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ARTICLE #094

Fasting: Between Controversy and Truth

Original message: Fasting to Be Consecrated and Productive · Summary by Sonia Beguide

Fasting divides opinion. For some, it is the secret to better health. Autophagy, the process by which our cells recycle themselves and adapt to a lack of food, earned Yoshinori Ohsumi the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2016. Others consider fasting useless, even dangerous: studies on intermittent fasting do not all point in the same direction, and it is not suitable for everyone.

READING TIME: 4–5 MIN

> *"Fasting is not a ritual to tick off, but a meeting of love and listening with God."*
>
> — *Sonia Beguide*

I — A Practice That Divides

Among Christians, too, opinions are divided. For some, it is an essential practice. For others, it is a mere ritual or a personal discipline. Some even claim that Jesus accomplished everything on the cross and that fasting is therefore no longer relevant. Yet Jesus himself said "when you fast" (Matthew 6:16), not "if you fast."

So, passing trend, powerful tool, or both? Let's first look at what fasting really is.

II — What Is Fasting?

When we say "fasting," we immediately think of abstaining from food and drink. But more broadly, to fast is to **voluntarily and temporarily deprive yourself of one or more things**. It could be:

- social media or screens;
- a dish or drink you are fond of (sweets, coffee, snacking);
- television, series, video games;
- impulse purchases;
- certain entertainments or habits that take up too much space.

The principle remains the same: giving up something good to focus on something better.

III — What Science Says

In her address this morning, Reverend Danielle Wafo reminded us of the scientific evidence on the health benefits of fasting. Here are some of the studies that support it:

- **Cell recycling.** The 2016 Nobel Prize rewarded the discovery of the mechanisms of autophagy, a fundamental process for breaking down and recy-

cling cellular components. This mechanism is essential for adapting to a lack of food.

- **A review in a leading medical journal.** In 2019, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published an analysis by de Cabo and Mattson. It concludes that intermittent fasting improves blood sugar regulation, increases resistance to stress, and reduces inflammation. It also notes that animal and human studies have observed lower blood pressure, lower blood lipids, and a lower resting heart rate.
- **Benefits independent of weight loss.** In a controlled trial in 2018 (*Cell Metabolism*), men with prediabetes ate within a short window early in the day for five weeks. Their insulin sensitivity, blood pressure, and oxidative stress improved, without any weight loss.
- **Heart health and diabetes.** The Intermountain study (Utah), published in the *American Journal of Cardiology*, compared patients who fast regularly with those who do not. Among 448 patients, regular fasting was associated with a lower risk of coronary artery disease (64% versus 76%), regardless of religion. Regular fasting was also associated with a lower prevalence of diabetes. Later work also showed lower triglycerides, weight, and blood sugar, as well as a sharp rise in growth hormone during 24 hours of fasting.
- **Longer fasts under medical supervision.** A 2019 study (*PLOS ONE*) followed 1,422 people who fasted for 4 to 21 days. It observed improvements in blood lipids and blood sugar regulation, and an improvement in 84.4% of people who had pre-existing health complaints. Adverse effects were reported in less than 1% of participants.

An honest caveat: several of these studies are observational, meaning they show an association rather than absolute proof of cause and effect. Some protocols are also limited to specific groups. Research is ongoing. Before fasting, it is wise to seek medical advice, especially in cases of diabetes, pregnancy, medical treatment, or chronic illness.

To check for yourself:

- de Cabo R., Mattson M.P., "Effects of Intermittent Fasting on Health, Aging, and Disease," *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2019: doi.org/10.1056/NEJMra1905136
- Sutton E.F. et al., *Cell Metabolism*, 2018: PMC5990470
- Horne B.D. et al., Intermountain Heart Institute: press release
- Wilhelmi de Toledo F. et al., *PLOS ONE*, 2019: PMC6314618
- Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2016 (Ohsumi): Karolinska Institutet

IV — 3 Essential Reasons for a Child of God to Fast

The speaker gave us three essential reasons.

1. For Consecration

Consecration means setting yourself apart and making yourself fully available to accomplish the mission God has personally entrusted to us on Earth.

2. For the Crucifixion of the Flesh

There is a battle in our flesh, and fasting will help us win it. Our willpower, though fundamental, necessary, and unavoidable, will absolutely not be enough. Each of us has passions and weaknesses that we know to be our Achilles' heel. They may include:

- anger or impatience;
- gluttony or excess;
- dependence on screens and social media;
- procrastination and laziness;
- covetousness, jealousy, or impure thoughts.

Only the help of the Holy Spirit will enable us to overcome them.

3. For Greater Productivity

Fasting makes us more sensitive to God's voice and enables us to better hear and receive His instructions for our lives. Times of fasting are very often times of clarity, in which we receive the solution and the strategy for professional, personal, and other situations that had dragged on for a long time.

V — My Testimony

The first time I decided to do a 3-day fast, it seemed impossible: I had never fasted before, not even for a single day. But God made it possible. In fasting, as in many other areas, you will take the first step with your will, but it is God who will do the rest. Never rely on your own strength.

VI — Fasts That Precede New Seasons

In the Scriptures, after 40 days of fasting, Moses received the tablets of the law with the Ten Commandments. It was also after 40 days of fasting in the wilderness that Jesus fully entered into his

ministry, clothed with the power of the Spirit. Many times, strategic fasts have preceded new seasons.

You can read these stories in **Exodus 34:28** (Moses), **Matthew 4:1-2**, and **Luke 4:1-2, 14** (Jesus).

To go further, listen to the full message:
youtube.com/watch?v=I-dMxfHw_Pc&t=6060s

Conclusion

It remains important to fast, but without falling into a mechanical or routine attitude, that is, fasting with religiosity. Everything, however good, loses its relevance the moment it becomes the product of routine. Fasting is not a ritual to tick off, but a meeting of love and listening with God.

Whatever challenges you are facing, keep holding on. God has not let go of you, and He never will.

We are in this together.

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SBE