

Emptying *and* Refilling

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Romans 15:13

Fasting can be a vague spiritual discipline, encompassing everything from strict dietary deprivation to turning off our social media. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus instructs that "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." As applied to a fast, successful self-denial is often measured by how long we abstain from our typical patterns.

To be sure, our initial fasting focus, intentional sacrifice, is important; however, if we stop there, we fall short of its fully intended purpose. We are left merely feeling hungry or craving whatever it was that we gave up. Instead, it's equally important to consider what we are "taking up" or replacing our "normal diet" with. So here's the second fasting question - How or with what are we purposefully refilling our emptiness?

John the Baptist addresses this question when, referring to Jesus, he stated "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). According to this personal instruction, fasting (our decrease) is only half of the equation. The other half, His increase, is an often overlooked yet equally critical element of fasting.

Yes, empty yourself, sacrificially relinquishing whatever distracts you from God. But then also be refilled: with prayer, with His word and with His Holy Spirit, celebrating the resulting peace, joy and hope that can only come from Him.

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