

The Joy of Fasting

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

Like many children today, our 7-year-old daughter, Deborah, plays soccer. (No, she doesn't head the ball, in case you were concerned.) She goes to practice after school, two nights a week, for about two hours at a time. She really enjoys it, mostly for the social interaction derived from spending time with a group of girls her age.

A friend of ours has a daughter who moved nearby to attend the local college. A very bright and responsible young lady, "Sanny" (an abbreviation for Cassandra) arrived in Southern California without a car. While she spends most of her time on campus, she enjoys attending church every Wednesday night. As the campus is only a block away from our home, we usually let her use one of our cars.

But schedules collided on this particular Wednesday evening, as they often do in our world. The bottom line is that there were three people, three destinations and only two cars. In order to make it work, Sanny dropped Deborah and I off at soccer practice and took my car to church.

At the end of practice, Deborah realized we didn't have a car. She was startled to hear we would be "walking home." If you live in or have visited Southern California, you probably understand that few people walk anywhere here. We all have cars and we clog our freeways, constantly going from here to there.

As we began our trek (about three blocks), Deborah seemed unsure, so I took her hand. After all, it was dark, she was tired and we had never walked home before. We held hands all the way home. I think it was the first time we had ever done that.

As we walked, I took the opportunity to talk to her about how fortunate we are. Most people in the world don't own a car... we have two. Walking is how the world gets where they want to go. I explained that sometimes it's important to make a sacrifice for someone else. She seemed to understand, as she knows that Sanny goes to church every Wednesday.

After that night, Deborah had a different viewpoint about our car. She seemed to appreciate the luxury of having one. She didn't complain in the slightest when we walked home again a few weeks later. It also seems to have impacted her relationship with Sanny. They enjoy each other's company, but Sanny has become more of a "big sister," which is an obvious improvement for Deborah, compared to having nothing but older brothers.

There is a value to "going without" now and again. It cleanses the soul. It could be anything, not just food. Fasting works well when you give up something for a short period of time. It's even better when you can take what you gave up and give it to someone else. Missing Monday Night Football to play catch with your son might be a classic example.

Fasting keeps you appreciative of all with which you have been blessed and helps curb the temptation to complain. It helps put things into perspective. As Americans, we are taught to constantly improve. We expect our incomes to grow, our cars to get more luxurious and our homes to become more valuable. We are bombarded with advertising messages encouraging us to desire

more, more and even more.

At times, we are like spoiled children opening gifts - so busy tearing the wrapping off the present that we forget to read the card, let alone remember to appreciate the giver. And once we have opened that one, it's on to the next. Do we really appreciate how blessed we are or have we just taken it all for granted? As I look at my own life, I don't appreciate what I've been given nearly enough. My wife, Evelyn, goes to a conference in Australia every year, for about nine days. She can't help but notice how much more she is appreciated the few weeks before and after that conference.

Fasting is a way of awakening our hearts to the value of what we have. It's a way to give up what you enjoy (for a short time) in order to really appreciate it. Fasting also makes us aware of those less fortunate. It gives us an opportunity to take some of what we have and give it to those who need it more.

Soccer season is now over. It will be nine months before Deborah and I have an opportunity to walk home together again - unless we just choose to do it for the good of our souls.

DMP Jr.

JANUARY 2008