

Fasting: Teaching Kids Spiritual Disciplines

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***Excerpts from published article.**

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Here are some practical ways to teach kids about fasting through experience with short and intentional opportunities.

Here are some practical ways to fast with kids:

- **Make different choices.** For a period of time, choose healthy foods for snacking. Instead of cookies, choose carrots. Instead of soda choose water. Instead of fast food, choose nutritious meals.
- **Abstain from sweets.** Lead kids to not eat sugar-based foods (candy, cake, pastries) for a designated time.
- **Grow from short to more intensive fasts.** Don't start with a 40 day, "no (fill in the blank)" fast that will be difficult to achieve. Start small and build on success.

Be intentional about helping kids understand why you're fasting:

- **Fasting must center on God.** If you fast for any reason other than to center on Him; His will and His desire, it will be in vain.
- **Fasting reminds us that God is our provider of every good and perfect gift.** Help kids find this reality.
- **Fasting helps us focus.** The point of a fast is to focus on a particular issue, need, concern, or desire. Determine the point and be very intentional to share and help kids understand.
- **Fasting is a discipline not a punishment.** Don't use the biblical discipline of fasting to ease your guilt or need to punish poor behavior.

- **Model biblical fasting.** Kids learn more from what they see than what they simply hear. When teaching the discipline of fasting, know that you can't lead kids to do something that you're not willing to do yourself.
- **Don't sell kids short.** While the practice and understanding of biblical fasting will be best suited for older kids, teaching and allowing kids to participate in age-appropriate ways will lay foundations for deeper and more meaningful experiences in the future.

How to Fast as a Family

- Kristen Feola Author
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Foods that are allowed on the Daniel Fast are fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, seeds, and oils. Restricted foods include dairy, meat, sugar, all forms of sweeteners, yeast, refined and processed foods, deep-fried foods, and solid fats.

Getting Your Children Involved

When my husband and I are on a Daniel Fast, our daughters (ages 8 and 6) follow the food guidelines the majority of the time. However, if our fast is during the school year, it's much more difficult for me to control their food intake, even if I pack their lunches every day. Between school parties and snacks at church, it's challenging to make sure everything they eat is Daniel Fast friendly. Therefore, don't worry if your children aren't able to adhere to the food guidelines because of such circumstances. They're still learning the basic concepts of fasting and why it's good to set aside physical desires (certain foods) for spiritual purposes (to pray for the salvation of others). Just the fact that they're fasting with you will sow seeds of faith in their hearts that one day will reap a harvest of righteousness. The extent of your children's involvement in the Daniel Fast will depend upon their ages and spiritual maturity. Ask the Lord to show you what will work best for your family dynamic, and trust Him to give you wisdom. Following is a list of ideas that will help you move through each stage of your fast:

Before the Fast

- Sit down with your children and discuss the definition of a fast. Look at examples from Scripture, such as when Esther called a 3-day fast (Esther 4:16) or when the Israelites prayed before their 900-mile trek to Jerusalem through difficult and dangerous territory (Ezra 8:21-23). Talk about what God how God answered their prayers.
- Read the story of Daniel's 10-day test in Daniel 1 to give your children an idea of Daniel's character and how he refused to violate his convictions. Take a look the account of Daniel's 21-day fast in Daniel 10. Explain how the modern-day Daniel Fast is following the prophet's example of devotion to [prayer](#).
- Talk about which foods you are going to give up during your fast. Emphasize that such foods are not bad or wrong, but that you are abstaining from them temporarily as a way to honor the Lord.
- Make a list of people for whom you want to pray.
- Go grocery shopping together. Even though it may mean more time at the supermarket (and more patience on your part!), make it a family event. Have older children select produce for you. Let a younger child hold the shopping list. You'll make your kids feel special, and they'll be more likely to be excited about the fast.
- Get a copy of my book, *The Ultimate Guide to the Daniel Fast*, to encourage you and keep you on track.

During the Fast

- Pray together each evening. This commitment will be a challenge, especially with school and church activities during the week. However, do your best to make this family time a priority. Keep it simple and brief. Otherwise, your children will lose interest. One activity to try with your children is The Prayer Game (see sidebar). Get creative with your ideas, and your children will look forward to bringing their needs before the Lord.
- Invite your kids into the kitchen to assist with meal preparation. Even though it will mean more work for you, it will be worth it. Assign older children the job of rinsing and chopping vegetables. Allow younger ones to set the table and fill glasses with water. Ask your husband (or wife) to wash the dishes. Get the whole family involved!

After the Fast

- Plan a family outing to review your Daniel Fast experience, such as a camping trip or weekend at the lake. Spend time thanking and praising the Lord for answered prayers. Share struggles and disappointments that you encountered along the way. Have older children write down what they learned.
- Challenge family members to keep praying for requests that are still to be answered.
- Continue to make healthy food choices. Don't fall back into old patterns of eating!

I hope that you are encouraged to seek the Lord through the Daniel Fast with your family. As parents, we would be wise to approach this spiritual discipline with the boldness of Paul, who wrote, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1)." As you demonstrate the importance of prayer and fasting to your children, you will be leading them in the footsteps of

Jesus.

Kristen Feola is the author of the book, *The Ultimate Guide to the Daniel Fast*, and writer of the blog, www.ultimatedanielfast.com. She has worked as a personal trainer, nutritional consultant, First Place 4 Health leader, and fitness instructor. Kristen lives in Springfield with her husband, Justin, and her two daughters.