO SEEK DIRECTION – 2 CHRONICLES 20:1 – 30

FAST TO KNOW HIM DEEPER – PSALM 46