

Fasting and the Consume Mindset

By Adam R. Parchert

We live in a society emphasizing and glamorizing the “consume mindset.” From binge-watching TV shows to buying things on credit, indulging in excessive eating, and seeking instant gratification, it’s easy to get caught up in it all. Unfortunately, with so many messages that draw us towards our corruptible human nature, relatively few encourage moderation, frugality, intentional abstinence, and mindfulness...the things that nourish our soul and draw us deeper into our relationship with Christ.

This pervasive consume mindset has a way of getting its hooks in us and embedding itself in our daily lives, making it seem normal, reasonable, and even expected. We can become so absorbed into this mindset that we rarely reflect upon what it would be like to deny ourselves anything. As a Christian living in the midst of this, it can feel like there is no escape. However, freedom from this seemingly inescapable mindset can be found.

I became so absorbed into this consume mindset that I rarely thought about what it would be like to deny myself of anything. As I lived my life, I did so with what appeared to be self-control and discipline. I was living a slightly more controlled version of the consume mindset. I was not a glutton, but I never denied myself anything I wanted to eat. I was not an outright hedonist, but I was no stranger to pleasure-seeking whenever I felt a twinge of desire.

Partaking in the consume mindset had effects on my body. First, my weight had crept up to a level that made me uncomfortable. You know the weight I’m talking about, right? When the scale starts to push over that certain number, you feel in your body and spirit that you are going downhill. Second, I constantly fought heartburn that my prescription antacids could barely hold back. Third, my clothes were getting tight, and my body was in full-out rebellion; the whole time, my desire to fix any of it was non-existent. Finally, I realized it wasn’t just my physical health suffering - my spiritual life was in a similar, neglected state.

I was physically and spiritually flabby, engorged with things I should not be consuming... leading an ever-increasing sedentary lifestyle. Although there were aspects of my life in which I exercised self-control, there were wide berths of my life where self-denial was a completely foreign concept; however, it is self-denial that lies at the heart of being a thriving disciple of Christ.

The Apostle Paul shares very straightforward words about, what he calls, the “works of the flesh.”

“Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!”
Galatians 5:19-21 NET

And, in 1 Corinthians 9, while the Apostle Paul discusses the rights and obligations of an Apostle, he says, “I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave.” The pervasive influence of the consume mindset seems to amplify the works of the flesh primarily. As growing disciples of Christ, we must work toward the goal of self-discipline, making our flesh our slaves.

Like many, I had consistently struggled with this. I set out to fulfill the teachings of the Apostle Paul by leading a self-disciplined life, as I defined it. However, I realized that I had not just been practicing the works of the flesh; I had become an expert at the works of the flesh. My expertise can be seen in how I weaved these works into my life and justified their existence. The net results of most of my efforts to live a more Christ-centered, disciplined life were disappointment and frustration. However, I realized that I needed to approach this in a different direction. Like trying to kill weeds by simply plucking off their leaves, I was trying to combat the consume mindset and the works of the flesh by merely attempting to control undesired behaviors. Simple behavior control did not feel like the self-discipline and holiness I desired. My disappointment and frustration came from not addressing the source and foundation of the undesired behaviors. The time for a decision had come. Keep doing things the way I always had, or venture out on a new journey to address the source and foundation of my struggles.

But what was at risk for me if I decided to seek genuine self-discipline and holiness? For one, I would have to give up comfort and security. It was comfortable and safe for me to stay physically and spiritually flabby. Contentment and complacency were strong motivators in my life. However, I would risk losing these things to push toward my goal. I was tired of being tired.

I remember back to the early days of my faith as I studied for the ministry at Bible College. One or two times a year, I would fast for periods ranging from one to seven days. These times of fasting were physically challenging but also proved to be very spiritually rewarding. For brief periods during and after fasting, the volume of the world was turned down. The desires of the consume mindset were less, and the works of flesh were more under control. As a result, I felt more energized physically and spiritually.

