

Family Fasting Challenge

Question: What do all these people have in common?

MOSES THE LAWGIVER, *King David*, *Daniel the seer*,
Anna the prophetess, Paul the Apostle,
Jesus Christ the incarnate Son,
Martin Luther, John Calvin, **John Knox**, **Charles Finney**,
John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards.

Answer: They all did something called “fasting”

Fasting (going without food) is a word which many people don't like for lots of different reasons. Here's a few of them:

- It's too hard - they don't like being hungry and think they can't manage without lots of energy
- They think of everything they learnt in history how people did it in the olden days when it wasn't really for Jesus, it was to keep the rules and leaders were mean and made people almost starve
- Everything we see on telly, and a lot of people around us think it is a good thing that we should **always** be able to have whatever we want, when we want it and never be hungry or without something.
- People think it's not good for you and unhealthy.

Do you think any of these? Why?

Fasting if it's done right, doesn't need to be bad at all. In fact, it's something that **helps us get really close to God**. Jesus doesn't tell us we HAVE to fast, but He does say, “when you fast” like he thinks we will. Did you know His disciples didn't fast? Jesus said that they didn't need to fast while He was with them, but that when He'd gone (back to heaven), then His followers will fast. You can read about that in Matthew 9:15. He's still in heaven, so we can still fast - to wait for Him to come back.

Now we know you children are growing and you need lots of nutrients to do that, so we want you to know from the beginning that you need to be careful. You should only decide to try fasting if God absolutely tells you to, and if you are young, you should maybe start by

doing it together with your family. You might not even decide to go without food altogether - you might like to give something particular up - but we'll talk about that later.

Why should we fast?

That's a very good question! Well fasting helps us with our hearts. It makes sure we're spending time and giving our love to God, and not on other things.

1. Fasting helps us focus on God.

Sometimes we give more attention to the things God gives us than we do on God. It's like getting a present and not speaking or talking to or being nice to the person who gave it to you. But really, if you get a present, the person who gave it to you is, (or should be!) more important.

That is the main reason, and if it was the only reason, it would still be important enough that we fasted. But there are more reasons!

2. Fasting shows us what is really hidden in our hearts.

Sometimes if we are sad, or angry, or worried, we eat food to make us feel better, or to hide how we really feel. Maybe we watch telly, or play on our Nintendo to make us feel better and hide our fear or anger. There's nothing wrong with being cheered up a bit by these things, but if we are really sad, or angry or worried, we should be telling God and asking for His help.

When we fast the things that usually hide what is really in our hearts, suddenly they aren't hidden anymore! We might even feel more angry or sad or worried than usual, but then we can ask God to take away the bad things in our hearts. We can ask for His help - perhaps saying sorry if we got ourselves into that mess, and letting Him solve the problem instead of hiding it with other things.

3. Fasting means that God's power gives us energy.

Jesus talks about a different kind of food - He says the power of God, His Word is like food and gives the energy we need. A lot of people say that even though they sometimes feel a bit hungry when they fast, they never feel weak or without energy because God can give them energy. We are feeding on God and His power in us, rather than food from the earth. That's why the Bible says that when we fast, we shouldn't look all miserable like someone very hungry - we should look happy because God's power is filling us up, and that's much more exciting than normal food!

4. Fasting helps us to not to boil!

Imagine a kettle when it is boiling. It gets hotter and hotter, and hotter and hotter until it boils up - or a volcano which when it gets too hot it explodes and bursts out the top! Or even a balloon - when it's filled too much with air it pops! Sometimes the things we do in our lives - our school work, home work, practicing instruments, sports, visiting family here,

there and everywhere, watching too much telly, or playing too many computer games - make us really busy. We get busier and busier so we feel like we might pop - or boil over!

When we fast, we stop doing things like normal. We might take a bit of time to be still and quiet. We might think about sitting somewhere with Jesus and just spend a minute telling Him how great He is. This stops the boiling over. Some people even do fasting once a week - to get into a rhythm of not boiling! Everything we think we need, or want, or have to spend time on becomes second place. First place is sitting with Jesus and being reminded how much He loves you.

There are lots of other reasons people fast, sometimes people fast when they really need God to answer a prayer, or to help them concentrate, but we think we've covered the main ones.

Fasting as a Family

Our suggestion is that before the All Pray Together weekend, you and your family have a pray and think about fasting, and how you might fast over the All Pray Together weekend. Here's a few ideas:

- You could decide not to have lunch on the Saturday and spend time singing together, go for a walk and pray that God would speak to you through the things you see, make a family tree and pray for each person.
- You could decide to give up something for the whole weekend (or why not longer?) such as chocolate or drinking things that aren't water.
- You might decide that God is not asking you to give up food at all, but maybe have an entire weekend without the telly or computer on! (Parents too!)
- You could limit what you eat to really basic things (like Daniel did). He only ate vegetables for three months! How about not having luxuries, treats, sweets and comfort food and being really thankful for the provision, variety and luxury we have. If you have very young children this one is good as you won't have to face cross, hungry children who don't understand. They might be surprised to be appeased with a carrot instead but at least you don't need to worry about hunger!

one young family give things up together... fruit squash, telly, video games. Mum remarks, "when they're so very little, we don't focus on the spiritual side so much as the discipline that goes with it - the self control and abstaining. we often fast as part of a wider community. As they growing up, now two are at school, we can talk more with them about the spiritual side too."

Remember! Fasting is not about choosing to something that fits, or that is easy or reasonable. It is about going without - there is a cost. But it's only going without something here on earth for our bodies, and instead getting new freedom and joy from Jesus. Jesus is definitely worth it, He's worth our sacrifice and slight discomfort. And He may well surprise you! You may feel more energetic than ever, your family dynamic might change, you might see prayers answered and have a closer friendship with Jesus.