

Why fast?

In the Bible, prayer and fasting go together. However, in our day, many neglect fasting altogether. John Wesley said, "Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason, and others have utterly disregarded it." In our culture, dotted with golden arches and pizza palaces, fasting seems out of place. In fact, little is said about fasting these days in our churches, even though in Scripture it is assumed to be a part of the Christian's life.

Throughout history God's people have made fasting part of their worship and prayer. Fasting is God's way of helping us take our focus off of the physical and on to the spiritual. Through fasting we can experience spiritual breakthroughs that will come in no other way.

What is fasting?

"To fast" means primarily "not to eat" - biblical fasting centers on spiritual purposes. There are many ways to fast. A more thorough definition might be: "The fast is an act of the will through which an individual Christian exerts spiritual control over the flesh (through not eating) with a view to a more personal and powerful experience with God in prayer."

Is fasting for today?

In Matthew 6:16, Jesus said, "When you fast..." He seems to make the assumption that fasting is a normal part of the Christian life. He doesn't say, "You must fast" or "If you fast," simply "When you fast." In Matthew 9:15 Jesus says, "The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then they will fast." This is perhaps the most important word about fasting for our day. When Jesus was here on earth the Kingdom of God had come. It was a time for feasting, not fasting. There would come a time for His disciples to fast, but not in the legalistic way of that time. The most natural interpretation of the days when Jesus' disciples would fast is in the present Church age. In fact, this is how the disciples understood Him as well because it was only after His ascension to the Father that we read of them fasting (Acts 13:2). It is this age of the Church to which our Master referred when He said, "Then they will fast." That time is now.

Prayer & Fasting Guide

God has given us the privilege of prayer so that we may know Him and know His will for our lives. He knows that we are unable to follow His path in the world apart from His power. It is through prayer that He is able to speak to us and hold us close to Him so that we might accomplish His will daily.



Schedule example:

MORNING: Begin the day with prayer and fasting. Read and meditate on God's Word, preferably on your knees. Invite God's Spirit to fill you with His presence. Let Him know that all you desire in life is His good pleasure. Pray for vision for your life, your church, country, and beyond.

NOON: Return to prayer and God's Word. Take a short prayer walk. Spend time in intercessory prayer for our church, our country and our world. Pray for our church staff. Pray for the lost people you know.

EVENING: Seek a quiet place alone with the Lord. If others are fasting, join them in prayer. If you are married, pray with your spouse for God's will to be done in your marriage and in your family. Pray that God alone would be your one desire.



Remember to focus completely on God and use this time to enjoy His presence. Outwardly you may be doing the same things you would normally do, but inwardly you are rejoicing and praising God that He is your sustenance. You will be surprised at how fasting will draw your attention to God. As you step out in faith and try it, you'll learn how to grow in prayer and fasting. Surrender your will to Him.



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Why pray?

We pray because Jesus told us to pray. We pray because Jesus, Himself, prayed. We pray as a church because it is impossible for the Body of Christ to know His will and have the power to accomplish it apart from prayer.

None of us would expect to maintain a close relationship with a wife, husband or friend if we never spoke with that person. How much more important it is to seek to be near the One who made us and whose will we desire to accomplish.

Is fasting biblical?

When you look at a list of those who fasted in the Bible, it looks like a "Who's Who" among biblical heroes of faith: Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, Anna, Paul, and Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son. Many well-known Christians of great influence fasted. Among them were Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. We find fasting in the Old and New Testaments usually refers to abstaining from all food but not from water. There are references to partial fasts, such as, in Daniel 10:3, when he refused certain foods for a period of time. There is also reference to the absolute fast, or abstaining from both food and water. It is sobering to realize that the very first mention Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive (Matthew 6:16-18). To use good things to our own ends is always the sign of false religion.

In most cases fasting is a private matter, but on special occasions people may be called to a corporate or public fast (Lev.23:27, Joel 2:15, 2 Chron. 20:1-4, Ezra 8:21-23). The group fast is a wonderful way for God's people to prepare themselves to be of one mind and one heart to accomplish His will. Fasting is certainly biblical. The question many Christians need to ask is not, "Is this a part of my background?" or "Has this been the normal practice in my Christian experience?" Instead it is, "What does the Bible teach?"

