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+++ 21 DAYS OF FASTING +++

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FASTING FOR KIDS PARENT INFORMATION



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FASTING FOR KIDS

Fasting is the spiritual discipline of abstaining from food or drink for spiritual purposes. It allows us to remove distraction, focus on God's blessings or callings, and develop the discipline of training our minds and our bodies. Some great Biblical examples of fasting are Jesus (Luke 4), Daniel (Daniel 10), and Esther (Esther 4), so we know it can be an important part of our faith journey.

But what about kids? Should kids fast? While it's not recommended for kids to fast from meals, **there are safe ways kids can develop the discipline of fasting.** Fasting is all about sacrifice, about giving something up so that something else can take its place as a priority. It's a way we **empty ourselves of our own desires and distractions that keep us from God and let Him fill us up.** It's a way we grow in our dependence on Him and in our faith.

Ways to lead kids in a time of fasting...

- 1. Give up something tangible and desired.** Whether it's their favorite drink, favorite snack, time on the tablet, a video game, or their favorite tv show, invite kids to give up something they will miss.
- 2. Teach them the spiritual purpose of fasting.** It's not recommended to encourage a child to fast for the purpose of losing weight, earning money, or counting up points or gold stars on a chore chart or similar item. Fasting should be God-centered and God-focused, with no rewards for completing the fast. What goes on spiritually during a time of fasting is more important than what goes on physically. Fasting is ultimately a posture of the heart, and it is not recommended that it be used with children as a form of punishment, chore, or forced on them. Guiding them to make the choice to give up something -whether large or small- on their own allows their heart in fasting to be revealed and fosters a genuine, voluntary desire to pursue God.
- 3. Provide an alternative.** Instead of just giving something up, encourage kids to spend that time allowing God to fill them up with something to help them grow in Him. Maybe during the time they'd usually watch their favorite tv show, they read their Bible instead. Or maybe when they are eating carrot sticks instead of their favorite snack, they can pray.
- 4. Fasting together as a family.** As a family, prayerfully choose one basic meal- such as chicken, rice, and vegetables-and prepare it together in advance. Commit to eating this same simple meal each evening for the week. Use the extended mealtime for spiritual growth. Set aside intentional time for family discussion, prayer, and reading Scripture allowing the focus to shift from food we want, to dependence on God. In this way, the fast becomes an act of shared devotion, unity, and filling up in the Lord.

The point of fasting is not just to "give up." It is not about self-discipline, willpower, or control. It is about **focusing on God as all we need and intentionally spending more time with Him!**

Communicate these important factors with kids to **help them understand the spiritual discipline of fasting** and to invite them to participate in a practice that Jesus used to help Him focus His time and His heart on God.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that all believers can learn as an act of worship and a way of drawing near to God. Introducing this practice to children lays a strong foundation, greatly deepening their understanding of fasting and cultivating spiritual discipline as they mature in their faith

TALKING POINTS FOR KIDS ABOUT A BIBLICAL FAST



You may decide to fast, but don't plan to include your kids during this fasting time. That is ok. However, your kids will likely notice and ask questions. Fasting and talking with your kids about why you are fasting is a great example to them of how to practice spiritual disciplines as you grow in your relationship with God. Here are a few potential talking points to aid in discussion with your kids.

1. "We're taking extra time to focus on God."

- "A fast is when we give up something we usually enjoy so we can pay more attention to God. It's like making extra space in our hearts to fill up with Him."

2. "We're not doing this to punish ourselves."

- "We're not fasting because we're in trouble or because God wants us to be uncomfortable. It's just one way to remind ourselves that God is the most important part of our lives."

3. "It helps us practice self-control."

- "When we say no to something for a short time, it helps us grow stronger on the inside-like training our hearts and minds."

4. "It helps us pray better."

- "When we feel hungry or miss something we're fasting from, we use that moment to pray or think about God instead."

5. "You don't have to fast just because we are."

- "Fasting is a choice when you're ready. Kids usually don't fast from food. If you want to join in, you could fast from something different-like sweets, screens, or toys- for a short time, but only if you want to."

6. "We're doing this for a short time, not forever."

- "Fasts have a beginning and an end. We're doing this for (number of days), and then we'll go back to normal."

7. "We're doing it with a heart to worship God."

- "The Bible says fasting isn't about complaining or acting sad. We're doing this with thankful hearts because we love God."

8. "If you're curious, you can ask anything."

- "We want you to understand what we're doing. You can ask any question - there's no such thing as a bad one."

AT HOME ACTIVITY: FASTING CUPS

Supplies

- 2 cups
- Pieces of paper that say "GIVE UP" and "FILL UP"
- Paper slips with ideas from the "Give up, Fill Up" lists below or your own ideas on slips of paper

Kids will have their own fasting cups. Give each kid two cups. Have them decorate pieces of paper that say "GIVE UP" and "FILL UP." Tape the decorated papers to the cups. Then make a set of "Give Up, Fill Up" strips. Let them decorate their strips and come up with their own ideas to add to the lists.

Say: You can do your own fast. All you do is draw one strip of paper from each cup every day. One of the cups has something you will give up. But fasting isn't only about giving things up; it's about filling that space with something you do to fill up with God. So the other cup has something you can do to fill up with God and grow closer to Him.

You can do this to help you grow in your faith, but remember, even if it's hard to give something up, we do it to help us grow closer to God. If you do this fast, it is because you choose to do it; not because someone is making you.

What can you do if you give something that is hard for you to go without? You can pray and ask God to help you have strength. You can spend time with God and with others.

GIVE UP LIST

Sweets and Sugary Foods - 2 days

TV and Tablet - 1 day

All devices and Social Media - 1 day

Sugary Drinks(juice and soda) - 2 days

Arguing and Complaining - 2 days

Sports - 2 days

Toys - 1 day

FILL UP LIST

Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:31 "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Memorize Joshua 1:9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Read Matthew 5:1-16 "Sermon on the Mount. Part 1"

Read Matthew 6:1-18 "Sermon on the Mount. Part 2"

Write or Draw a prayer to God. What can you thank God for? What do you think God wants to tell you today?

Pray: Ask God to speak to you and show you how you can grow closer to Him this week. Thank Him for everything He has given you. Tell him you're sorry for sinning.

Spend two minutes praying.

Sing: Listen to your favorite worship song and sing it or read the words.