

Fasting and Prayer

What is Fasting?

Fasting, according to the Bible, means to voluntarily reduce or eliminate your intake of food for a specific time and purpose. Jesus expected His followers to fast, and He said that God rewards fasting:

When you give up eating, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are giving up eating. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. So when you give up eating, comb your hair and wash your face. Then people will not know that you are giving up eating, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you. Matthew 6:16-18 (NCV)

Why do a Spiritual Fast?

1. **Fasting gives you more time for prayer.** You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer and to read God's Word. It will help you understand what God wants to do in your life.

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:2-3

"Skipping meals alone will not result in a meaningful fast! You must set aside time to pray and seek spiritual insight. Dedicate at least as much time as you would normally spend in food preparation and eating for prayers and the study of God's Word." –

Ronnie W. Floyd, The Power of Prayer and Fasting

2. **Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something.** It shows that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.

Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. Joel 1:14

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Joel 2:12

3. **Fasting releases God's supernatural power.** It is a tool you can use when there is opposition to God's Will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among God's people. United prayer and fasting has always been used by God to deal a decisive blow to the enemy!

*[God says,] Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
Isaiah 58:6*

*So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and He answered our prayer.
Ezra 8:23*

Worth Remembering:

Jesus did not say “if” you fast, he said, “when” you fast.

*“When you fast, do not look somber . . .
But when you fast, put oil on your
head and wash your face . . .” from Matthew 6:16-18*

Other Purposes of Fasting

1. To focus your full attention on God.
2. To bring you into a closer relationship with Christ.
3. To reveal things in your life that are controlling you.
4. To humble yourself.
5. To remind you to seek God before making important decisions.
6. To cause you to put more faith in God.
7. To reveal how much more you need God, rather than food.
8. To emphasize that this life is not about you; it's about knowing and glorifying God.

“When a man is willing to set aside the legitimate appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, he is demonstrating that he means business, that he is seeking God with all his heart.” – Arthur Wallis

Biblical Examples of Fasting

The Bible records many instances of people fasting to prepare for a blessing!

1. Jesus fasted during his victory over temptation.

For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry. Luke 4:2 (The Message)

2. Moses fasted before he received the Ten Commandments.

So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.
Exodus 34:28 (ESV)

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3. The Israelites fasted before a miraculous victory.

Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar" . . . Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.

2 Chronicles 20:2-3

4. Daniel fasted in order to receive guidance from God.

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition. in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. . . . while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding." Daniel 9:3, 21-22

5. Nehemiah fasted before deciding to begin a major building project.

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Nehemiah 1:4

A Word of Caution

Remember that fasting is not "earning" an answer to prayer. God cannot be blackmailed by human effort. God wants to answer your prayers, and He answers out of grace.

Fasting simply prepares you for God's answer.

Temptations

As you begin to consider doing a spiritual fast, you may experience temptations. You are surrounded by "fast food" restaurants and advertisements that tout how happy and content you would be eating delicious food. Whether you feel hunger or not, seeing the displays will remind you of food!

You know that Jesus was tempted in the desert by the devil when he had been fasting for 40 days. You have already read Luke 4:2 (Jesus fasting), but here is more of the story:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone." Luke 4:1-4

Before You Start Your Fast

Ask God what He wants you to pray about while fasting. Is it praying about a very important decision you need to make, or is it releasing to God an unsaved child/ spouse, a worried heart, a divorce, an illness, a painful situation, a new job, a move, a financial burden, an addiction, etc.? Whatever your specific situation is, God's purpose for you to fast and pray is for you to focus on Him, laying your burdens down at His feet.

During your fast, you will spend more time with God than you did previously. Expect changes to take place in your heart and life as you get closer to God.

Fasting is as important as any of the other spiritual habits that believers should incorporate into their lives. It will help you have a closer relationship with God. It also helps with self-control by denying yourself something you desire, such as food.

Practical Guidelines

1. Before you start fasting, pray and ask for God's direction and guidance to see if He is leading you to begin a fast.
2. If you have health problems, or are unsure, call your doctor for medical advice. 3. If you are pregnant or nursing a baby, do not fast.
4. Write down specific prayer requests and thanksgivings related to your fast. (But remember: Fasting is not done as an attempt to get something from God, only to submit to His Will.)
5. Expect to be blessed by God as you fast, pray, and honor Him.
6. Decrease the frequency of your meals and the portions of your food two days prior to fasting. Don't aim at "storing up" by overeating before a fast.
7. The day before you start your fast, eat raw vegetables and fresh fruits. 8. If fasting on your own, don't boast about it! It is between God and you.
9. Set aside time to pray and enjoy God's presence. He is the sole focus of your fast.

