

FASTING

Definition - A voluntary abstinence from food; either total or partial.

I know many people today fast different things such as technology, social media, entertainment, and other things such as this, but the biblical reality is that fasting refers to food. I don't believe those other things are wrong too fast. Anything that is Potentially a hindrance in our spiritual walk should be kept in its rightful place and not control our lives.

Probably why fasting pertains to food is because food is built around everything we do in society to a point. We must have it to live of course, but when compared to God, he is to be more important than even the food we eat. In other words, we need him even more than we need food when it comes to our spiritual life.

Some Background about Fasting

Why the idea of fasting seems strange today?

- It was associated with medieval Christianity.
- Confined to those believers who tend to be a little extreme or fanatical.
- Many simply saw it as simply starving oneself.
- Many viewed it as being harmful to your health.

Reasons that fasting was ignored:

- The denial of the body of physical comforts – we don't like that!
- Extremist who would not only go without food but would torture their bodies
- Ex. Wearing a hairshirt; Wearing a spiked girdle.

These extreme practices associated with fasting led to the very opposite extreme which was not fasting at all.

People in Bible Known for Fasting

- Moses
- David
- Elijah
- Esther
- Jesus
- Jesus' Disciples
- Early Church
- Apostle Paul

Fasting Today

Is fasting for today?

- Did the practice of fasting only apply to the early church or can we apply it today?
- Is there any reason or purpose why we as individuals and as a body of believers need to fast in these days that we live in?

Look at Matthew 6

Read vv. 3, 6, 16

It does not say “if” but “**when**” you fast.

- Do we need to give to the needy today?
- Do we need to pray today?
- We have not discontinued our giving nor our praying in the church today.
- Neither should we discontinue fasting in the church today.
- Note again what Jesus said, “not if, but when.”

What is Fasting?

Hungering for God more than for food.

- The desire to draw closer to God and do God’s will is greater than your desire to eat.
- Desire for spiritual food more than physical food.

Examples

Genesis 24 – Story of Isaac and Rebekah – note vs. 33

- Abraham send’s his servant on a mission to find a wife for his son Issac.
- Servant met Rebekah at the well.
- Servant went to Rebekah’s father’s house
- Food was set before him
- Said he would not eat until he told them what his master has sent him to do.
- Servant loved Abraham, his master.
- Servant desired to accomplish his master’s will before he would even eat.

John 4 – Jesus and woman at the well

- Jesus’ disciples had gone into town to buy some food.
- Jesus, in the meantime, was speaking to the Samaritan woman about Himself being the living water which brings eternal life.
- V. 34 – Jesus Reply: My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.
- Here again we see the servant with a greater hunger (desire) to perform His master’s will than to eat.

Job. 23:12 – “I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.”

Humbling of our will.

Psalms 35:13 KJV - But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul (will, emotions) with fasting...

A means of giving yourself fully over to God

Joel 2:12-13 KJV – “Now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God...”

What Fasting Is Not

1. Not a means of tying God's hands and forcing Him to do what we want Him to do.

- Isaiah 58:3-5

2. Fasting is not a religious ritual.

- By the time of Christ, the Pharisees had developed this practice of fasting, and had turned, as they did every other spiritual thing, into a legal bondage.
- Read how Jesus presented the typical Pharisee in Luke 18:9-12

3. Fasting is not injurious to your body.

- Doctors recommend
- The body naturally fast when sick
- Removing toxins

Benefits of Fasting

Radiance in your life that will affect those around you.

- Ex. Moses – Exodus 34:28
- Fasted 40 days and 40 nights
- Face was radiant when he came down from the mountain
- Put the fear of God into the people of Israel.
- 2 Corinthians 3:18 – we reflect the Lord's glory. We reflect God's glory when we allow the Holy Spirit to conform us into the image of Jesus.
- *Psalm 34:3 – "those who look to Him are radiant: their faces are never covered with shame."*

Receiving Direction

- Moses received direction from God while fasting to lead the people of Israel. Deuteronomy 10:11
- Jehoshaphat given direction when he proclaimed a fast for all Judah whenever the Ammonites & Moabites were going to attack him. 2 Chronicles 20
- Cornelius given direction whenever he was fasting, to send for Peter – resulted in Gentiles being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Acts 10
- Church at Antioch instructed to separate Saul & Barnabas whenever they were fasting. Acts 13

Means of Protection & Deliverance During Nations Emergencies

- Book of Esther a powerful example of how fasting was used

4. To Free the Captives

Isaiah 58:6 KJV Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

5. For Deeper Understanding of God's Word

Daniel 9:2-3 KJV *In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. (3) And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:*

True Fasting is synonymous with humility before God. It must be done with sincere motives

Three Types of Fast

Normal Fast

- abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water. Example Jesus in John 4 when talking to the Samaritan woman at the well – afterwards was hungry – did not say He was thirsty.

Absolute Fast – abstaining from drinking as well as eating.

- **Normally never done more than three days.**
- Ezra – grieved over faithlessness of the exiles. Ezra 10:6
- Esther 4:16 – Esther & Jewish people because of their desperate situations
- This fast seems to be an exceptional measure for an exceptional situation. Usually reserved for spiritual emergencies.

Partial Fast – restriction of diet rather than complete abstention.

- Example - Daniel 10:2, 3 – given a vision by God when seeking him – refused to eat any delicacies, no meat or wine. Did not say he ate nothing.

