Go S.L.O.W. to Fast

I am a foodie. I am interested in food whether eating it, cooking it, reading about it, or watching shows about it.

In one way, we are all foodies, right? When hungry enough we become interested in eating. But true foodies are something different. We don’t eat just because we are wired to get hungry; we enjoy the entire experience of eating. Maybe that’s why the origin of *foodie* is traced to the word *junkie*. It’s probably true that I am a food junkie.

I love the experience of food. I love it at home, I love it at church picnics and potlucks, and I love it at restaurants. I have had the pleasure of eating at five restaurants owned by “iron chefs” from the television show, *Iron Chef America*. They were all outstanding, but I walked away from one and told my wife I didn’t know food could taste so good!

Food is a centerpiece of life for many of us, at home and at church. It seems that almost any event can be enhanced by a meal. Sometimes, however, our love affair with food needs to take a backseat to other significant endeavors, specifically fasting.

While addressing the subject of fasting in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus twice used the phrase, “when you fast” (Matthew 6:16-17). This leaves little doubt that he expected his followers to fast. Despite this expectation, fasting remains a mystery to many who have yet to practice or master this spiritual discipline.

Simply put, fasting is abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. It is one way we can demonstrate to God that he has our attention. We might fast for any number of reasons including to focus in prayer, to seek guidance and direction, or to petition God for a specific need.

Practically, fasting is beneficial because it can help us learn about ourselves. Dallas Willard wrote that fasting “reveals how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating…. If nothing else, though, it will certainly demonstrate how powerful and clever our body is in getting its own way against our strongest resolves.”[[1]](#footnote-1) We do not often think of food as powerful, but that fact is another reason fasting should be one of our spiritual habits.

So, how do we introduce fasting into our lives? I think it is helpful if we “Go S.L.O.W. to fast.” SLOW is an acronym for (1) Set a time, (2) Lose the excuses, (3) Outline a plan, and (4) Welcome the inconvenience.

***Set a time***. If you do not schedule your fast, it is not going to happen. It is most helpful to start with one meal a week, and not a meal you routinely skip. Once you choose a day and meal, put it on your calendar and set a reminder.

***Lose the excuses***. When you decide to fast, a host of reasons will come to mind why you cannot or should not do it. This is natural when beginning a new habit, but do not let any of this derail your determination. Step away from the plate and exercise self-control.

***Outline a plan***. Will you walk and pray? Will you drive and pray? Where will you go so that you are not around food and tempted to eat? When do you usually eat before that meal? Do not gorge yourself ahead of time so you can make it through the meal you are skipping. Pray for strength but expect to feel hungry. When do you usually eat after that meal? Do not make up for what you missed as soon as the fast is over. Pray for strength but expect to feel hungry until your next mealtime.

Concerning the feeling of hunger, Donald Whitney writes that “although the physical discomfort is unpleasant—perhaps even painful—it is important to feel some degree of hunger during your fast. Your hunger helps you, serving as a continual reminder of your spiritual purpose.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

***Welcome the inconvenience***. When you decide to fast, you will likely feel hungrier at that time than you usually do. Expect it and plan for it. Disciplines are a form of spiritual warfare and when you decide to step onto the battlefield, your sinful nature, as well as the enemy of your soul, will spring into action to distract you and keep you on the sidelines. Let the experience remind you that your real strength is found in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:10).

There are benefits to skipping the table and getting alone with God, but they are not theoretically gained. Only in the practice of fasting can we experience its power and effectiveness.

Robert G. Culler ©2018

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1. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Whitney, Donald S., *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)