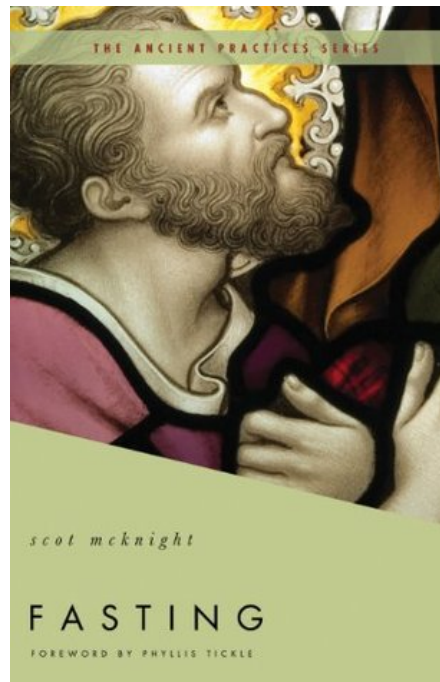




Fasting: The Ancient Practices

Scot McKnight

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Fasting: The Ancient Practices Scot McKnight

Building a body and mind that hungers for God.

Is the practice of faith centered solely on the spirit? Is the body an enemy, or can it actually play a role in our pursuit of God? In this installment of the *Ancient Practices Series*, Dr. Scot McKnight reconnects the spiritual and the physical through the discipline of fasting.

The act of fasting, he says, should not be focused on results or used as a manipulative tool. It is a practice to be used in response to sacred moments, just as it has in the lives of God's people throughout history. McKnight gives us scriptural accounts of fasting, along with practical wisdom on benefits and pitfalls, when we should fast, and what happens to our bodies as a result.

For those who have wondered how to grasp the value of this most misunderstood ancient practice, this book is a comprehensive guide.

Fasting: The Ancient Practices Details

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From Reader Review Fasting: The Ancient Practices for online ebook

Adam Shields says

My full review is at <http://bookwi.se/fasting-by-scot-mckn...>

Short version review: This is a very good book. I think the best of the three Ancient Practices books I have read. It is enough background and history to understand fasting while still being personal and relevant to fasting today.

The majority of the book was really about how not to fast (bad motivation, bad theology, bad health, etc.). I have read or started a few books on fasting in the last week or so and the main addition of this book was the focus on motivation. McKnight says that "fasting should always be the natural result to a grievous sacred moment." Something that draws us to fasting, not because of what we can learn or what we can get but something that causes us to fast because we don't have any other thing we can do.

Marcus Lynn says

Scot McKnight's "Fasting" is one of eight volumes in the Ancient Practices series. I haven't read any of the other books in the series but if Fasting is anything like the others than I look forward to reading them. McKnight does an impressive job framing the spiritual discipline of fasting within the deeper tradition of Christianity and Judaism. His insight into its history, purpose, and practice is the most helpful work on the subject I have come across. The only thing I was hoping to find in this work was some practical tidbits to begin fasting and maybe more specific discussion on his own failures and success in this practice.

McKnight clearly articulates fasting as "a person's whole-body, natural response to life's sacred moments." By wedding the body to fasting, he demonstrates how "fasting is natural. Fasting is the body talking what the spirit yearns, what the soul longs for, and what the mind knows to be true." To do that he clarifies the biblical view of the body against what 21st century Americans have seen the body as "beaker for the soul."

By tying fasting to the larger Judeo-Christian tradition, McKnight plumbs the depths to which followers of God have fasted, not for utilitarian purposes but simply in response to the various kinds of grievous sacred moments in life, such as the recognition of sin, death, impending disaster, the impoverishment of others, the sacred presence of God, and the absence of justice, peace, and love.

If you're looking for the theological/biblical underpinning to fasting than this is a must-read.

Charissa Howe says

Highly recommend this book!

One of the book reviewing sites I'm working with is Booksneeze and today's review is a book I received from them. I was given a copy of the book to review, but am under no obligation to review it favorably.

Fasting by Scott McKnight

This book is a part of the Ancient Practices Series that the Sabbath book I reviewed comes from. I enjoyed and was convicted by that one and with Lent on the way, this was a great one to sign on for. McKnight's book talks about the discipline of fasting, the history of it, the reasons for it and gives examples of different types of fasting. He breaks down how fasting relates to different aspects of our being in a logical and sensible way.