I set out to reestablish the spiritual discipline of fasting in my life. Like an athlete who practices the perfect form, posture, and technique to become great at what they do, I wanted to practice the discipline of fasting in such a way as to become

proficient at it. By consistently fasting, I experienced results that I was not expecting. Practicing self-discipline in this area of my life spilled over into other areas, including my eating habits, physical health, prayer life, desire for spiritual pursuits, relationship with my wife, and attitude towards my children. I felt impacts reverberate throughout my life, even into areas that I considered unconnected to the practice of fasting. Practicing this type of self-discipline helped me break free from some of the heavy influences of the consume mindset. I could tangibly feel my body and mind coming under my control - a concept that Paul called making the flesh his slave.

The Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

I've learned a great deal about fasting over the past 20-plus years. In the following section, I'll share some of what I've learned in hopes that you, too, will experience the rewards of this spiritual discipline. But fasting is not a cure-all or guaranteed way to rid yourself of your struggles with the flesh. Fasting is, however, a centuries-long practice that Jesus Himself partook in to bring focus, turn down the volume of the flesh, and turn up the volume of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting appears repeatedly in the Bible as a way to connect with God. In the Old Testament, people fasted to express remorse and mourning, draw closer to God, and seek His guidance. In the New Testament, fasting is seen as a way to overcome temptation and a means to be humbly set apart for God. Jesus Himself fasted in preparation for ministry and before making important decisions, such as choosing His twelve disciples. By setting aside food for a period of time, we can help turn down the volume of the world and turn the volume up on God's presence in our life.

Although I will focus on fasting for spiritual reasons, there are significant benefits to fasting for health reasons. Many people fast to reset their bodies, lose weight, and improve overall health. This can involve various types of fasting, including intermittent fasting, water fasting, juice fasting, or time-restricted feeding. There has been a great deal of research showing the many health benefits of periodic fasting. However, it is essential to consult a healthcare professional before starting a fast, especially if you have any underlying health conditions.

I am a big supporter of dual-purpose fasting for health and spiritual reasons. Our body and spirit are inseparably linked this side of eternity. As we tend to the needs of our spirit, we can also tend to the needs of our bodies. For all the spiritual benefits of fasting, there are advantages to your health, from breaking bad eating habits and cleansing your body of all the junk we feed it. I encourage you to embrace the experience for all it has to offer. When we embark on a journey like this, we step out of our comfort zones and into the unknown. This change in routine and environment brings a new pulse to our existence, full of challenge, excitement, adventure, and endless possibilities.

Benefits of Fasting

- ***Fasting can be a way to bring the works of the flesh into check intentionally.***

You may be unaware of how strong of a hold certain things have over you until you do without those things. Like the alcoholic who insists that they can stop drinking at any time but always seems to have the smell of alcohol on their breath. Or, the caffeine addict who laments how they don't feel alive until they have had their first cup of coffee. Intentional denial of certain things will cause you to become keenly aware of the control, or lack of control, these things have over you. We must not allow anything other than Christ to have control over us.

Wow, it's incredible to think it's been over 20 years since I started my first full-time ministry position at that church. I remember how much I enjoyed having my office and the kind lady who would make coffee for everyone there. I had become so accustomed to drinking multiple cups of coffee throughout the day that it had become a habit.

However, there was one particular day that stood out to me. I woke up with a terrible headache and could barely focus during my morning prayer. I took a sip from my first cup of coffee for the day, and suddenly my headache disappeared instantly. It was then that I realized that my body had become dependent on caffeine and that I had allowed it to control me.

And, like a toddler who didn't get what it wanted, my flesh would make me miserable until I gave it what it wanted. I had become dependent on the caffeine fix. I had allowed something to have control over me.

My response to this epiphany would lay the groundwork for a lifelong relationship with the spiritual discipline of fasting. I wouldn't say I liked that a lack of consuming something could partially or fully disable me. I had never smoked, drunk, or done drugs, but at that moment, I felt a small drop of what the addict must feel...and I wouldn't say I liked it.

After that fateful morning, I entered into a period of fasting to bring the desire of my flesh into check intentionally. This was one of my first intentional efforts to confront my consume mindset.