How do you fast?

There are many ways to fast. Fasting should always be a response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, not a current fad and certainly not to please others or to meet a goal. After correct biblical teaching on fasting, each person needs to come before God and seek His face. Remember, the purpose of fasting is to give up in order to focus more on God in prayer. Several types of fasting are appropriate:

- * **MEDIA FAST:** Many of our families would do well to give up television altogether for a period of time. Don't go to movies or read the newspaper or internet.
- * **PARTIAL FAST:** Refrain from certain types of food such as soft drinks, coffee, sweets, desserts, and eat only fruits or vegetables. A partial fast can also include a liquid diet during which time the individual drinks only fruit drinks and water. A partial fast could also mean that you have only water.
- * **ABSOLUTE FAST:** During an absolute fast the person has no food or water.
- * **OTHER FASTS:** Any activity that takes time and keeps you from having time to focus on God in prayer can be sacrificed for Him. Some people are addicted to exercise and need to give that up in order to devote that time to God. Some have a habit of going to certain restaurants or shops. Sometimes God calls us to give up sleep in order to pray. Focus on prayer during the time you would ordinarily spend with these activities.

What is your physical condition?

There are some people who cannot fast because of health reasons. A diabetic person should try another form of fasting. A person who takes certain medicines should consult a physician if there are any questions. Young children should enter into a media fast instead of a fast that involves food. Older children should be guided by their parents. Any healthy adult can fast. What we call "hunger" is really appetite. We have been taught to clean our plates and if we miss three square meals a day with snacks in between, we'll "starve". The healthy body can go long periods of time without solid food. However, liquids - water and fruit juices - should be available.

Fasting can actually be beneficial to your health. Prepare for the fast by eating smaller meals than usual. During the fast you will feel hunger pangs after half a day or so, but this is not real hunger. Your stomach has been trained through years of conditioning to give signals of hunger at certain hours. Your stomach is like a spoiled child and does not need indulgence but discipline. You are to be master of your stomach, not its slave. If you drink coffee, tea, or drink soft drinks, you may experience headaches and need to slowly move toward a complete fast that could require days of preparation as you move away from caffeine. During the fast you may experience weakness. Simply rest and pray, and you will be fine. End your fast with a light meal of fruits and vegetables, and then you can eat more as you go.

What is your spiritual condition?

This is the most critical question of the fast. Preparation for a meaningful fast begins with repentance and confession. Do not expect God to violate His own stated will concerning the prayers He will hear. If you have unconfessed sin in your heart, you must confess it. (Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 59:2)

- ***CONFESS** every sin that the Holy Spirit brings to your attention.
- ***SEEK** forgiveness from all whom you have offended and forgive all who have hurt you. (Mark 11:25, Luke 11:4, 17:3-4)
- ***ASK** God to fill you with His Spirit so that He will be your sustainer. (Ephesians 5:18, 1 John 5:14-15, John 4:32-34)
- ***BEGIN** your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. (Hebrews 11:6)
- ***HUNGER** and thirst after righteousness. (Matthew 5:6)
- ***DO** not underestimate spiritual opposition. (Galatians 5:16-17)
- ***REMEMBER** that fasting is feasting as you "feed" on His presence and His will.

What kind of fast should I do?

24-HOUR FAST: abstain from all solid food drinking fruit/vegetable juices as well as water for one day. Eat dinner one day, then not eat solid food again until dinner the next day. You would miss two meals. Some prefer to go from lunch to lunch the next day.

36-HOUR FAST: from dinner one day to breakfast two days later. This fast usually involves some discomfort before the time is up, but the spiritual benefits can be significant.

THREE-DAY FAST: you do not eat for two whole days...eat dinner one day and then breakfast the third morning.

As you grow in your ability to fast, you can move to longer periods of time - a week, two weeks, a month, or even 40 days. Only those who have fasted for shorter periods and know how their bodies react to the process of fasting should enter into these fasts.