I've read a great deal about spiritual disciplines, but have, for a variety of terrible reasons, avoided delving much into the world of fasting. I've not even read up on it much, to be honest, lest I be convicted to make it fit. I'm not a food addict, but I'm an American. We don't like anything that even looks remotely like inconvenience and fasting looks terribly inconvenient. For about 5 or so years, I was constantly pregnant or nursing, and that was my excuse. Then I started training for marathons, and nutrition is important and that's been my recent excuse. Before that, the most fasting I had done was for the 30 Hour Famine.

McKnight isn't just talking about the giving up of chocolate or facebook or alcohol that so many folks do at Lent. While he doesn't have a problem with discipline abstinence of certain distractions, he is clear that when the Bible talks about fasting, it means not eating and sometimes it even means not drinking. Knowing that there are many folks who tout fasting as the healthy thing to do and others complain that it's not healthy at all, he spends the entire last chapter talking about fasting and the body. He also reiterates time and time again that we must not fast for results, but rather as a response to a sacred moment in life. Fasting is not primarily a way to add power to our prayer. It is an act of reverence.

This book has certainly opened my eyes about the importance of the practice of fasting and has convicted me to make a careful effort to add the practice to my life and to beware that I'm fasting with the right motives. I highly recommend this book to all my Christian friends and family, especially those of you who, like me, haven't really taken fasting seriously in the past. And even if you have, this may give you an interesting new perspective on it.

My full review can be found here: <http://www.thesquirrelfactor.com/2011...>

Patrick Willis says

I must admit first off that I truly admire Scot McKnight and all that he's done to teach Bible and theology. One of my all time favorite books was "The Jesus Creed." In addition to content, his writing style is very easy to follow and conversational, and this book on fasting was no different. The most memorable part of his presentation of this discipline is how he defines fasting. The definition that he gives is "fasting is the natural, inevitable response of a person to a grievous sacred moment." He explains that for many Christians today, our focus has been on the wrong thing when it comes to fasting. He illustrates his point with the A->B->C model. A= sacred moment; B= Fasting; and C= Results. For many Christians today, and I would add for every other book on fasting that I've read so far in my life, the focus has been solely on the B->C connection. In other words, we fast TO GET something. McKnight argues that this mindset is flawed, [arguably] unbiblical, and risky. It's flawed and unbiblical because the examples proved throughout Scripture, always come about as a response to some situation that they are faced with (i.e. Jonah 3.4-10). It's also risky because there are some times when the results we are fasting for don't come. If fasting is only done to get something, and then we don't get it, how discouraging and damaging might that be for a person's continue discipline of fasting. Instead by focusing on the A->B relationship, all of those issues disappear.

In connection with other teachings from Jesus, as Christians if we are truly seeking God's Kingdom first and

we pray and truly desire for God's will to be done here on earth as in heaven, then when we look around and see just how far things are from that reality, we should experience a 'grievous, sacred moment.' Since we are beings comprised of BOTH inner and outer parts (soul/spirit and body), the grieving practice is not 'complete' without both parts participating. Thus our inner selves feel sorrow, frustration, and longing for God's Kingdom to come, while our outer selves grieves through the discipline of fasting. I agree with McKnight that for some reason many Christians today have tried to separate and divide the human being into two, separate things. Some even go as far as to say the whole person is really just the inner part and the body is just a shell (which sounds dangerously close to Gnosticism to me). In reality the two parts of part of a whole, and both are needed for the whole person to be whole.

Overall, I highly recommend this book. I read it in two days, so it's not that difficult of a commitment to read. It certainly is going to be my 'go-to' whenever someone asks me about fasting!

Steve says

Fasting isn't a popular spiritual discipline. It's not the sort of thing people get excited about: feasting, yes; but fasting, no. Particularly at this time of year!

This excellent book by Scot McKnight, part of The Ancient Practices Series under the general editorship of Phyllis Tickle, takes a fresh look at fasting.

Is fasting a form of trying to twist God's arm? Is it a way of showing God how serious we are? No.

McKnight stresses that fasting isn't a manipulative tool that guarantees results. Indeed results are not important. This approach is refreshingly contrary to many other books on fasting that focus on the benefits and rewards of fasting. McKnight rightly stress that fasting is a response - a response to a grievous 'sacred moment'. These moments include death, grief, impending or actual disaster, the absence of justice, a lack of holiness and so on.

The book is in two main parts: Spirituality and fasting and Wisdom and fasting. The first looks at different aspects of fasting as ... the second at fasting and... . He notes that fasting is not something we should do lightly as it is potentially damaging to the body. The first part looks at the theology of fasting and the second the practice of fasting.