- ***Fasting can be a powerful spiritual journey and experience.***

As I have experienced fasting, I have encountered many emotions, temptations, and physical discomforts. However, it has also brought deep peace, unusual calmness, contentment, and heightened sensitivity to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is an exercise in humility and an experience in simplifying your life. Although it is difficult to quantify, something special awaits me whenever I devote myself to the spiritual discipline of voluntary and total abstinence from food.

Jesus Christ fasted for forty days in the wilderness in preparation for His ministry.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After he fasted forty days and forty nights, he was famished." Matthew 4:1-2 NET

During this time, He was tempted by the devil. Despite being famished, He never gave in to temptation. In the weakness of His flesh, the strength of His Spirit was shown to be triumphant. When we fast and weaken the hold of the flesh, we can experience a similar strengthening of the Spirit of God in our lives.

The time Jesus spent fasting was in the wilderness, away from the cares and concerns of everyday life. However, it may not be possible to physically separate yourself from your responsibilities while fasting. If possible, consider doing so. If not, you can create a virtual wilderness experience by modifying your daily routine to include extended Bible reading, prayer, and quiet contemplation. During this time, amplify your existing spiritual practices while trying out new ones.

- **Fasting can be the perfect time to start new spiritual habits.**

- **Worship**: Use extra time to worship God and express your love and gratitude. You could listen to worship music, sing hymns, or praise God for who He is.
- **Service**: Use the time you would typically spend eating to serve others. Volunteer at a local charity, help a neighbor in need, or look for ways to bless those around you.
- **Reflection**: Reflect on your life and examine areas where you need to grow. Ask God to reveal any sins or areas of weakness you need to address and seek His guidance on overcoming them.
- **Gratitude**: Take time to express gratitude for the blessings in your life. Call, text, email, or write a letter to the people you are grateful for in your life.
- **Journaling**: Keep a journal of your thoughts, prayers, and reflections during your fast. This can help you stay focused on your spiritual goals and provide a record of your spiritual journey.
- **Memorization**: Choose key Bible verses and repeat them to yourself throughout the day.
- **Creativity**: Express your feelings toward Jesus in some form of art.

- ***Contemplation***: Seek out a quiet place and sit and reflect on the presence of God.
- ***Breath Prayer***: This form of prayer matches your natural rhythm of breathing with simple, one-sentence prayers. While you inhale, pray a short phrase such as, “I breathe in your Holy Spirit,” and while exhaling, pray a short phrase such as, “I praise your Holy Name.”
- ***Detachment***: Jesus was in this world but did not allow the world’s values to shape His life. Take time to inventory how you have attachments to the world, the consume mindset, and the works of the flesh. Contemplate ways to intentionally distance yourself from these attachments while drawing closer to God.
- ***Unplugging***: As much as possible, turn off all those electronic devices and reduce the volume of distractions in your life.

Practical Guide to a multi-day fast of two to seven days

Before beginning your fast, ask God to guide you and decide on the length of time you’ll fast. Setting a specific goal will give you a clear purpose and help you resist the urge to quit prematurely. If you have any medical concerns, consult your doctor to ensure fasting won’t interfere with your medication or condition. If the doctor expresses concern based on medical reasons, talk through a way that will be safe for you.

Recall the Biblical instructions Jesus gave and experience your fasting time with humility and privacy.

“When you fast, do not look sullen like the hypocrites, for they make their faces unattractive so that people will see them fasting. I tell you the truth, they have their reward! When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to others when you are fasting but only to your Father, who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.” Matthew 6:16-18 NET

Do not be afraid to inform your spouse or children that you are fasting, but ask them not to share it publicly. If you’re invited to a meal with friends while fasting, which always happens, you can reschedule or inform them privately. Conduct yourself so as not to draw attention to yourself while fasting so that the reward you gain can be from God, not man.

It is highly recommended to gradually ease into fasts by gradually reducing your intake of food, carbs, sugar, and caffeine over a week.