Ways to Partially Fast

- Live exclusively on one type of food for the duration of the fast – fruits, vegetables
- Omit a certain meal through the day, thus limiting the quantity of food you consume normally (Do not attempt to make up for it the next time you eat. I.E. eating enough for two meals in one)
- Good type fast to go on whenever circumstances make it difficult for you to go on a normal fast.

How long and what type of fast is right for you?

- Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit
- There is no "formula fast" that is the only "right" way. Fasting is about the condition of the heart, not the number of days.
- If you have never fasted before, start slowly. Fast for one meal a day, or one day a week.
- I personally recommend and practice water and juice fasting, especially if you are going to fast for an extended period of time. This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or water-only fasts and still lead you into the humbling experience of denying your desire for solid food that you can chew.

How to Make Your Spiritual Experience the Best it Can Be

- Do it with others
- Solid commitment.
- Arrange a special time each day with God (perhaps at mealtimes).
- Be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, ask God to strengthen your resolve.

Below is a helpful information provided by Bill Bright who has now passed away but was indeed a man of prayer and fasted often. Here are some things he recommends when fasting:

7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting & Prayer

by Bill Bright New Life Publications

How to Begin Your Fast

How you begin and conduct your fast will largely determine your success. By following these seven basic steps to fasting, you will make your time with the Lord more meaningful and spiritually rewarding.

Step 1 - Set Your Objective

Why are you fasting?

Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

Through fasting and prayer we humble ourselves before God so the Holy Spirit will stir our souls, awaken our churches, and heal our land according to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Make this a priority in your fasting.

Step 2 - Make Your Commitment

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14, 15). For Him it was a matter of when believers would fast, not if they would do it. Before you fast, decide the following up front:

- How long you will fast-one meal, one day, a week, several weeks, forty days (Beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts.)
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake (such as water only, or water and juices; what kinds of juices you will drink and how often)
- What physical or social activities you will restrict
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

Step 3 - Prepare Yourself Spiritually

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3,4).
- Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14, 15.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1, 2).
- Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others (Psalm 48:9,10 103; 1-8, 11-13).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16, 17).

Step 4 - Prepare Yourself Physically

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.

Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer.

- Do not rush into your fast.
- Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods.
- Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.

WHILE YOU FAST

Your time of fasting and prayer has come. You are abstaining from all solid foods and have begun to seek the Lord. Here are some helpful suggestions to consider:

- Avoid drugs, even natural herbal drugs and homeopathic remedies. **Medication should be withdrawn only with your physician's supervision.**
- Limit your activity.
- Exercise only moderately. Walk one to three miles each day if convenient and comfortable.
- Rest as much as your schedule will permit.
- Prepare yourself for temporary mental discomforts, such as impatience, crankiness, and anxiety.

- Expect some physical discomforts, especially on the second day. You may have fleeting hunger pains, dizziness, or the "blahs." Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause headaches. Physical annoyances may also include weakness, tiredness, or sleeplessness.
- The first two or three days are usually the hardest. As you continue to fast, you will likely experience a sense of well being both physically and spiritually. However, should you feel hunger pains, increase your liquid intake.

Step 5 - Put Yourself on a Schedule

For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be.

Tips on Juice Fasting

- ◆ Drinking fruit juice will decrease your hunger pains and give you some natural sugar energy. The taste and lift will motivate and strengthen you to continue.
- ◆ The best juices are made from fresh watermelon, lemons, grapes, apples, cabbage, beets, carrots, celery, or leafy green vegetables. In cold weather, you may enjoy warm vegetable broth.
- ◆ Mix acidic juices (orange, tomato) with water for your stomach's sake.
- ◆ Avoid caffeinated drinks. And avoid chewing gum or mints, even if your breath is bad. They stimulate digestive action in your stomach.

BREAKING YOUR FAST

When your designated time for fasting is finished, you will begin to eat again. But how you break your fast is extremely important for your physical and spiritual well being.

Step 6 - End Your Fast Gradually

Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Suddenly reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have negative, even dangerous, consequences. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day. If you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will result in continued good health.

Here are some suggestions to help you end your fast properly:

- ◆ Break an extended water fast with fruit such as watermelon.
- ◆ While continuing to drink fruit or vegetable juices, add the following:
 - First day: Add a raw salad.
 - Second day: Add baked or boiled potato, no butter or seasoning.
 - Third day: Add a steamed vegetable.
 - Thereafter: Begin to reintroduce your normal diet.
- ◆ Gradually return to regular eating with several small snacks during the first few days. Start with a little soup and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe. Advance to a few tablespoons of solid foods such as raw fruits and vegetables or a raw salad and baked potato.

A FINAL WORD

Step 7 - Expect Results

If you sincerely humble yourself before the Lord, repent, pray, and seek God's face; if you consistently meditate on His Word, you will experience a heightened awareness of His presence (John 14:21). The Lord will give you fresh, new spiritual insights. Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened. You will feel mentally, spiritually, and physically refreshed. You will see answers to your prayers.

A single fast, however, is not a spiritual cure-all. Just as we need fresh infillings of the Holy Spirit daily, we also need new times of fasting before God. A 24-hour fast each week has been greatly rewarding to many Christians.

It takes time to build your spiritual fasting muscles. If you fail to make it through your first fast, do not be discouraged. You may have tried to fast too long the first time out, or you may need to strengthen your understanding and resolve. As soon as possible, undertake another fast until you do succeed. God will honor you for your faithfulness.