For many fasting is a way of denying the body so they can focus on the so-called 'spiritual'; it is for many an outworking of a nature/ grace dualism. However, McKnight contends that that fasting is not popular because we have exiled the body from spirituality. He is wanting an embodied form of spirituality. A spirit/ body dualism has denied the body and so fasting, a bodily function, has been ignored. Rather than denying the body, the kind of fasting that McKnight stresses is one that embraces the body.

There is a brief study guide and a list of recommended reading.

This is certainly the best book I've read on fasting.

Taylor says

Prayer has a bundle of natural companions -- like prayer and kneeling, prayer and pleading, prayer and pondering, prayer and struggling, prayer and praising -- and prayer and fasting.

Sometimes it is necessary to check the delight of the flesh in respect to licit pleasures in order to keep it from

yielding to illicit joys. -Augustine

Fasting helps us to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves, to attain the Kingdom of God. -Andrew Murray

Fasting was no longer a constraint and penance for me, but a joy and need of body and soul. I practiced it spontaneously because I loved it. -Adalbert de Vogue

They were hungry enough for God's leading that they wanted to say it with the hunger of their bodies and not just the hunger of their hearts. -Piper about the early church

Wrong body image:

- a monster to be conquered
- a celebrity to be glorified
- a cornucopia to be filled
- a wallflower to be ignored

Fasting is the body talking what the spirit yearns, what the soul longs for, and what the mind knows to be true.

Fasting is about pathos, taking on the emotions of God in a given event.

The wisdom of the ages is that sensitive people fast to communicate with God during dry days.

Body grief is perhaps the purest example of what fasting is all about: a human being, overwhelmed by the sacredness of a moment, chooses not to eat in order to sanctify his or her communion with God and participate fully in one of life's grievous moments.

To love fasting is just that -- to delight in a life regulated by sacred rhythms and fasting.

It is as if the man who fasts were more himself, in possession of his true identity, and less dependent on exterior objects and the impulses they arouse in him.

Paul is an advocate for a total person (body and soul) battling with desire in order to "present your members to God" (Rom 6:13).

Fasting, one might say, is the faithful person's pathos for and with the poor -- fasting embodies God's disposition to the poor. Fasting, then, is body poverty in response to injustice in our world.

There are two companions to fasting, according to Isaiah 58. The first is that fasting be converted into justice and solidarity with others. The second is that fasting leads to holiness.

So I would say that a more complete view of fasting suggests that it is the combination of our yearning to know God and our present state of not knowing God intimately enough that prompts the person to fast with the hope of encountering God.

John the Baptist was well known for his fasting . . . He couldn't get settled into this world until God's will was more firmly established.

The Christian era is an age of fasting and feasting, of holding the tension of unfinished business, while confessing in faith to the outcome.

Christ has come -- we can feast.

Christ is yet to come -- we should fast.

The inflammation of things we will [supposedly] get from fasting is what I call benefit-itis.

[Fasting] is a safeguard of a soul, a stabilizing companion to the body, a weapon for the brave, a discipline for champions. Fasting knocks over temptations, anoints for godliness. She is a companion for sobriety, the crafter of a sound mind. In wars she fights bravely, in peace she teaches tranquility. -Basil

Half of Christian fasting is that our physical appetite is lost because of our homesickness for God is so intense. The other half is that our homesickness for God is threatened because our physical appetites are so intense. -Piper

More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. -Richard Foster

Bookworm1858 says

Fasting by Scot McKnight
Thomas Nelson, 2009
132 pages
Inspirational; Non-fiction
4/5 stars

Source: Received as a free ebook from booksneeze in exchange for an honest review.

I wanted to read this because I've been thinking about my relationship with food lately and because I didn't know much about fasting, biblically and in more modern times. I was hoping to learn a lot more through reading this book--and I did!

First McKnight outlines why we fast. There are two main reasons; one is in response to a grievous spiritual moment such as a recognition of our own sin or death of a family member. The other main reason is through scheduled weekly fasting. Early Christians generally fasted on Wednesday and Friday to distinguish themselves from Jews fasting on Monday and Thursday. The most important point is to not fast in order to get something from God--that is exactly the wrong mindset to have. The idea of weekly fasts really intrigues and I'm thinking of implementing that this year.

Another point McKnight makes is about how many Westerners experience a disconnect between body and soul which hinders them when practicing this spiritual discipline. Oftentimes the body is considered unimportant and thus fasting is not practiced. This is wrong, argues McKnight; we need to bring the body and soul together, something that fasting can do.

