

The Discipline of Fasting: Family Style

Thanks for being willing to take this journey in practicing fasting with your family. No matter what happens, I am confident your family will grow closer to God and each other during this practice. Below are some tips, talking points & guidelines to help you during this process.

Fasting Definition:

“Biblical fasting is the denial of self in order to sharpen spiritual focus...Fasting is primarily understood as the choice to let go of something in order to pay attention and hear God.”*

Purpose of Fasting:

“The purpose of the practice of fasting for believers today is to help us remember Jesus, seek to become closer to God, and reflect God’s nature and character. When introducing this spiritual discipline to children, you may speak of the practice as “letting go of patterns and habits (fasting) that do not keep us close to God and His ways and taking on (feasting) patterns and habits that keep us close to God and His ways and form His nature and character in us.”*

*Quotes taken from [Spiritual Disciplines for Children](#), by Vernie Schorr Love.

Fasting Options:

There are a number of things you and your children can choose to fast from:

- Food (eliminate certain foods like desserts, processed sugar, junk food, etc; fast from a snack time or meal; eating at restaurants; etc.)
- Drink
- Media/technology
 - Screen time
 - Social media
 - TV/Video Games/Movies
- Certain behaviors/habits/creature comforts/etc
 - i.e negativity, anger, complaining, telling lies, being disrespectful, nail biting, elevators, hobbies, being a couch potato
- Anything else that you or your kids spend a lot of time and energy on

Guidelines:

- Each person participating needs to choose his or her own item to fast from. It should be a difficult item to give up. Everyone’s fast **does not** need to be the same.
- Choose a time frame of how long each person is going to go without said thing.
 - It should be long enough for it to hurt.
 - Depending on the age (and temperament) of the child, it can even be long enough for the person to fail at their fast. More on this later.
- Decide what each person is going to do **in place of that thing** to focus his or her attention on God.
 - Giving up restaurants? Donate the money to a charity instead. Or find a homeless shelter to serve at during that meal.

- Limiting technology? Use that time to spend time with God either as an individual or as a family.
- Concentrating on bad behaviors or habits? Focus on the opposite positive trait of God. i.e. telling lies versus God's trustworthiness
- During your fast discuss what it's like. Is it difficult? Easy? When is it hardest to not do the thing you gave up? What have you learned about God during this process?
- Complete your fast no later than June 30.
- Complete the follow up questions and email back to me by June 30. Your responses will be compiled and shared on my blog on July 4. Anonymity can be kept at your request.

Sometimes the purpose is to fail.

Someone smarter than me once wrote in a blog I can no longer find that sometimes the goal of fasting is to fail. In failing we learn that we are flawed & dependent on God's grace. It's not something we can earn by fasting (or do anything!) perfectly. Our failing helps us see that we are utterly dependent on God and that we often have idols in our lives we are unaware exist. Reassure children of this truth when they struggle, especially with those perfectionists in your life. *Let them see when & how you fail, too.* Some very young and/or sensitive children may not need to fail the first time they try this. You know them best. Plan accordingly. But I do encourage you to push them out of their comfort zones.

Follow Up Questions:

You can also use these questions in discussions along the way but please send me final responses **no later than June 30**. Please include each child's name & age. These don't have to be long answers; just enough to share your experience and help others understand what it looks like to practice fasting with children that age.

For the child:

1. What did you fast from and for how long? (These are the details of each person's fast.)
2. Describe your experience with fasting. For example, what it easy? Difficult? When was it hardest?
3. What did you learn about yourself? i.e. What did you notice about yourself, your thoughts, or your attitude?
4. What did you learn about God?
5. Would you want to practice fasting again?
6. What would you tell someone who has never fasted before?

For the parent:

1. What was your fast? For how long?
2. Describe your experience with fasting as a family.
3. What did you learn about your kids while watching them fast?
4. What did you learn about your kids' faith?
5. What did you learn about God?
6. Would you practice a family fast again?
7. What tips do you have for other families who would like to practice fasting together?