- ***Prepare your body before fasting. Seven days before you start:***

- Day -7 (i.e., seven days before your fast begins)
 - Reduce carbs/sugar and caffeine intake by about $\frac{1}{2}$ your regular intake. You can find good Keto recipes online to help reduce carbs/sugar. Healthy foods are best; avoid processed food.
 - Eat a light breakfast, lunch, and dinner—about $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of your regular intake.
- Day -6
 - Reduce carbs/sugar and caffeine intake to about $\frac{1}{4}$ your regular intake.
 - Eat a light breakfast, lunch, and dinner. About $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ your regular intake.
 - You'll experience food cravings during fasting, but avoid snacking; this is my biggest struggle.
 - This is the beginning of the mental challenge that accompanies fasting. You may stop, second-guess your decision to fast, or devise reasons to delay it. Like a toddler screaming for candy, our bodies can be relentless. Don't give in.
 - Here are a few tips to combat cravings that you can use throughout the fasting process:
 - Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated and full.
 - Get enough sleep or take a nap as your energy level wanes.
 - Stay busy to keep your mind off food cravings.
 - Finally, try practicing some new habits from the list above.
 - You will likely feel the physical effects of reducing carbohydrates and sugar. This is part of a process in the body called ketosis. Ketosis is a natural metabolic state where the body uses ketones, produced from the breakdown of fats in the liver, as its primary fuel source instead of carbs and sugar.
 - You may experience symptoms like fatigue, headaches, nausea, and dizziness, commonly known as the "keto flu." These symptoms usually subside within a few days

- When I experience this, I intentionally don't take any medicine to combat it. Instead, I consider it part of the process and that there is something to learn about how I conduct myself when in physical discomfort. While this happens, I consciously decide to be pleasant (or at least not crabby).
- Day -5
 - Reduce carbs/sugar and eliminate caffeine.
 - If you like caffeine-free herbal tea, that is an excellent substitute for coffee.
 - Eat a light breakfast. Skip lunch. Eat a light dinner.
 - During the time you would generally be eating lunch, do something to connect you with God intentionally.
- Day -4
 - Eliminate carbs/sugar.
 - Eat a simple breakfast, maybe 1 item. Skip lunch. Eat a light dinner
- Day -3 thru -1
 - Eat a simple breakfast. Skip Lunch. Eat a light dinner.
- **Fasting Days One thru Seven**
 - Days 1-3:
 - Hunger pains: Preparation that includes the slow reduction in food consumption will help reduce this. Your body is not used to being told no.
 - Cravings: There are both physical and psychological factors that drive these cravings. As your blood sugar naturally decreases, you may desire high-carbohydrate and high-fat foods. Managing cravings during fasting requires self-awareness and managing your emotions and desires. You are in a full-out battle with the consume mindset!
 - Desires to stop: Your mind will begin to play tricks on you, trying to convince you to give up. Always set a goal for the length of your fast before you start, and stick to it.
 - Things to be aware of: While fasting, it's common to experience some mild physical symptoms such as hunger, fatigue, and headaches.

However, if you experience severe or persistent symptoms, you should seek advice from a medical professional. Some signs that may indicate a problem include:

- Consistent dizziness or lightheadedness
 - Fainting or loss of consciousness
 - Rapid or irregular heartbeat
 - Severe or persistent headaches
 - Chest pain or discomfort
 - Shortness of breath
 - Severe abdominal pain
 - Persistent vomiting or diarrhea
 - Extreme weakness or fatigue
 - Mental fog, confusion, or disorientation
- Days 4-7:
- Hunger pains will significantly decrease or go away altogether.
 - The digestive system will slow down, leading to a decrease in stomach acid production and bowel movements. As a result, the body conserves energy by slowing down its metabolism.
 - From my experience, this period can be a time of great contentment and peace. Breaking the physical and psychological habits that may have been a challenge earlier in the fast, this time can be very rewarding.
 - One of the most exciting things I've encountered during this period is the freedom from any concern about or desire for food. If the first few days of the fast were a struggle, then this time can be viewed as a reprieve, a reward. Use this time to focus on God even more, as you have made your body YOUR servant and can now better attend to the needs of your spirit.

What to drink during a fast:

- Water: Drink much water. Use water to help quench cravings.