Of course, fasting can also be dangerous and McKnight includes a chapter about the health risks excessive fasting can impose. It might be wise to fast from breakfast to dinner, which is how I'm going to start, rather than just jump into long-term fasting. That would be dangerous to your health! If there are any health concerns, a doctor should be consulted.

Overall: An intriguing and illuminating look at the ancient practice of fasting: how it was practiced and how we might practice fasting now. I want to incorporate fasting in to my spiritual journey.

Cover: I'm not a big fan of the picture; I chose the book solely based on the concept.

Scott Jeffries says

Scot McKnight always has a way of deconstructing a difficult and sometimes foreign topic so that, at the very least, the reader is forced to think and discover answers for themselves. In *Fasting: The Ancient Practices*, McKnight takes a spiritual practice as old as the Bible and removes some of the mystery surrounding it so that one knows the Biblical purpose behind the practice.

McKnight makes the case that the Biblical purpose of fasting was to be a "spiritual response to a sacred moment." He details examples that show that where fasting is found in the Bible it is always surrounding a sacred moment. This was truly eye opening for me. You see, I run marathons and am familiar with the mind set of, "I would like to challenge myself to see if I can do this hard thing." I think many people approach fasting in the same way. They want to show that they are serious about this religion thing and desire to hang their hat on being able to say I did this hard thing for Jesus. I admit that I have been guilty of this. But what McKnight shows us is that fasting is not a spiritual challenge to test our religious mettle but an opportunity for our body to participate in the stuff of the spiritual.

As I was reading this book, I was faced with several difficult challenges that left me burdened. I started to see these challenges as sacred moments where I needed God deeply. Fasting during this time was an obvious and beneficial practice that lightened my burdens and instilled a sense of God's presence throughout the ordeal.

Lucy G. DE Llaguno says

Somos unidad cuerpo alma espíritu emociones pasiones por eso también "hacemos espiritualidad con el cuerpo". ¿Por que el empeño inútil por separarnos de nosotros mismos? Nos quiebra.

Ayuno es una respuesta del cuerpo ante el dolor. Me recuerda la sencilla experiencia de no comer cuando estoy triste. Simplemente no tengo hambre. No es un sacrificio es solo respuesta. Y en esa respuesta quizá y solo quizá encuentre otra respuesta que invite a la transformación.

Rocky Woolery says

Very good insights on the spiritual practice of fasting. I especially like the definition McKnight gives to fasting, "Fasting is the natural, inevitable response of a person to a grievous sacred moment in life." It was also good to see that he says that fasting is not about what I can get from God, rather a response to who God is.

Seth Comfort says

I just finished reading Scot McKnight's book *Fasting*, this book is one of the eight books in the *Ancient Practices Series* and I thought it was excellent. Editor Phyllis Tickle warns in her forward that this book is

not a book for the cowardly, instead it is for the courageous Christian who seeks to more fully understand and serve God. I think that is an appropriate warning.

Scot starts off his book talking about fasting through different Christian voice through history. He talks about how fasting for King David, and everyone in the Bible, was a whole-body experience. He also talks about the prophet Isaiah and his warning to Israel reminding them that fasting isn't about us, what we give up when we fast should be given to others. He also quotes John Calvin, "whenever men are to pray to God concerning any great matter, it would be expedient to appoint fasting along with prayer. Their sole purpose in this kind of fasting is to render themselves more eager and unencumbered for prayer...with a full stomach our mind is not so lifted up to God." He also points to recent reminders of fasting from authors such as Dallas Willard and John Piper.

Scot then goes on to give his definition of fasting: Fasting is the natural, inevitable response of a person to a grievous sacred moment in life.

He really unpacks this definition with the analogy that A -> B -> C, so A (sacred moment) leads us to B (fasting) that leads us to C (results). He explains that often times we try to get the results that we want from fasting and jump to B -> C, but reminds the reader that the Bible presents a responsive view of fasting. I fully agree with him about this statement, often times we try to use fasting as an instrument for results rather than a response to God.

Scot then goes on to unpack the different forms of fasting. He really drives home his point that fasting is a whole-body experience, he explains that the Western mind tries to separate the body and spirit, we have a spiritual life and we have our regular life. The soul and the body are separate, the soul is spiritual and the body is of this world, which is why it is so difficult for us to see the importance in fasting, because that has a direct impact on the body, we don't see how it ties into our spiritual side. Scot talks about our body image and does a great job of reminding us that we are created in the image of God!

In the next section of the book, McKnight unpacks the different types of fasting. He starts with Body Turning, the most common form of fasting is in response to the kind of sacred moment when Israel is called to confess sin.

Body Plea, in the Bible, pleas and supplications and prayers were accompanied by the embodied act of fasting.

