

BASICS

- ♦ Read through the booklet on fasting and agree (as parents) on the kind of fasting that is on your hearts and in what form each would like to fast.
- ♦ Maybe you could take turns with the children's meals or alternate days or weeks of fasting and so relieve each other of the burden of taking care of the meals for the children. For this short period of time, you can also resort to meals that you wouldn't necessarily prepare otherwise, such as ready-made pizzas and the like, in order to save yourself the trouble of cooking. Or you can cook ahead or make soups that you can eat for days.
- ♦ As parents, be aware that fasting is a reinforcer. When you fast, you may also become more impatient, etc., to which your children will then respond. That means for you: plan relaxed days/weeks, don't create unnecessary family stress by being overly strict, use all the babysitting and friend meet-up options you have to unwind your everyday life so that you don't keep falling into the stress trap.
- ♦ With your partner, think about how each of you can incorporate your personal recharging time in your daily schedule during this period, and what is absolutely necessary for your fasting to be fruitful. For example, you can block at least one hour for yourself every day during fasting. Or, as a rule, go to bed early. You can also take turns with the morning routine or the evening ritual so that you can manage your energy well.
- ♦ It is important that you discuss and prepare yourselves beforehand. At a marathon, runners don't just show up unprepared, but they prepare well and thoroughly for it.
- ♦ And if you do fail at it: As a mother of a two-year-old at the time, I was encouraged by the prospect that one day the season would come when I could water fast, but I just couldn't do it at the time. Instead, I chose smoothies and social media fasts. God knows your heart and he is gracious with you. But on the other hand, don't get discouraged right away either. Fasting needs practice and there will be failures sometimes – like when training for a sport.

The following applies to all suggestions: as parents you know your children best, and this also applies to the age indications.

DEVELOPING A VISION FOR FASTING IN YOUR CHILDREN

Do you think you can't explain fasting to your children? Then here are a few ideas - because your children often understand more than you would think:

- ♦ Fasting means to do without, to stop eating or doing something.
- ♦ Fasting is quite normal in the Bible -> e.g. Queen Esther fasts with her people (Esther 4:16), believing that the impossible becomes possible.
- ♦ Fasting costs you something because you would like to eat something sweet but don't, or because you would like to play Playstation but don't. There is simply a secret surrounding fasting - and you can only discover it if you try it out - exciting, isn't it?
- ♦ Fasting is not just about what I don't want to do, but what I do want to do. Spend time with my friends? Invite someone to ICF? Read the Bible? Playing worship songs, praying, discovering nature with Jesus, etc.?
- ♦ We as parents fast because we want to plead our case with God and show Him that we are serious about Him. Or because I trust God, because it is written in the Bible as a good thing to do, or because I have already experienced that it was good, (insert your own experience here).
- ♦ Explain to your children that fasting is as natural as tithing and keeping the Sabbath. You will see how much they already understand.

FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN (UP TO APPROX. 5 YEARS)

Communicate as much about fasting to your children as they can already understand and involve them creatively. Maybe it's appropriate for you to do a Daniel fast as a family, or have your children fast (favourite) sweets. Think about how the fast, i.e. the abstinence, could become interesting and exciting for your children by spending special moments together during this time (like spending more quality time together with undivided attention).

Consider: if the child leaves something out at just one meal (e.g. the beloved Parmesan cheese with pasta) because he or she is fasting, it is already a success! We are role models for our children - give your child the freedom to decide for himself/herself to fast, such as the parmesan that is skipped.

FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL CHILDREN (APPROX. 5 TO 14 YEARS)

- After you have studied the fasting booklet as parents, discuss as a family how you can implement Lent in your family and what is your heartbeat behind it.
- If your children must eat, make it as easy on yourself as possible (see above).
- Discuss with your children whether it is appropriate to fast on sweets, meat or cold cuts (or another favourite food). There should be an element of sacrifice for the children.
- It can also be a fast from a certain favourite programme, PC game, radio play, toy, WhatsApp, etc. There are no limits to your creativity.
- Use the time that becomes available by fasting (e.g. by not having to cook) to pray as a family, to read the (children's) Bible or to worship together. Involve your children and let them also create such moments where you consciously spend time together with God.
- What motivates children to fast in the first place? What is their goal? Is there an issue in their life, a friend who doesn't know Jesus, a challenge, a yearning for something to happen? Of course, fasting is more than just sticking up for a theme.

FAMILIES WITH TEENAGE CHILDREN (APPROX. 14 TO ADULT)

- Read the fasting booklet and consider together as a family what you want to fast for and what you want to consciously do without.
- Set a timeframe for fasting and let everyone decide what and how to fast (note that without parental consent young people should not completely abstain from food to prevent eating disorders). Social media or other media fasting can be just as effective as food fasting.
- Prayerfully prepare for fasting and let the Holy Spirit and His creativity inspire you to bring life into this spiritual discipline and so grow in faith together.

- ◆ Consider reading a Bible reading plan or book together as a family, doing devotions together, or participating in the mid-day prayer. There are no limits to creativity. Use this special time of fasting together to create a spiritual and family bond and so nurture the vision for fasting in the family.

— MORE FASTING IDEAS:

- ◆ Temporarily reduce toys, together with the children.
- ◆ Refrain from media consumption
- ◆ Perceive more with the senses (eye/ear/hand), focus on one sensory organ every day.
- ◆ Do more to help out (e.g. clean the car, the bike or muck out the pet's cage).
- ◆ Consciously decide to spend more time together as a family (parents as well as children).
- ◆ Children can draw a fasting picture every day - similar to an Advent calendar, in which the days are made visible, how long the fasting will still last or how many days are already past.
- ◆ Stop using your mobile phone (mobile phone ban for parents with smaller children) for a certain period of time.
- ◆ Don't just think about what we do not do, but also especially: what do we do together instead?