Read the Word of God and keep a journal to write your conversations with Him.

10. While on a fast, drink lots of water.

11. While fasting, continue your regular activities, but this is not a good time to start any new strenuous exercise.

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12. Agree with God when He brings attention to sins in your life. ("Confess" means to agree with God.)

13. If you are completing an extended fast, break your fast gently by eating some fruits. Remember, do not overeat after a fast!

Some Tips from Dr. Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ)

There are many types of fasts. The option you choose depends upon your health, the desired length of your fast, and your personal preference:

A Water Fast - means to abstain from all food and juices

A Partial Fast - means to eliminate certain foods or specific meals

A Juice Fast – means to drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times

For example, if you are beginning an extended juice fast, you may find the following schedule helpful:

5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed, blended, or diluted in 50 percent water.
(Apple, pear, papaya, grape, and peach are best. Avoid orange juice.)

10:30 a.m. - noon

Vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts. (Avoid tomato juice.)

2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Decaffeinated herbal tea with a drop of honey.

6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Broth from boiled potatoes, celery, and carrots (no salt).

Fasting From Worldly Distractions to Feast on the Lord

"Fasting is not confined to abstinence from eating and drinking. Fasting really means voluntary abstinence for a time from the various necessities of life, such as food, drink, sleep, rest, association with people and so forth. The purpose ...is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may

concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things.” – Ole Hallesby, *Prayer*

What are you preoccupied with in your life? What distraction keeps you from spending time with God? Put a check mark by one or more.

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Is it your...

- Internet/ email/social media
- Shopping
- Gossiping
- Cell phone/text messaging
- Exercising
- Movies
- Television
- Music
- Decorating
- Entertaining
- Spending money
- Sports
- Traveling
- Sweets/soda

Whatever the distraction is in your life, recognize and identify what it is, and how much time you spend on it. Be honest with yourself. Commit to set aside a certain amount of time that you usually spend on your very own distractions, and instead spend that time with God, reading the Scripture and praying. Spend time at the foot of the throne of God. It will be a life-changing experience as you fast from food or other worldly distractions and instead feast on the Lord.

Call to Action

Prayer: Ask God if He is leading you to fast for a specific reason. Pray that He will remove all the excuses and fears you have about getting started. With a repentant heart, confess your sins and ask for forgiveness. Ask God to point out character flaws that you are not aware of. Humbly thank Him when He tells you the truth about you, because it will change your heart, your mind, and your life. Pray that God will give you the strength and endurance to complete a fast.

Circle one or two of the Action Steps below that you will take:

1. Identify and make a list of the greatest obstacles in your life that keep you from fasting.
2. This week, fast from _____, and set aside ____ hours and/or ____ minutes to

spend time praying.

3. Ask _____ to be your accountability partner regarding fasting.
4. Ask _____ to fast and pray with you about something specific.
5. Start a Fasting Journal with your prayer requests and prayers of thanksgiving.

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Great Resources

The Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard (San Francisco: Harper) 1999. Willard deals with methods for a spiritual life. He states that we can become like Christ in character and in power and then realize our highest ideals of well-being and well-doing. He reminds us that the heart of the New Testament message is to become like Christ. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard J. Foster (San Francisco: Harper) 2003. Foster gives many examples demonstrating how spiritual disciplines can become part of our daily activities-how they can help us shed our superficial habits and "bring in the abundance of God into our lives." He offers new crucial insights on simplicity, demonstrating how the biblical view of simplicity, properly understood and applied, brings joy and balance to our inward and outward lives and "sets us free to enjoy the provision of God as a gift that can be shared with others."

The Power of Prayer and Fasting by Ronnie W. Floyd (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers) 1997.

This is a practical, step-by-step guidance for those who may feel led to observe a one-day, three-day, seven-day, or forty-day period of prayer and fasting-preparing for the fast, recording insights, coping with physical insights and discomfort, and more.