Body Grief, overwhelmed by the sacredness of a moment we choose not to eat in order to sanctify our communion with God and participate fully in one of life's grievous moments.

Body Discipline, the scheduled practice of fasting

Body Calendar, vital fasts that respond properly to the story of God's redemptive ways that are observed in the church calendar.

Body Poverty, response to injustice in our world.

Body Contact, fasting to experience intimacies with God

Body Hope, fasting because of the hope of Christ's return

Scot finishes the book up with a section called Wisdom and Fasting, he unpacks the benefits of fasting such as making room for God, but also gives a warning about fasting in terms of health and extremes.

All in all, I really enjoyed this book. I have been interested in the topic of fasting and curious to why it has fallen by the wayside in our present day. Scot does a great job of unpacking fasting and all the benefits of returning to this ancient practice. I would highly recommend this book.

Lance says

I'm not an Anabaptist as McKnight is, but I thought to pick up this little tome to see a different perspective on a basic practice of my own faith. And I was really impressed.

Don't get me wrong. McKnight and I don't agree on everything. And I'm not completely buying everything McKnight says about fasting. But he said enough that made me challenge what I believe that I re-examined my own faith and found that some things I didn't think that I believe I actually do believe.

The biggest example revolves around McKnight's main idea. Many fast with the intention of receiving something. McKnight argues that fasting should be a natural response to what McKnight calls "grievous sacred moments." These moments include sins (ours & others), moral disasters, severe sickness (ours & others), death, grief, a consciousness of our own weakness & need for God, and a lack of justice in the community. I would simply call those moments trigger events.

In McKnight's view, fasting is not the point of spirituality; spirituality is the point of fasting. He quotes extensively from the Bible to show how fasting was practiced anciently as a response. That case convinced me to examine my own faith and my own scriptures. And I found that in some cases fasting was an expression to secure something from God and in many, many more cases as the natural response to a trigger event.

I also enjoyed McKnight's perspective of fasting as a holistic experience. It's more than just the interplay between the spirit and the body. Fasting also involves the heart and the mind. And that holistic experience is more accessible when fasting is seen as a response rather than a request for divine intervention.

Again, I don't agree with everything McKnight propounds. But I highly recommend his book. It helped me to re-examine my own faith, and I feel that I am now more grounded than I was previously.

Laura says

Fasting, written by Scot McKnight, analyzes Christians' view of the body and the role of fasting in a person's spiritual walk. According to McKnight, when the body, soul, spirit, and heart come together in unity, fasting is a natural response to a relationship with God. Throughout the book, McKnight shares a formula for fasting: A—a grievous, sacred moment; B—fasting; C—results. Many Christians believe that if they will fast, God will answer them in a certain way. McKnight argues that fasting for a result becomes a "manipulative device instead of a genuine, Christian discipline" (page xxi). Instead, it is the other way around. When a person goes through a sacred moment, the only response is fasting. These sacred moments can be a physical need, a realization of sin, or just the desire to grow closer to God.

Throughout the book, McKnight backs up his ideas with scripture, logic, and words from other Biblical scholars. I found the book to be thought-provoking. Most of the book was devoted to spiritual ramifications of fasting, but it was valuable that physical consequences and warnings were examined as well. While fasting is an important part of a Christian's walk, it should not be done to an extreme that may cause death. The overall theme that fasting is a natural response, demonstrating a person's hunger for more of Jesus is a powerful message for Christians who are often hungrier for the things of the world than the savior of the world.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher through the BookSneeze®.com book review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Bryan Neuschwander says

Here is, I think, the strength of the book: "Fasting along with our prayer requests is not some kind of magic bullet to ensure the answer we want. Fasting doesn't reinforce the crumbling walls of our prayers like a flying buttress, nor is it a manipulative device. We fast because a condition arises--what we are calling the sacred moment--that leads us to desire something deeply. We fast because our plea is so intense that in the midst of our sacred desire eating seems sacrilegious" (49).

I'm glad, however, that others have found the book helpful. Personally, I'd recommend Willard's *Spirit of the Disciplines*, Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, or even Piper's *Hungering for God* over this title.

John says

McKnight's book on fasting is a very practical step by step take on the sacred practice. It is very easy to read and understand. McKnight does a great job at bringing the Ancient Voices to light each step of the way while also illuminating contemporary concerns. I read this while I am doing a 21 day abstinence/fast. It helped a lot with my focus and warning me of my own pious weaknesses. I enjoyed the book. IT is a helpful resource for Christians and others to understand religious motivations and practices.