- Herbal tea (non-caffeinated): Sometimes, I add a bit of honey for flavor, but I keep this to a minimum.
- Fruit juice: I drink 100% pure fruit juice in moderation during a fast. Most stores have these in glass bottles of tart cherry, blueberry, pomegranate, etc. They are 100% juice with no added anything.
- Please keep it simple. Fasting is less about abstinence from food and more about practicing self-discipline and self-control. For example, drinking a protein shake or a fruit smoothie is not technically eating, but it is taking the place of eating and, I believe, robbing you of the true experience of self-discipline and self-control.

Breaking your fast:

- Breaking your fast correctly is crucial for a successful and healthy experience. So take it slow and steady, and don't overindulge. And if you experience any severe discomfort during the process, consult your healthcare provider.
- In a fast of more than three days, your digestive system will have significantly slowed down and reduced the amount of digestive juices available. Therefore, it is essential to eat light, easily digested-food. This can be an exciting and pivotal time, a chance to consider what you put into your body carefully. Fasting is a spiritual journey with physical benefits that shouldn't be ignored. Remember, a healthier you can be a more spiritually oriented you.
- After breaking your fast, you will get full much faster and are drawn to simpler, healthier foods. Embrace this change and use it to establish new eating habits. Through this process, you have broken free from parts of the consume mindset. In some significant ways, you have made your flesh your slave and brought it under the control of the Holy Spirit of God. Enjoy this, embrace this.

- **Breaking Fast Day 1:**

- Eat broth or something like basic canned chicken noodle soup. Eat half a bowl, then the remaining an hour later, and let that sit for most of the day.
- Be aware of your body and eat slowly, in small amounts, with a few hours in between.
- You will begin to feel your digestive system slowly respond. Don't overeat.

- **Breaking Fast Day 2:**

- Eat something for all three meals that are soft and easily digestible.

- Continue to eat slowly, in small amounts, with a few hours in between.
- Be mindful of any discomfort or digestive issues.

- ***Breaking Fast Day 3 and Beyond:***

- Slowly begin eating things with more substance: toast, soups, canned fruit, small salads, etc., until you have found your body's new normal for meals.
- Continue to eat slowly and mindfully, listening to your body's cues.
- You will need to eat significantly less than you previously did to feel full.

Medical benefits of fasting

- **Weight loss:** Fasting can help you lose weight by reducing calorie intake. By limiting the amount of food you eat, your body may turn to stored fat as a source of energy.
- **Improved insulin sensitivity:** Fasting can improve your body's ability to use insulin, which can help lower your blood sugar levels and reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- **Reduced inflammation:** Fasting has been shown to reduce inflammation in the body, which can help improve symptoms of chronic conditions like arthritis and asthma.
- **Improved heart health:** Fasting has been linked to improved heart health by reducing blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and other risk factors for heart disease.
- **Improved brain function:** Fasting has been shown to increase the production of a protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which is associated with improved brain function and a reduced risk of neurological disorders like Alzheimer's.¹
- **Autophagy:** Fasting can trigger autophagy, where your body breaks down and recycles old or damaged cells. This can help improve cellular health and reduce the risk of age-related diseases. The evidence suggests that anywhere between 18 hours to four days will trigger autophagy.²

In Conclusion

¹ Journal article, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2622429/>

² Article, <https://blog.insidetracker.com/autophagy-know-before-starting-fast>

This journey is a chance to break away from the monotony of our everyday lives and experience something new. This sense of newness and discovery brings a new pulse to our existence, shocking us out of our complacency and restoring the God-initiated pulse of our faith.

Each person's experience with fasting will be unique to them. However, it is a physical and spiritual journey that can be very rewarding. Listen well to the teachings of Scripture on fasting and allow this intimate time with God to reward you.

Keep these words of Jesus top of mind during your journey.

“Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and devouring insect destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and devouring insect do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21 NET

May Christ be the heartbeat of the journey...

About the author:

Adam R. Parchert holds a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies from Central Bible College, Springfield, Missouri. He has provided pastoral leadership in various capacities since 1996. From 2012 to 2021, Adam successfully founded and led a suburban Chicago church. In addition, he runs a small business while actively involved in his local church and the Christian non-profit organization, The Crucible Project.